

Works of art



Joe Bates • 6th September 2024

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Joe Bates takes a closer look at the different ways airports are introducing artwork into terminals and across the airport campus to create a destination in their own right and a unique experience for travellers.

Embracing art in terminal buildings might not be the newest fad in the world, but it appears to be one that airports are taking more seriously than ever before as they strive to create unique experiences for passengers and boost customer satisfaction levels.

Arguably, the most famous art installation of all is the Rijksmuseum at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport, which has been showcasing world famous paintings at the Dutch hub for more than 22 years.

And in more recent times new airports such as Incheon International Airport in South Korea and Hamad International Airport in Qatar have embraced art and culture from the get go, between them boasting a series of impressive sculptures, paintings and museums.

Indeed, such is the desire to make an impression that art is being factored into the design of many new terminals being built today, and increasingly across the entire airport campus, to capture the attention of and excite travellers when they travel to and from the airport by road.



Bold new art installations at Salt Lake City International Airport

One such airport that has gone all in with art is Salt Lake City International Airport (SLC), which up until now has invested over \$40 million on artwork that includes the eye-catching 'The Canyon' that runs through the Main Plaza in its new terminal, and 'The Peaks', a monumental sculpture designed to reflect the nearby Wasatch Mountains and pay tribute to Utah's five Native American tribes as well as the five elements of the natural world: air, earth, fire, space and water.

Both were imagined by artist Gordon Huether in collaboration with the airport, which wanted The Canyon and other artworks in the new terminal to provide a truly memorable experience for passengers.

Talking about the airport's artworks at the recent SMART Airports & Regions Conference and Exhibition in Denver, SLC's director of communication and marketing, Nancy Volmer, said: "Among the top 10 things people wanted to see from our new airport was that it reflected the beauty of Utah.

"It was also very important to our executive director at the time, Maureen Riley, who wanted people to remember Salt Lake City International Airport, and our business travellers told us that they wanted to see the beauty of Utah represented in the airport, so

we did, through art, providing windows with views of the mountains on our east and west side, and used colours that felt like Utah.”



She noted: that the airport, designers and architects all got together early in the planning process to make sure that the new terminal lived up to expectations by including a number of “large scale art installations”.

Designed to evoke the Salt Lake City landscape, The Canyon spans 362 feet, roughly the length of a US football field, and uses 2.5 acres of composite fabric and the equivalent of seven miles of aluminium tubing. The entire work consists of 412 individual tensile membrane frames.

While The Peaks, made from weathering steel, is 90ft high at its tallest — the size of a 12-story building — and weighs approximately 75 tons. The skin of each of the five sculptures has a graphic of the globe etched on the surface. A glass orb, placed near the top of the tallest peak, pinpoints the location of Utah on the globe.

Other art installations at SLC include ‘Whimsy Wall’ art works that will eventually be present in all 24 restrooms, ‘The River Tunnel’ — an immersive sound and light experience located in a 1,000ft long underwater tunnel connecting concourses A and B — and ‘Near Distance’ next to the TSA checkpoint which actually includes some salt from Utah’s famed salt lakes.

“All our artworks are designed to represent the spirit, culture, people and beauty of Utah,” added Volmer.



Nature meets multimedia architecture at Changi's Terminal 2

Moment Factory in collaboration with design studio BOIFFILS has created two signature multimedia installations aimed at bringing the Garden City's natural beauty into Changi Airport's newly renovated Terminal 2.

The features support the airport's goal to be a destination in its own right — a vision that's repeatedly earned it awards in ACI's Airport Service Quality (ASQ) customer excellence programme and numerous other accolades.

The Wonderwall is described as a breathtaking four-story digital waterfall nestled between vertical gardens, which utilises a curved LED screen that showcases a mesmerising cascade of water and rock formations. Multiple times an hour, a surreal choreography takes place as the flow dramatically reverses course for a three-and-a-half show set to a bespoke composition by pianist Jean-Michel Blais.



While The Digital Sky is a dreamscape that offers transit passengers a chance to unwind beneath a sprawling digital sky. Mirroring real-time daylight and meteorological conditions via integration with the airport's weather system, the overhead installation offers an unexpected view of the outside world.

At intervals, the sky transforms into a captivating underwater scene. Embedded within the greenery, an ever-evolving soundscape draws from nearly 100 recordings of local wildlife, spatialised to create an immersive nature experience.

"Our third collaboration with Changi Airport Group allowed us to really push the envelope, both creatively and technically," says Fady Atallah, creative director at Moment Factory.

"With these installations, travellers will get to immerse themselves in Singapore's nature with two unique experiences in their journey: an awe-inspiring moment at the Wonderfall and a surprising pause under the digital sky in the dreamscape."

Arts and Culture Festival at Hong Kong International Airport

Doing things a little more traditionally this summer is Hong Kong International Airport, which recently launched its HKIA Arts and Culture Festival 2024.

The event, which lasts until October 31, feature a series of art exhibitions showcasing the talent and creativity of Hong Kong artists while promoting Hong Kong's unique culture to travellers from around the globe.

Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK) has partnered with M+, MobArt Gallery, Art Promotion Office of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, and Hong Kong Arts Centre to present art exhibitions that highlight the diversity of the local arts scene.



The festival will include four exhibitions spanning diverse themes, from traditional crafts to digital arts. Visitors can personalise their own postcards of Hong Kong street scenes by using stamps made with 'Lee Hon Kong Kai' fonts, a signature calligraphy commonly used in Hong Kong's signs since 1970s. Visitors can also receive limited-edition luggage stickers designed by local artists.

