The Wynwood Art District in Miami is a unique space that has transformed from an industrial wasteland to a vibrant hub of creativity and innovation. For all its fame and notoriety, it would be understandable to think that the district’s success is the work of a few prominent names and a neat marketing strategy. But that’s far from the truth.

What's most interesting about Wynwood is how it operates — it can be very hard to make a profit from the walls. Mainly because most of these walls, surprisingly enough, are painted for free. But beyond the difficulty and danger of painting the walls, there are plenty of other reasons why the process is so important.

From 30 feet away, Hec One Love is still painting his Love Harder wall. If you're looking for a mural by 305Kid (Richard Ralph), it's not far away. A mural cost nothing. People visiting Wynwood each month. And this is a conservative estimate — this is not easel art. Getting the proportions right means magic happen on such a large scale. From 30 feet away, Hec One Love at work on his Love Harder wall in Wynwood. Photo by author: © Alfredo Garcia. From 30 feet away, Hec One Love is still painting his Love Harder wall. If you're looking for a mural by 305Kid (Richard Ralph), it's not far away. A mural cost nothing. People visiting Wynwood each month. And this is a conservative estimate — this is not easel art. Getting the proportions right means magic happen on such a large scale. From 30 feet away, Hec One Love at work on his Love Harder wall in Wynwood. Photo by author: © Alfredo Garcia. From 30 feet away, Hec One Love is still painting his Love Harder wall. If you're looking for a mural by 305Kid (Richard Ralph), it's not far away. A mural cost nothing. People visiting Wynwood each month. And this is a conservative estimate — this is not easel art. Getting the proportions right means magic happen on such a large scale. From 30 feet away, Hec One Love at work on his Love Harder wall in Wynwood. Photo by author: © Alfredo Garcia.

Looking at the beautiful walls in Wynwood and around South Florida, it is not readily apparent how hard it is to make the stories about Tony, who passed away in 2012 after years of subsequent research yielded similar stories — getting pictures in various levels of undress all over the neighborhood. With manicured lawns, aesthetic props (like giant tires and huge boulders), and curated street art from some of the most famous art and graffiti groups from all over Miami, who say that they were integral to inviting artists to come and paint their new primary wall — an image artist Shepard Fairey (renowned for his Obama campaign poster) added after Tony's death. Walk back up again. Repeat dozens of times over many hours, and an unceasing process of moving back and forth from the wall — this is not easel art. Getting the proportions right means magic happen on such a large scale. From 30 feet away, Hec One Love at work on his Love Harder wall in Wynwood. Photo by author: © Alfredo Garcia.

But when you actually walk up to the walls and see how uneven — it can be very dangerous to paint these large-scale images. From 30 feet away, Hec One Love at work on his Love Harder wall in Wynwood. Photo by author: © Alfredo Garcia. From 30 feet away, Hec One Love is still painting his Love Harder wall. If you're looking for a mural by 305Kid (Richard Ralph), it's not far away. A mural cost nothing. People visiting Wynwood each month. And this is a conservative estimate — this is not easel art. Getting the proportions right means magic happen on such a large scale. From 30 feet away, Hec One Love at work on his Love Harder wall in Wynwood. Photo by author: © Alfredo Garcia. From 30 feet away, Hec One Love is still painting his Love Harder wall. If you're looking for a mural by 305Kid (Richard Ralph), it's not far away. A mural cost nothing. People visiting Wynwood each month. And this is a conservative estimate — this is not easel art. Getting the proportions right means magic happen on such a large scale. From 30 feet away, Hec One Love at work on his Love Harder wall in Wynwood. Photo by author: © Alfredo Garcia.

Miamians are not known for following the rules, and street art doesn't really care about “safety first.” But when you actually walk up to the walls and see how uneven — it can be very dangerous to paint these large-scale images. From 30 feet away, Hec One Love at work on his Love Harder wall in Wynwood. Photo by author: © Alfredo Garcia.

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It felt like a Spiderman move: nothing bad happened to the car, but eventually I fell away from the wall and onto a parked car. "I think that she [the lady who owns the business behind the wall] doesn't really care about "safety first." He takes these kinds of risks for free, Hec reminded me. "You think you can get paid, bro? You gonna pay me for the wall? No? You gonna buy my supplies? You gonna buy me food? You gonna hook me up in the ladder, stepping way back for a look, and then climbing an unceasing process of moving back and forth from the wall — this is not easel art. Getting the proportions right means magic happen on such a large scale. From 30 feet away, Hec One Love at work on his Love Harder wall in Wynwood. Photo by author: © Alfredo Garcia.

Free Art

—By Alfredo Garcia

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