# North Belfast schools transform walls into community murals through Hit the North festival



Three school walls in North Belfast have undergone a remarkable transformation into public art canvases through the Hit the North (HTN) Street Art Festival, a collaboration between Translink and Seedhead Arts. The initiative aims to foster creativity and community engagement, with students actively involved in shaping the artistic vision.

At Belfast Royal Academy (BRA), a striking mural measuring 7m by 14m now adorns a prominent gable wall at the school’s main entrance. Created by street artist Eoin McGinn, known as EMIC, the mural portrays a young pupil, coat and backpack on, accompanied by an owl. The silhouette of York Street Station in the background roots the piece firmly in the local urban landscape.

EMIC explained that the artwork is rich with symbolism relating to transport and the journey of life and education. “There’s lots of little hidden symbology within the image,” he stated. He described the mural as “dreamlike,” capturing those quiet moments of daydreaming often encountered during commutes. The mural incorporates colors reminiscent of previous Translink projects, and he noted, “The owl, the path, the colours - it all represents youth, making friends and growth.”

This mural is part of a broader initiative involving not only BRA but also Holy Family Primary School and Currie Primary School, each having their own dynamic street art projects. Hilary Woods, Principal of BRA, emphasized that the process involved collaboration between students and teachers, allowing pupils to express their perceptions of school and transport. “This wasn’t just about somebody coming in to put art on your wall,” she clarified.

The project drew inspiration from existing street art at York Street Station Underpass, motivating Mrs Woods to engage her students in a similar endeavour. She believes that art enhances the school environment and encourages deeper thinking among students. “Art lifts our spirits, it improves our surroundings and it makes pupils think more,” she added.

Students at BRA participated in workshops where they not only developed their artistic skills but also explored potential careers in the creative industries. Their earlier involvement in Translink’s Poetry in Motion workshops had already nurtured their connection to public transport as a source of inspiration. This collective engagement shaped the mural’s direction, blending students’ voices into the artistic process.

Translink, a key collaborator in the project, aligns public art initiatives with its 'Better. Connected' strategy, aiming to create inclusive and inspiring public spaces. Michael Holmes, the Programme Manager for York Street Station, highlighted that up to 1,000 BRA pupils use the station daily, reinforcing the importance of connecting young people to their environment.

The HTN Festival, which ran from May 2 to 4, featured various components, including a Street Art Bus Tour guiding participants through Belfast’s evolving urban art scene. Adam Turkington, founder of the HTN Festival, expressed a commitment to forging meaningful partnerships with local suppliers, marking a departure from dependence on international corporate brands.

Looking ahead, the 2025 HTN Festival is set to spotlight over 60 artists from both local and international backgrounds. EMIC believes public art plays a vital role in enriching the urban experience, stating, “People tell me how street art at York St Station Underpass and beyond brightens up their daily commute.” This initiative reveals that in North Belfast, creativity is no longer confined to galleries but is integral to the everyday experiences of students, vividly expressed on the walls of their schools.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.seedheadarts.com/street-art/htn23> - This official page provides detailed information about the 2023 'Hit The North' Street Art Festival, including dates, participating artists, and event highlights.
2. <https://www.seedheadarts.com/blog/htn23-press> - This press release discusses the festival's 10th anniversary, featuring over 75 local and international artists, and highlights key participants like ROA and Studio Giftig.
3. <https://www.seedheadarts.com/events/hit-the-north-2022-6wa57> - This event page outlines the festival's schedule, including the 'paint jam' on Kent Street, and lists participating artists such as ROA, Shok-1, and Studio Giftig.
4. <https://www.seedheadarts.com/street-art/hit-the-north-hidden> - This page provides an overview of the festival's history, its impact on Belfast's urban landscape, and its role in transforming the city's visual environment.
5. <https://www.seedheadarts.com/street-art/htn23> - This page offers information about the 2023 'Hit The North' Street Art Festival, including dates, participating artists, and event highlights.
6. <https://www.seedheadarts.com/blog/htn23-press> - This press release discusses the festival's 10th anniversary, featuring over 75 local and international artists, and highlights key participants like ROA and Studio Giftig.
7. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/walls-of-three-belfast-schools-transformed-by-paintings-with-hidden-symbology/a1103699583.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data