



TAKING FLIGHT

Museum-quality, rotating art exhibitions have landed at airports across America

BY INA DROSU

ANYONE WHO HAS BEEN IN AN AIRPORT KNOWS IT'S NOT the highlight of one's journey. Lugging bags and children through endless corridors, simmering in long security lines, attempting to eat shriveled hot dogs and limp lettuce are not the joyous experiences one seeks when traveling. However, mitigating these low points is precisely the focus of art programs abounding in the nation's airports, large or small, and things are taking off.

Mexican artist Leonardo Nierman donated "Sensación de Vuelo" to Lambert-St. Louis Airport.



Many American airports have their roots in the late 1920s, with expansions after WWII into the “Jet Transportation Era” of the 1950s. Adaptations continued through the second half of the 20th century then landed in our new millennium with fresh needs and aspirations. With long-overdue infrastructure upgrades and fast-paced technological advances, likewise changes in security requirements since 9/11 and increased global traffic, airports such as Miami International (MIA), Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International (ATL), Los Angeles International (LAX), and even Denver International (DEN) strive to provide travelers, employees, and visitors with an experience that eases spatial, cultural, and timely transitions by implementing art, that great humanizer, into the airport’s fabric.

“We didn’t have much of a mission until recently. Our program is in its infancy,” admits Jeffrey Lea, Public Relations Manager at Lambert-St. Louis International (STL). But, using the airport’s iconic Minoru Yamasaki 1956 Terminal 1 as a springboard—similarly to the way LAX used its Paul Williams 1961

Theme Building or DEN its Joppesen Terminal peaked roof—major renovations invited the formation of an Art and Culture Program and the incorporation of works such as Alicia LaChance’s “New Village” terrazzo floor.

However, not all displays are permanent. Patterned on the innovative program at San Francisco, the only U.S. airport with museum

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accreditation, other airports have integrated rotating exhibits ranging in format from glasswork, sculpture, and painting to historic presentations, video, and interactive displays. The necessity to deal with a passenger’s anxiety due to increased security screenings and longer waiting periods spent on the other side of checkpoints, in an agglomerated setting, is not inferior to the need to promote sustainability through photovoltaic energy or improved light, air, and pedestrian traffic quality.

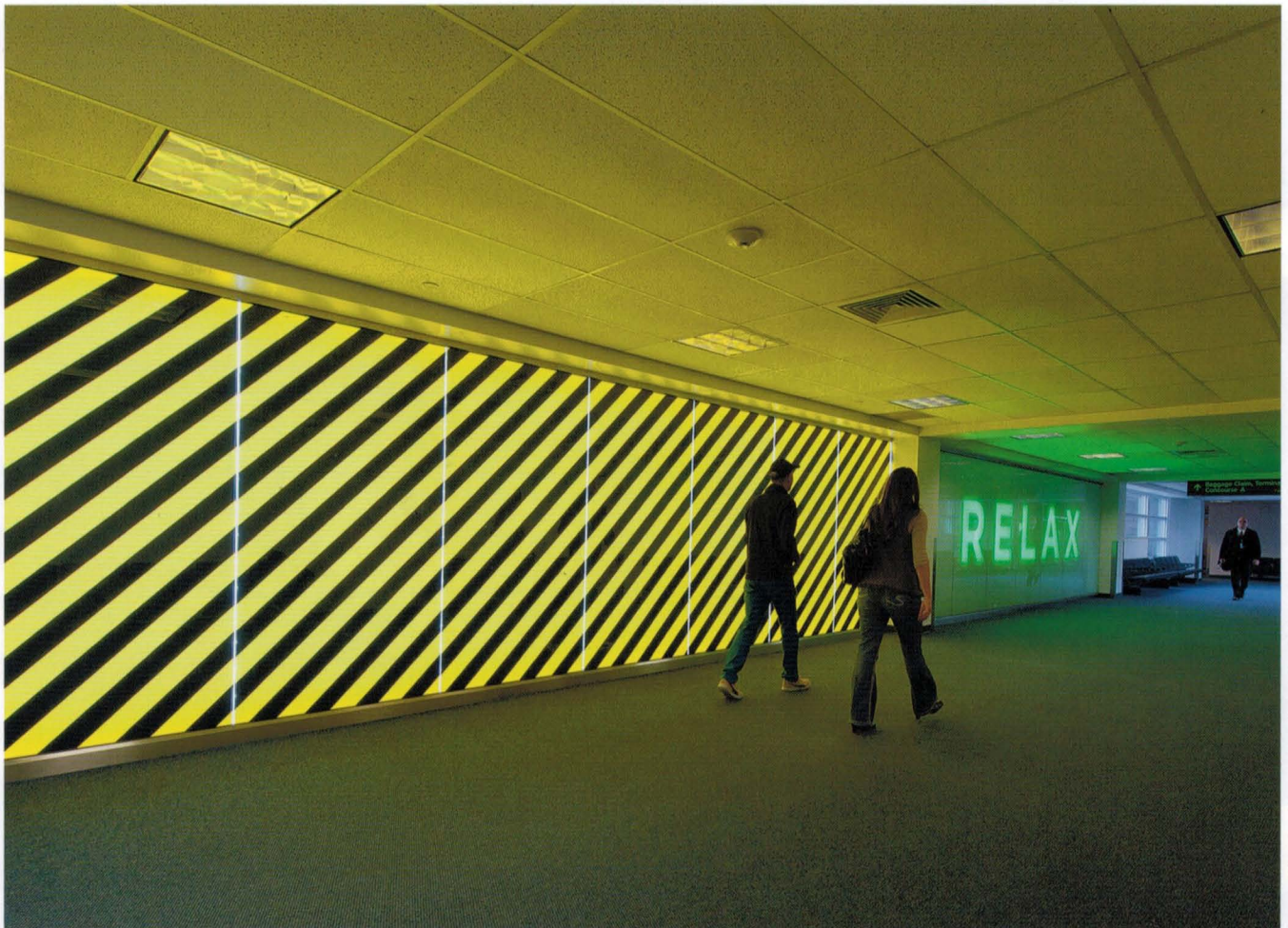
Yolanda Sanchez, herself an artist and MIA’s Director of Airport Fine Arts and Cultural Affairs, founded MIA’s rotating exhibition 12 years ago. After years of incorporating artwork architecturally as terrazzo floors or wall elements, a famous example being the relocation of the Carybé murals from JFK International Airport, this program enables her “to educate the public through museum-quality art, showcase artists that are accessible [to airport users, and let viewers] have a moment of delight.”

