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ENTERTAINMENT

## Liberty Gardens in North Miami: where virtual meets reality

BY JONEL JUSTE [ARTBURSTMIAMI.COM](http://ARTBURSTMIAMI.COM)

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The new Liberty Gardens Park mural, by Miami-based artist Ernesto Maranje, touches on themes of restoring the native tree and plant habitats that nurture and allow birds, butterflies, bees, bats and other wildlife to thrive. *COURTESY OF NORTH MIAMI COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY*

North Miami is rapidly changing. One of the visible signs of these changes is the renovation and beautification project at Liberty Gardens Park, nestled in the heart of the city.

This novel pocket park is easy to spot, noticeable from a distance thanks to a huge, new, augmented-reality mural overlooking 125th Street, North Miami's main thoroughfare.

For months, a segment of the 125th Street sidewalk was blocked and hidden to the public, piquing the curiosity of passersby. Once completed in March, North Miamians discovered a 2,700-square-foot public green space with the stunning mural, plus an expansive green wall, Florida-inspired landscape and decorative trellis with seating. The project was financed through

Miami-Dade County's Art in Public Places program and a beautification grant from the [North Miami Community Redevelopment Agency](#) (NMCRA).

“Liberty Gardens Park is a direct result of North Miami's larger efforts to enhance the redevelopment of our ever-growing downtown corridor,” said North Miami Mayor Philippe Bien-Aime. “As part of the city's cultural enhancement initiatives, Liberty Gardens Park will hopefully be a place where people can peacefully stroll through the garden or enjoy the vibrant music, art, food and entertainment showcased throughout our diverse neighborhood.”

The mural, a collaboration between the NMCRA and the nonprofit arts group, Before It's Too Late, measures 95 feet wide x 45 feet high. (Photo courtesy of North Miami Community Redevelopment Agency)

Located at 715 NE 125th St., at the site of a former shotgun-style building, Liberty Gardens Park neighbors North Miami landmarks such as City Hall and the Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami. The novelty of this public square is the possibility for the visitor to navigate between virtual and reality.

First, there's the mural canvas on the east wall, measuring 95 feet wide x 45 feet high. A collaboration between the NMCRA and the nonprofit arts group, [Before It's Too Late](#), the mural touches on themes of restoring the native tree and plant habitats that nurture and allow birds, butterflies, bees, bats and other wildlife to thrive.

Miami-based artist Ernesto Maranje, known for his environmental paintings, designed a site-specific mural that incorporates an augmented reality (AR) experience accessible to the public via mobile app.

After exploring the physical space, gazing at the mural and the green walls, visitors can enhance their experience with the free “Liberty Gardens AR” app (available for Android and iPhone), which literally brings the place and the mural to life. They will also be able to learn more about the artwork and discover a whole new world beyond the park itself.

The park is now “a space where technology meets art,” said Rasha Cameau, the NMCRA's executive director. “As part of its ongoing neighborhood improvement efforts, the NMCRA converted the previously underutilized breezeway into a passive, outdoor garden space the entire community can enjoy. This also plays into a larger plan by the city of North Miami and NMCRA to beautify the entire downtown corridor and eliminate urban blight to improve quality of life.”

In addition to the stunning mural, the 2,700-square-foot public green space features expansive green wall, Florida-inspired landscape and decorative trellis with seating. (Photo courtesy of Jonel Juste)

Added North Miami Councilwoman Carol Keys: “It was an absolute honor to work on the Liberty Gardens Park project and bring a gorgeous green retreat to North Miami's urban core ... we are always exploring ways to improve the sustainability of our city. This type of mindful development remains a key priority for us in the years ahead.”

With the city's emergency declaration now lifted, and more people seeking activities in the great outdoors after months of quarantine, now might be a good time to explore Liberty Gardens Park.

“We want residents and visitors alike to come together, enjoy the park’s lush landscaping, and experience a connection to art, nature and to one another,” Cameau said.

For more information, go to [northmiamicra.org](http://northmiamicra.org).

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