

NEW YORK TRANSIT MUSEUM

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INSPIRING SPACES: 25 YEARS OF MTA ARTS FOR TRANSIT

**New York Transit Museum Gallery Annex
July 26 – October 31, 2010**

Grand Central Terminal

Shuttle Passage, just off the Main Concourse, next to the Station Master's Office

**New York Transit Museum
July 3, 2010 – March 2011**

Brooklyn Heights

Corner of Boerum Place and Schermerhorn Street

Since 1985, MTA Arts for Transit has been one of the country's most innovative public art programs, creating over 215 projects for the stations and facilities of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), with another 70 currently in production. In celebration of Arts for Transit's 25th anniversary, the New York Transit Museum will present *Inspiring Spaces: 25 Years of MTA Arts for Transit*. This two-part exhibition on view at Museum locations in Brooklyn and the Gallery Annex at Grand Central Terminal examines the art, artists, and impact of this rich and varied body of work.

The exhibition at the Museum's Gallery Annex at Grand Central Terminal will examine nearly three dozen pieces that embody a key principle of public art— that it is created for a specific space, and in turn alters both the place and people who use it. In Brooklyn Heights, the exhibition explores the recurring themes that inspire artists and their Arts for Transit projects. Both contain introductory essays by Eleanor Heartney, art critic and contributing editor to *Art in America*. Heartney explores the place of Arts for Transit in the larger context of public art.

Gallery Annex and Store at Grand Central Terminal

The role of public art in our lives and its site specific nature are central to the exhibition at Grand Central Terminal. As Heartney writes, "Today communication technology, modes of work, and leisure activities all conspire to draw us into private worlds and away from physical contact with our neighbors. In this context, public transport remains the great leveler, throwing the city's residents together in unpredictable combinations. Arts for Transit celebrates this most truly public of our urban spaces with artworks that remind us of our inescapable collectivity."

Much of this art is monumental, with a scale, scope, and impact beyond what one imagines these particular spaces would allow. The work does not stand apart from a site's architecture; rather it becomes an organic extension of the setting. Many projects are art in relief, sculptural pieces

projecting from floors and ceilings that alter their environments while interacting with riders on a personal level. Some illuminate the history of the site and the community they inhabit.

Artists working on Arts for Transit projects create transformations— of materials, of space, and of the communities in which they work. Though glass, ceramic, bronze, and steel are typical materials in transit systems, artists and fabricators use them in innovative ways. These materials and the art made from them turn crowded utilitarian environments into places that inspire and engage riders and workers. Such challenging spaces greatly influence the artwork designed for them. Walls are one of the few seemingly unlimited resources within the system, so it is a natural location for art. But even when confined to walls, much of this art work seems to transcend boundaries to have a stronger impact than their size or location would seem to allow.

Many notable artists are featured in the exhibition, including Romare Bearden, Milton Glaser, Sol LeWitt, Jean Shin, Doug and Mike Starn, Elizabeth Murray, and Al Held.

- Andrea Dezsö created a lush fantasy *Community Garden* (2006) at Bedford Park Boulevard in the Bronx.
- Artist Donald Lipski created artwork to match the grandeur of Grand Central Terminal with *Sirshasana* (1998), a 14-foot inverted olive tree with aluminum and fiberglass branches spanning 25 feet. The incongruity of Lipski's upside down tree is eclipsed by the perfect reference to the colors and textures of Grand Central, making this sculpture appear as if it was always there, showering the market with shimmering raindrops.
- A dynamic collaboration between artist and architect can be seen at the recently completed Long Island Rail Road Atlantic Terminal in Brooklyn, where artists Allan and Ellen Wexler and architects di Domenico + Partners created a dramatic two-story sculptural balcony. *Overlook* references the scenic overlooks found in national parks, blending the urban and natural worlds.

New York Transit Museum, Brooklyn Heights

In exploring the recurring themes that inspire artists and their projects, the Brooklyn Heights exhibition shows how artists fulfill one of public art's most important goals— to help build a common culture within a diverse urban population. Whether it is country, town, neighborhood, or block, the idea of place resonates for all of us, and often inspires. Subway artists and architects have referenced their surroundings since the turn of the twentieth century, when station plaques depicting historical scenes were popular station ornamentation. Artists today are drawn to the timeless importance of local histories and the people who made them. They have found inspiring ways to depict travel and destinations, which become emblems for the real world.

Though it might seem counterintuitive in the gritty urban environment of transit stations, dozens of projects are inspired by nature. Flowers and plants, birds and fish, and sunlight have been used by artists in a variety of ways throughout the past 25 years. In addition to their pure beauty, these projects reveal the personal meaning of nature for various artists and the many ways nature can be portrayed.

Stations and riders' experiences arouse the playful side of many artists. Sometimes the work is funny; other times it evokes a more serious narrative, commenting on working and commuting, but with a deft hand and unexpected levity. Along with infusing humor into stations, many artists have transformed spaces into visually comfortable spots for weary travelers. Art portraying the grace of nature, dramatic color and beauty, or the promise of humanity transforms the experience of travel.

These themes have been carried out by many notable featured artists, including Nancy Spero, Jane Dickson, Tom Otterness, Jacob Lawrence, and Roy Lichtenstein. At Long Island Rail Road's Seaford Station, Carson Fox extended nature's sky with her own creation in tempered glass in *Blue Sky Pursuit* (2009). Looking to the Museum of Natural History located above, Arts for Transit staff conceived and designed the art and collaborated with fabricators to create *For Want of a Nail* (2000) at the station at 81st Street. The work explores the interconnectivity of life in the universe, developed with examples of the ten key disciplines presented at the Museum.