Light is a recurrent theme in displays due to its physical effects, but also because it “is always welcome” and “takes away the edge” off more intense works, explains Electroland’s Cameron McNall. McNall considers his illuminated walls entitled “RELAX” at DEN as a way for “people to invest attention [in this] microcosmic environment where everyone’s purpose [to travel] is unified.” For him, any art with wings is a little bit too close to home as a means of engagement. He prefers symbolism and interaction to literal representations connected with flying, thus allowing viewers



OPPOSITE: The Carybé Murals at Miami International were salvaged in partnership with American Airlines. RIGHT, TOP: Mixed Nature Series by Luciana Abait at Los Angeles. BOTTOM: Denver International Airport is illuminated by Electroland's "RELAX" display.

Photo by Kelly Barrie, Panic Studio LA



Artwork © Electroland. Photo courtesy of Denver International Airport



Image courtesy of Kyungmin Park.

LEFT: Ceramic artist Kyungmin Park's imaginative creations are also featured at Atlanta. BELOW: Brian Dettmer transforms a book into art for E-merge, a rotating exhibit featuring contemporary Atlanta artists. BOTTOM: Packing (Caravan) by Cynthia Minet, an illuminated sculpture at Los angeles is made of recycled and re-purposed plastic.



Image courtesy of BrianDettmer.



or participants to interpret and discover for themselves through direct experience.

For Paul Villinski, on the other hand, MIA is the appropriate home for his "Air Chair", fantastic flying wheelchair machine made to uplift spirit and interest as it hangs above the visitors' heads. He, also, draws the surprised viewer towards discovery through this embodiment of unlikely possibility. Indeed, 'surprise' plays an important role in the task of inspiring the public. In an understated but

powerful way, Ximena Labra's "For Those Who Go" at DEN, is a collection of literary excerpts planted unobtrusively right in front of you—on windows, on conveyors, on arches, on walls. Though easily overlooked, once seen they percolate and affect a lasting impression.

"The tools I am using in the relation with the public are imagination, intellect, and memory," she says. "For Those Who Go" is for those and about those who will travel. Not only in space and time, but also in their

minds, willing to go beyond their usual surroundings... the will of discovery that makes us human beings, find out who we are and what the universe is made of."

Sarah Cifarelli, Airport Art Manager at LAX, agrees that an airport is "its own city, with a captive audience." Here, too, light surfaces through the distinctive entry pylons, or an extensive permanent video art installation, or Cynthia Minet's "Packing (Caravan)". The first reflects airplanes' flight patterns, the second explores change, and the third echoes the travelers streaming alongside the colorful, burden-savvy animal train. With glow, color, and not devoid of humor, they replace impersonal indifference with points of interest and recognizable environments that people can relate to and be engaged in.

Airport art programs also serve as an introduction to the nature and style of the geographical area one has just landed in, or provide memories for those leaving it. Beyond the plastic arts or video there is also a growing interest in music and performing arts. Cifarelli is exploring the possibility of turning LAX's 2010 pilot performance program launched in a San Fernando Valley facility into an on-site recurring event. Working out challenging logistics, the opportunity came this past summer during the preview celebration of the new Tom Bradley International Terminal.

At the other end of the spectrum, ATL's music scene has been around since 1996. Throughout the year, music complements the rotating and commissioned art programs, such as NASA's "Golden Age of Space" exhibit. These performances serve to entertain and educate the 95 million yearly travelers pacing the airport's halls. With the highest passenger traffic in the world, "our program creates an amazing sense of place and who we are, [and] underscores Atlanta as an international city," says David Vogt, ATL's Art Program Manager, adding that "we feel our program is among the elites nationally not only in scope, but scale and budget."

The infusion of art is added to functional concerns, but as Miami's Sanchez says: "People are paying more attention to the fact that architecture, art, and design go hand in hand. Why must they be only about function and operations? Why not create beautiful spaces?" ■

LEFT: The flying wheelchair uplifts spirits at Miami International Airport.

