

Miami International Airport: A Trip of Its Own

A runway of airport inspiration

by Irene Sperber on January 10, 2011



One of the saved JFK Airport murals by Brazilian artist Carybe in MIA (photo taken from the MIA web site)

- 1) Photographs of Art Deco in Shanghai & Miami Beach
- 2) "Foreverglades," artist Barbara Neijna's homage to the book *The Everglades, River of Grass*
- 3) Michele Oka Doner
- 4) Murals by Brazilian artist Carybe

As you're flying down the concourse at Miami International Airport, roller board bumping along on your heelsleave time to peruse the artwork zipping past your overloaded cerebellum. Remember: Life is the journey, not the destination. Taking that to heart, Miami International Airport has installed several first-class art additions along its myriad corridors.

Yolanda Sanchez, Director of **Airport Fine Arts and Cultural Affairs** (MIA) pioneered the idea of Art in the airport environment. MIA has both permanent and rotating exhibitions programs.



The MIA Exhibition

In Concourse D, 77 photos of Art Deco in Shanghai & Miami Beach cover an attractive steel gray/blue wall next to Gate 15. Images are beautifully portrayed by China's first freelance photographer Deke Erh, a worldwide expert in Shanghai Art Deco architecture. Shanghai is one of the largest art deco areas in the world along with Miami Beach. In an effort to bring the two icons of Deco architecture together, in 2007 Miami Beach preservationists Don Worth and Nina Weber Worth had the idea to create an information exchange with Shanghai. MDPL's Art Deco weekend 2007 was themed "East Meets West: From Shanghai to Miami Beach." A delegation from Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce was successfully dispatched to China with Chamber of Commerce President Jerry Libbin. There is hope of bringing the photography exhibit to Pudong Airport in Shanghai to further awareness of the architectural relationship and import of the two cities seemingly far removed, but sharing a visual heritage. Proof of this project's impact is obvious in the historic plaques popping up on the facades of landmark buildings in Shanghai.....most notable being the infamous Peace Hotel.

A book of the same name is available, *Art Deco in Shanghai & Miami Beach*, accompanied by historical text by the noted long-time Shanghai resident, Tess Johnston, who has oft collaborated with Erh. Deco features and significance are interpreted by Miami Beach writer and preservationist Clotilde Luce.



MIA floor done by Miami artist Michele Oka Doner (photo by Irene Sperber)

"Foreverglades" is a knockout award-winning installation by artist Barbara Niejna, championing Marjorie Stoneman Douglas' life work culminated in her spectacular book *The Everglades: River of Grass.* Concourse "J" (South Terminal) is one of the largest public art projects ever and it is a doozy. It feels reminiscent of the opening credits of the original *Star Wars* movie as inspirational words of varying sizes scroll under your feet as you hurry over the black bespeckled terrazzo floor imprinted with Stoneman-Douglas' heart-felt writing. Two floors and walls transport us up and away from the din of travel into a universe of the extraordinary. Glass panels are engraved with more of Douglas' book passages as you absorb dynamic rear-lit close-up photos of Everglades flora. Artist / sculptor Niejna brings the heart and soul of our environment and it's fragility into the impersonal airport experience.

Another permanent installation is Miami's Michele Oka Doner's North Terminal area, which effectively summons the feeling of a walk on the beach: floors of dark terrazzo are imbedded with bronze sea plants and creatures, bringing your anxiety level down several notches as you scurry over the soothing "water" of the terminal floor.

Ms Sanchez was also instrumental in saving Carybé's amazing murals from destruction. Along with American Airlines, Miami-Dade Aviation Department and the award-winning Odebrecht (contractors), Brazilian artist Carybé's vast murals were installed in JFK Airport (New York) in 1960. Saved from the wrecking ball, the culturally rich murals were brought to MIA, restored and installed permanently in the South Terminal.

The Children's Collector Gallery (South Terminal): Miami-Dade Public Schools and the University of Miami School of Medicine, Pediatrics, chooses yearly artwork created by

children of Miami-Dade's Public Schools' Exceptional Student Educational Program.

Four main galleries accompany seven site-specific projects in the MIA facility. Located both before and after the Security area, quality artwork strives to "educate the traveling public and communicate the environment." Yolanda Sanchez also commented that MIA "tries to be thought-provoking and uplifting in topic".

Visit the web site for more art sites in the various terminals: www.miami-airport.com.

Read more:

http://www.miamiartzine.com/issue_main.cfm?btitle=miami+international+airport+a+trip+of+its+own&id=1464&keyx=756029560

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