Elsewhere, there is a series of gongbi paintings, traditional Chinese paintings delicately and exquisitely outlining natural beauties, which have been transformed via multimedia digital technology into dynamic visuals and interactive artworks at the Ground Transportation Centre.

While the airport's giant digital screen will feature four animated paintings created by local artists and 260 secondary school students.

"As the gateway to Hong Kong, HKIA stands as an ideal venue to showcase the diverse cultural landscape of our vibrant city," said AAHK's acting CEO, Vivian Cheung.

"HKIA has been providing a valuable platform for both established and emerging local artists to share their work with a global audience since 2015. The Arts and Culture Festival will enrich the journey of every traveller passing through the airport."



Looking to the future at New York JFK

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and JFK Millennium Partners (JMP), the company selected to build and operate the highly anticipated \$4.2 billion Terminal 6 (T6) at John F Kennedy International Airport, has announced that 18 artists have been selected to debut new public art commissions when the terminal opens to passengers in 2026.

The art programme is led by Public Art Fund, the independent non-profit organisation dedicated to art in public spaces. The featured artists, including 10 from New York City, will capture the spirit of New York with a diverse range of artworks that will be seamlessly integrated into the terminal.

According to PANYNJ, sculptures, suspended installations, wall works, and glass mosaic floor medallions will create a unique New York sense of place. It notes that the project supports its vision to create a world-class passenger experience at JFK through inspirational public art, operational excellence, 21st century technology and world-class functionality.

"Public art that is inspiring and evocative of our region is an essential part of the Port Authority's strategy to create world-class airports that are becoming destinations in their own right," says Port Authority executive director, Rick Cotton.

“Just as we have done at LaGuardia and at Newark-Liberty’s Terminal A, the public art at JFK’s new Terminal 6 will dazzle travellers and help create a sense of place unique to New York.”



Multiple new public artworks unveiled at SFO

San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) in partnership with San Francisco International Airport (SFO) has unveiled multiple new public art installations at Harvey Milk Terminal 1 upon the completion and recent grand opening of the final section of the terminal.

“The collection of art found at San Francisco International Airport is some of the finest in the world, and that’s no exaggeration,” enthused Ralph Remington, SFAC’s director of cultural affairs.

“From captivating 2D works to murals, sculptures and everything in between, we hope the world class artwork travellers will see as they make their way towards their travel destination inspires them and keeps them coming back for more.

“We are thankful to have been able to partner with SFO to incorporate new public art as part of the renovation of Harvey Milk Terminal 1 and thank all the artists who worked closely with public art staff to make their visions and dreams, reality.”



Funding for public art at SFO was generated from the Art Enrichment Ordinance, or 2%-for-Art-Program, which ensures two percent of gross construction costs from the expansion of Harvey Milk Terminal 1, and other publicly funded capital construction projects at SFO, be allocated for public art.

The Arts Commission developed an ambitious public art programme designed to create a dynamic environment that engages travellers from the moment they arrive at the airport, showcasing world class art throughout the airport campus, pre- and post-security.

The final section of the award-winning \$2.5 billion Harvey Milk Terminal 1 opened on June 17, 2024, and includes new public art, a new north check-in lobby, a new mezzanine-level security checkpoint, two additional aircraft gates, four new concessions and a new connecting walkway that links all SFO terminals post-security.

“Harvey Milk Terminal 1 sets a new benchmark for the airport experience,” said SFO’s airport director, Ivar Satero. “This facility celebrates the legacy of a pioneering civil rights leader, with museum exhibits and public artwork that together tell a story about what makes San Francisco great and how people like Harvey Milk continue to serve as an inspiration for the world.”

Two new works were installed as part of the completion of this final section. Craig Calderwood’s immersive three-story mural *The Only Blue is the Sky* and Suzanne Husky’s *Close Encounter with the California Sublime*.

The former uses vibrant visual vernacular to capture the exuberance of queer history and culture while honouring the legacy of civil rights pioneer Supervisor Harvey Milk, and the latter is said to reimagine Albert Bierstadt's painting, Merced River, Yosemite Valley, c.1866, by adding a tourist family in the act of taking a selfie with a California grizzly bear to critique environmental commodification and exploitation.



Hip-Hop celebration at Toronto City Airport

Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport was among the first to unveil new artwork this year when it opened its 'Project T-Dot' photography exhibit by local photographer, Ajani Charles, that celebrates Toronto's diverse Hip-Hop scene.

In line with terminal operator Nieuport Aviation's commitment to reflecting the vibrancy and diversity of Toronto through unique art activations, the exhibit is the largest art installation ever at the downtown gateway.

Project T-Dot depicts candid images of Toronto's most renowned Hip-Hop figures, as well as many others who are lesser-known but nonetheless influential in Toronto's Hip-Hop scene, allowing travellers the opportunity to engage with the cultural richness of the city as they pass through Billy Bishop Airport.

The exhibition comprises 60 large-scale photographic panels in the terminal's atrium alongside an interactive touchscreen where they can learn more about Toronto's Hip-Hop culture, community, and history by exploring engaging supplementary information.

"As the owner and operator of the passenger terminal at Billy Bishop Airport, Nieuport Aviation is committed to not only playing a vital role in connecting travellers to the places they want to be, but also to connecting our neighbours and travellers to Toronto's vibrant culture," explained president and CEO, Neil Pakey.