Buffalo is a city filled with art, ready to be explored! With a growing collection of murals throughout the city, an impressive collection of historic statuary, and much more, it’s difficult to go for a tour without encountering public art. You can even take a tour of the art placed in each station of Buffalo’s Metro Rail System on our Art of the Subway tour. Each station features at least one art installation by local, national, and internationally recognized artists, whether located inside the station, on the exterior, or throughout the structure. You can immerse yourself in works by Beverly Pepper, Harvey Breverman, Robert Lobe, Sam Gilliam, and Milton Rogovin, to name a few.

Construction of Buffalo’s Metro Rail began on May 18, 1979 and was completed in 1986—connecting the University at Buffalo, South Campus, to Buffalo’s waterfront. From the very beginning, planners intended to incorporate art into the metro station, and so, in 1979, Buffalo put out a national call for artists. 500 responded to the call, seventy artists were asked to submit formal proposals, and twenty-two works were chosen.

On this tour, our incredibly knowledgeable docent takes the group through most of the system, starting from the University Station to the Medical Campus/Allentown Station, home to one of the newest installations, Shasti O’Leary Soudant’s Gut Flora, commissioned by the Albright-Knox Art Gallery through their public art initiative in 2016.

One of my favorite works, installed at the University Station, is Beverly Pepper’s Vertical Presence-Grass Dunes. This exterior sculpture, resembling a drill bit, stands tall at the Main Street bus loop measuring 150 feet and is made of corten steel. Also known as weathering steel, the material is popular for outdoor sculpture works because, rather than deteriorating due to exposure, it forms a rust-like appearance and weathers well over time. In addition to the
vertical drill bit, corten steel is seen rising and curving throughout the grassy plot. These curving lines contrast beautifully with the striking verticality of the drill bit and communicate harmoniously with the chosen site.

Beverly Pepper is a fascinating subject as well, as she pioneered the use of corten steel as an artistic material. Throughout her career, she has worked to integrate sculpture into natural landscapes. Additionally, Pepper taught herself how to weld by working in factories, setting herself apart from many other artists working in that medium. A striking anecdote shared by Pepper herself has to do with the first invitation she received for a metal works show. A curator, who had seen her wood works, asked if she could also work in metal. Rather than passing up an opportunity, Pepper lied and said she was familiar with metal work, assuming she’d be able to learn by the time of the show.

“I was terrified. But one thing I learnt growing up in Brooklyn is that if you’re offered an opportunity, take it. You don’t have to be qualified. You just have to have the chutzpah to face all the possible downfalls,” Pepper says in the 2014 *The Telegraph* article “The Brilliant Artist You’ve Never Heard of: Interview with Sculptor Beverly Pepper,” by Kate Salter.

Working well into her nineties, Beverly Pepper is a perfect example of the way true passion can grow and evolve throughout a life and a career.

Beverly Pepper and her *Vertical Presence-Grass Dunes* are just one example of the surprises guests can expect on the tour. All are welcome to join in on the fun of the Art of the Subway tour on Sunday, February 17, 2019 at 10 a.m. The tour is approximately three hours and ends in the Allentown neighborhood. Cameras are very much encouraged and we should note that Metro Rail fair is not included in the tour price. $15 general admission, $5 for students, and free for Explorer Pass holders.

- Olivia McCarthy