Visitors will also have the opportunity to learn about the complex process involved in translating a proposal into finished work. At the Sutter Avenue station on the L subway line in Brooklyn, artist Takayo Noda created a bright, stunning garden in faceted glass window screens called *The Habitat for the Yellow Bird* (2007). Studying both a rejected and a final accepted sample of the glass, one can see the great lengths to which Noda and the fabricator went to produce a final form that captures the grace and lyricism of Noda's original watercolor painting.

In Brooklyn Heights, the Museum will also survey the Poster and Art Card projects, displaying the original work used to place art in vacant advertising space and inside train cars. The Poster Program began in 1991, partially out of a need to brighten stations with more than just advertising, partially to tap into an immense wealth of talented illustrators, and partially based on the success of London Transport's 110-year old art poster program. The posters celebrate the pace and character of city life, with the experience of transit at its core. The Art Card Program began in 1999, allowing artists to create original work for subway car interiors in oil paint, acrylic, silk-screen, gouache, collage, mixed media, and photography.

MTA Arts for Transit

Arts for Transit upholds the mandate set forth by the subway's founders, who believed that every design element in the system should respect and enhance the experience of commuters. In keeping with the City Beautiful Movement, the subway's first engineer, William Barclay Parsons, inserted a clause in the original 1898 building contract that stations and structures, "be designed, constructed and maintained with a view to the beauty of their appearance, as well as to their efficiency." With these words, he created a principle that, years later, became the cornerstone upon which the subway's art program was established. Arts for Transit formally carries on this mandate today.

In conjunction with a massive station rehabilitation program launched in the 1980's, Arts for Transit was created to oversee the selection of artists and installation of permanent artworks in subway and commuter rail stations, underscoring the importance placed on customers and their experience of MTA systems. Arts for Transit collaborated in the development of guidelines for station design and historic preservation. Station rehabilitation is approached holistically, with detailed guidelines inspired by the original architects, providing a structured framework within which artists are free to focus on their art and its long term benefit to passengers. Throughout the years Arts for Transit has grown to encompass the Poster and Art Card programs, Music Under New York and the Lightbox Project, a series of photography exhibits. These temporary projects give illustrators, photographers, and musicians the opportunity to explore the people, places, and purpose of the transit network with visual appeal and variety.

In addition to photographs of the completed projects, the exhibits will feature original paintings, drawings, and sculpture that artists used at the initial stages of the production process. Glass, ceramic, and metal fabrication samples will illustrate how this original art translated into final pieces. Proposals and concept drawings of works in progress will give a glimpse of the future

course of Arts for Transit. These pieces will give the audience an intimate view of the artists and the process they use to create art.

Inspiring Spaces: 25 Years of Arts for Transit will be on view at the New York Transit Museum in Brooklyn Heights from July 3, 2010-March 2011, and at the Gallery Annex at Grand Central Terminal from July 27-October 28, 2010.

Support for this exhibition has been provided by:

The New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency
The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
Brooklyn Community Foundation

New York Transit Museum

The New York Transit Museum is one of only a handful of museums in the world dedicated to urban public transportation. The Museum's collection of objects, documents, photographs, film, and historic rolling stock illustrates the story of mass transit's critical role in the region's economic and residential development since the 19th century. By exploring the social history, engineering, technology, and artistry of New York's subways, buses, bridges, tunnels, and commuter rail systems, the Transit Museum reveals an often-overlooked trove of rich icons that tells us much about urban development and culture.

The Transit Museum's main facility is located in a decommissioned 1936 subway station in Brooklyn Heights, an ideal setting for the Museum's twenty vintage subway and elevated cars, and wide-ranging educational programs for children and adults. The Gallery Annex at Grand Central Terminal presents changing exhibitions relevant to the millions of commuters who use mass transit every day.

For additional exhibition, tour, and special events information please call: 718 694-1600 or visit our website at www.mta.info/museum

New York Transit Museum, Brooklyn Heights

The New York Transit Museum is located at the corner of Boerum Place and Schermerhorn Street in Brooklyn Heights

Hours: Tuesday – Friday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday and Sunday Noon to 5 p.m.,
Closed Mondays and major holidays

Admission: Adults \$5, Children 3 – 17 years of age \$3, Senior Citizens (62+) \$3, Seniors Free
Wednesdays, Museum members: Free

New York Transit Museum Gallery Annex

The New York Transit Museum Gallery Annex at Grand Central Terminal is located in the Shuttle Passage, just off the Main Concourse, next to the Station Master's Office.

Hours: Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday and Sunday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Admission is free.

In conjunction with the exhibition the New York Transit Museum will be conducting the following programming:

Tuesday, October 5 6:30 p.m.
25 YEARS OF MTA ARTS FOR TRANSIT: REVISITING OUR ROOTS
Pre-registration recommended. Call 718-694-1794 to reserve a spot.

Since 1985, MTA Arts for Transit has commissioned artwork to enhance and improve the rider experience. In celebration of the program's 25th anniversary, discover the story behind this influential program. Moderated by art critic Eleanor Heartney, panelists Tracy Fitzpatrick, Curator, Neuberger Museum of Art, Tom Finkelppearl, Executive Director, Queens Museum of Art, and Dr. Harriet Senie, co-founder of the organization Public Art Dialogue will reflect upon the current state of public art in the city and the role of the Arts for Transit program.

Tuesday, November 16 6:30 p.m.
25 YEARS OF MTA ARTS FOR TRANSIT: MEET THE ARTISTS
Pre-registration recommended. Call 718-694-1794 to reserve a spot.

What happens when public art and public transportation team up to enhance the rider experience? Anne Pasternak, President and Artistic Director of Creative Time will moderate a discussion with artists Ellen Harvey, Duke Riley, and Vito Acconci about the conception, realization, and installation of their Arts for Transit permanent art projects.