

DIVERSION AND MORE "Hands of Haiti," featuring works by artists in Haiti, showing at Miami International Airport.

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By DOROTHY SPEARS



ANYONE facing a long wait at an airport in these days of heightened security and random pat-downs may want to unwind at an art exhibit in a terminal.

A growing number of airports in the United States and abroad have been working with area museums and cultural institutions to organize rotating shows of sculpture, photography, pottery, weaving and — in the case of Toronto Pearson International Airport — even dinosaur casts.

The contents of the exhibits as well as the locations vary. Some are presented in airy atriums, at baggage claims, on unused billboards, along moving sidewalks, in dedicated galleries and even hovering among plants in open-air gardens. But their goal is consistent: to provide education and entertainment in an environment typically dismissed as an anxiety-inducing no man's land.

"Airports have replaced train stations both as destinations and as ideal sites for viewing art," said Maxwell L. Anderson, director of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, whose alliance with the Indianapolis International Airport began in January.

Referring to "the august grandeur of wide open spaces" typically found at airports, Mr. Anderson said the Indianapolis Museum of Art planned to use some of the \$100,000 it would receive this year from its contract with the Indianapolis Airport Authority to spearhead "affordable and thrilling" large-scale installations and to promote its recently acquired Miller House, a mid-century Modernist residence designed by Eero Saarinen in nearby Columbus, Ind.



An ironwork from Haiti that is on exhibit at the Miami airport.

"People are spending so much more time in airports," said Mr. Anderson. "They've become a kind of gateway to local culture."

About 35.7 million passengers visited Miami International Airport last year, many of them on international flights. With this in mind, Yolanda Sanchez, the airport's director of fine arts and cultural affairs, said she deliberately teamed with local museums, cultural institutions and social outreach programs.

"We want to bring the destination to the airport," she said.

Among the current offerings are a mural by local children, ironworks from Haiti and a show of 24 large-scale photographs by recent participants in the Everglades Park Service's artist-in-residence program.

Ms. Sanchez said a 4,400-square-foot sculpture garden was planned for the new North Terminal.

The partnership between the airport and the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden will present "an opportunity to acquaint people with what they're going to see on a much larger scale at Fairchild," said Bruce Greer, president of Fairchild's board of trustees.

Stanley Boynton, executive director of the Everglades Foundation, a nonprofit group working to restore the Everglades, sees a similar opportunity. Referring to Ms. Sanchez's current photography show, which he hopes will expose people to the Everglades and inspire them to go there and even engage with the effort to restore them, Mr. Boynton said, "there's no better location in Miami than the airport."

When airports are expanded, a percentage of the cost is typically devoted to permanent installations of art. Most rotating exhibitions are financed separately. Programs at the Philadelphia International Airport and San Francisco International Airport — like those in Miami and Toronto — are run by airport staff members. In Indianapolis and Oakland, Calif., port authorities take bids from local institutions, which use their own staffs to manage changing art shows.

According to Elsa Cameron, former director of the San Francisco Airport Museum, who started one of the nation's oldest and most comprehensive programs, unless the airport staff is already highly trained in handling museum-quality objects, "it's usually cheaper and smarter if local museums curate exhibitions."

Institutions are also more likely to lend valuable works from their collections if they know the airport facility has proper lighting and climate control, said Ms. Cameron, who serves as president for Community Arts International, which oversees art projects in public places and whose clients have included airports in San Diego and Toronto.

John Clark, the chief executive of the Indianapolis Airport Authority, agreed. "You hire professionals to run your airport," he said. "You need professionals to run art programs."

Although no official statistics connect airport passengers to museum attendance, Cherie Newell, director of professional services at the Oakland Museum of California, said that a recent exhibition her department organized for Oakland International Airport played a crucial role in promoting corresponding activities at the museum.

Midway through last summer's show of "Pixar: 25 Years of Animation," the museum held a satellite exhibit "Pencils to Pixels" at the Oakland airport, featuring work by four animation studios — DreamWorks, Industrial Light and Magic, Pixar Animation Studios and Tippett Studio — and six zoetropes with original artworks by Pixar. Museum attendance at the time was flat, because children were in school, Ms. Newell said. "Then, all of a sudden, it bumped back up."

The Pixar show, which closed in January, was one of the best-attended shows in the museum's history, according to Lori Fogarty, the museum's director. "It was enormously popular," she said, adding that, with Pixar based in Oakland and Pixar employees commuting back and forth to Los Angeles from the airport, "Pencils to Pixels" was a real point of pride for them.

Airport contracts can also provide nonprofit cultural institutions with some much-needed revenue. "Our current contract with the airport brings in over \$400,000 a year," said Ms. Fogarty. This fee, which comes out of earnings generated by the airport, covers the cost of developing, designing, installing and staffing changing exhibitions. "It also provides additional operating support to the museum," she said.

While the benefits to museums may seem obvious, the airports also profit from the injection of spectacular and unexpected displays of art into an experience that typically conjures indignity, delays and unforeseen hassles, said Lisa Freiman, a senior curator of contemporary art at the Indianapolis museum.

Although the Indianapolis airport's association with the museum is still very young, for example, Mr. Clark said he was intrigued by the museum's focus on large-scale works — along the lines of a recent commission for the museum's main lobby, constructed from 30 miles of colored string — that will present exciting and cost-efficient sources of cutting-edge culture.

Humanizing sterile corridors also encourages passenger spending, said Ms. Cameron. According to a 2007 survey conducted at an airport in Italy, rotating art exhibits account for increased passenger spending in boutiques and restaurants, she said, explaining that "while one family member is looking at a show, others tend to shop and eat."

Public interest in airport art exhibits has intensified since 9/11, according to Leah Douglas, director of exhibitions at the Philadelphia International Airport. She cited comment cards from passengers stating that after waiting in line to get through security, "and feeling really stressed," art was a wonderful diversion.

And while installing shows in corridors and atriums exposed to passengers has its drawbacks, Ms. Douglas said, "It's also exciting for passengers to get a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the process and to interact with artists." "Of course," she said, "We have to keep the artwork and tools close, and keep track of what we're doing."

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