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Underpass mural aims to connect two sides of Gwinnett County



Muralist Krista Jones, known as JONESY, designed and painted the recently completed immersive mural, "Synchronicity," at the Sugarloaf Parkway/Interstate 85 underpass.
COURTESY OF KRISTA JONES

By Anna Haas – Contributing Writer, Atlanta Business Chronicle
Nov 28, 2025 **Updated** Dec 2, 2025 6:08pm EST

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Story Highlights

- Krista Jones completed a 21,000-square-foot underpass mural in October.
- The project aims to connect the Gas South District and Sugarloaf Mills.
- The mural is one piece in a larger ongoing series by Jones, called Formations.

Completed in October, a 21,000-square-foot underpass mural is working to blend the barrier between the Gas South District and Sugarloaf Mills.

The first seed of the project to transform the walls of the Sugarloaf Parkway/Interstate 85 underpass was planted in 2018 when the Sugarloaf Community Improvement District identified it as an area for improvement. It wasn't until 2021, though, that the plan started to take shape, and the CID connected with muralist Krista Jones, known as JONESY, who would design and paint the recently completed immersive mural – "Synchronicity."

Before color could ever hit the walls, though, the CID had to undertake the task of coordinating with the Georgia Department of Transportation, Gwinnett County and Georgia Power to replace hundreds of old, dim and nonfunctional lights in the underpass with energy-efficient and cost-saving LEDs. Then came the power washing, and only after could Jones and her team begin painting. Ultimately, the north wall was completed in July 2024, and the south wall's completion in October 2025 finished the project.

Alyssa Davis, executive director of Sugarloaf CID, said the mural is part of the organization's aspirations for the area to become Gwinnett's downtown.

"We have long felt that Interstate 85 was a dividing barrier between the west and east sides of the CID," Davis said. "So this project was about bringing the two sides together and making them feel more connected."

On one side of I-85 is Gas South District, and on the other is Sugarloaf Mills – two successful business and entertainment areas.

One of the project's greatest challenges was its size. The north and south walls are a combined 21,000 square feet, making it one of the largest underpass murals in the country.

Painting multiple coats and finishing with an anti-graffiti layer was demanding both in time and labor. Jones said the first wall took about 27 days to install over

the course of seven weeks, due to inclement weather, and the second wall, which employed a slightly larger team, took about 22 days. Jones said, for her, the challenge was making sure the design on such a large structure didn't become too repetitive.

"Synchronicity" is one piece in a larger ongoing series by Jones, called Formations. This series also includes murals at the Hudgens Center for the Arts & Learning and the dog day care facility Wag Atlanta. She describes this series as her way of processing the natural environment, which presents itself in the stylized leaves, vines and other imagery in the gateway mural. The work also reflects its surroundings – in this case, the energy and movement happening above and below the underpass conveyed through the sweeping curves across the walls.

"My goal with this work is to create something that's vibrant and also reflects nature and a way to bring some unexpected joy in these really sterile environments that people drive through every day," Jones said.

That "unexpected joy" has already begun, as Jones said she could feel the excitement of pedestrians and drivers when she and her team started painting the south wall and received supportive honks and waves.