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New Salt Lake airport will have art everywhere — even in the restrooms



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TV cameras focused, still photographers started snapping photos and reporters pulled out notebooks as Salt Lake City International Airport Director Bill Wyatt walked to a podium Friday.

“This, I suppose by any measure, is quite an unusual event: unveiling art for the bathrooms” for the new \$3.6 billion airport scheduled to open Sept. 15, he said.

Indeed, the airport actually held a news conference to show off mural art for its new restrooms. Officials say this shows a dedication to details and comfort that should make the new airport experience stand out for millions of travelers.

The airport showed the first 20 new paintings by local and national artists that will become what it calls “whimsy wall” murals stretching the length of new restrooms.

Mayor Jackie Biskupski said plans for art throughout the new airport were incorporated from initial designs, rather than being added after construction is nearly complete.

“This is done in part to ensure that this airport — wherever you are — is visually appealing and tells the unique story of who we are as Utahns,” she said. “One of those unexpected places is the restrooms, which will serve millions of travelers each year.”

(Trent Nelson | The Salt Lake Tribune) Salt Lake City Mayor Jackie Biskupski speaks at a news conference showcasing the art by 18 local and national artists chosen to be featured in the new airport as the Whimsy Wall Art Project, on Friday Nov. 1, 2019. The piece behind her on the left is Nancy Bardach's "Acceleration Decelerating."

Chosen paintings will include everything from a sunset on the Great Salt Lake to abstract art about the feeling of accelerating and decelerating, clouds, birds, wildflowers, books, rainbows, American Indian art, deserts and service dogs.

Utah artist Trent Call attended Friday to inspect how a small abstract painting he made — inspired by ancient Lake Bonneville — had been digitally supersized, placed on vinyl and stretched along a restroom wall.

What was it like being at a news conference to show his art in a restroom? “It’s definitely a first,” he said.

Unfortunately for him, his art is in a women's restroom — so he can't visit it once the airport opens. "It's OK, I got some good photos," he said. Call added that he truly enjoys seeing it supersized because that helps the feeling he tried to depict of being covered by Lake Bonneville, which once submerged the airport area.

"The art really pops," Wyatt said. "It just adds a dimension of power to the bathroom that otherwise is just kind of industrial space."

Wyatt said officials spent a lot of time refining plans for restrooms because, well, visitors will spend a lot of time there and often form opinions of airport by their restrooms.

"We absolutely have to get that right," he said. "Typically for a hub airport, the first and last thing you probably do is use one of the restrooms."

(Trent Nelson | The Salt Lake Tribune) Salt Lake City Mayor Jackie Biskupski looks over Nancy Bardach's piece "Accelerating Decelerating" following a news conference showcasing the art by 18 local and national artists chosen to be featured in the new airport as the Whimsy Wall Art Project, on Friday Nov. 1, 2019.

In the current airport — which serves 25 million passengers a year but was designed for only 10 million — Wyatt says far too few restrooms exist and they are constantly crowded.

The new airport will not have that problem. “Passengers will never be more than 150 feet from a bathroom,” Wyatt said, adding it will have 26 banks of them eventually in gate areas.

“We overachieved, especially in the women’s restrooms. There are more stalls than required, even by code — and substantially more than are in the men’s rooms,” he said.

Stalls will be extra-long to accommodate baggage inside. They will have hooks to hang clothes if people want to change. Doors will have no cracks to help increase privacy, and stalls are tall.

Restrooms will have two banks of stalls, to allow closing one side for cleaning without closing the entire room. Men’s and Women’s rooms will have baby changing areas. Each women’s restroom will have free feminine hygiene products and a room for breastfeeding.

“Usually if an airport has one [room for breastfeeding] they are considered to have really knocked it out of the park. We’ll have 26,” Wyatt said.

He said all the little details add up to a good experience overall.

“So maybe when people are flying from Sacramento to Washington and are deciding whether to connect in Denver or Salt Lake, they’ll say, ‘I’ll go through Salt Lake,’” he said.

“Salt Lake City truly is building the nation’s premier 21st century airport,” Biskupski said. “Our teams have not simply focused on the customer convenience. They have also prioritized traveler experience and enjoyment of this facility.”



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