

How Artists Are Electrifying Public Spaces Through Electrical Boxes

A new form of public art has been popping up all over the country, but especially locally in Massachusetts. These colorful art displays are actually on electrical boxes and various initiatives have turned them into opportunities for beautifying public spaces and showcasing local artists.

What Are Electrical Boxes?

Electrical boxes, transformers, or utility boxes are machines that transfer electricity from one circuit to another, changing the voltage level while the frequency stays the same.

In order to supply energy to homes and businesses, power plants must send high voltage electricity across long distances. Transformer boxes change the voltage of this electricity so it is safe to use. Electrical transformer boxes contain pad-mounted transformers that bring high-voltage electricity to a lower voltage needed for underground wires that supply power. With or without solar, transformers are necessary in every community in order to provide electricity from the grid to homes and businesses.

These large metal boxes can be seen as often unsightly-looking fixtures in yards, town centers, and all over cities. Energy infrastructure is only growing and electric boxes are becoming more needed than ever. Many of these structures have been around for decades, converting power for growing communities.



Local Power In Art

All over the country, cities and towns have taken community beautification efforts to the streets. These art displays are popping up all over the Commonwealth. The goal of these projects is to celebrate local artists and have them contribute to the public art community. Local artists getting involved in their community benefits them and local businesses by providing exposure and increasing foot traffic. Efforts like this are funded by donations and sponsorships all with hopes of livening town spaces.

The City of Boston is passionate about this beautification effort in order to promote local art and contribute to the attractiveness of the urban streetscape. Other Massachusetts towns have had the same ideas. "People would rather see art than just another metal box," says Peabody Conservation



An artist painting an electrical box at Tasteful Boston in Medford, MA

Agent Lucia DelNegro.

Local electrical box beautification projects are taking place all over Massachusetts and nationwide. Here are some of our favorite examples close to our office in Burlington:

- ⚡ Peabody's "Outside the Box" Program began in 2015 with a goal to bring art to unexpected places. The Community Development Department has partnered with ArcWorks Community Art Center, the Department of Public Services, and the Fire Department to make this program possible.
- ⚡ Somerville's "Switchbox Project" is entering its 24th year of bringing artists out of the studio and onto the streets to literally *transform* transformer boxes.
- ⚡ Electrifying Amherst is this western Massachusetts town's official project to liven up public spaces. Dubbed the "Electrical Box Makeover Project," the program is designed to add more art to Downtown Amherst and Amherst Center Cultural District.
- ⚡ Reading's first major public art program, "Outside the Box Mural Program", has put new images on utility boxes downtown, including scenes of nature and local landmarks like the train station and the town center.
- ⚡ Arlington gives their "Transform(er)ing Our Streets" effort a new theme every year. Seven new utility boxes have been painted by local artists between the bike path on Late Street and on Mass Ave at Capitol Square.
- ⚡ In Medford, local artists have used this initiative to push social issues like **nature conservation** and **equality**. These pieces combine utility, art, and activism.
- ⚡ Burlington has striking works of art on electrical boxes including a rendition of Van Gogh's *Starry Night* located on Middlesex Turnpike by 3rd Ave. Other painted electrical boxes can be found in the same area.



A rendition of Van Gogh's "Starry Night" is painted on an electrical box near the Solaris Renewables office in Burlington, MA.

Be On The Lookout For Painted Electrical Boxes Near You

Wherever you are, be on the lookout for decorated utility boxes. Many times, they are tagged with the local artist's name so you can also take this chance to discover local artists in your area. There are initiatives to beautify towns all over the country with opportunities for you or anyone you know to add art to your town. Search for your town's public art projects and fill out an application to be considered. We encourage you to tag @Solaris Renewables in your photos of painted transformer boxes around the community.

