



SPOTLIGHT

LAX AIRPORT ART PROGRAM REDEFINES THE EXPERIENCE OF TRANSITORY PUBLIC SPACE

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PHOTOS PANIC STUDIO LA; COURTESY OF LOS ANGELES WORLD AIRPORTS

Even at its best, an airport is still a place of enforced loitering, usually with little beyond the tedium of queues and onslaught of shops, bars, advertisements, admonitions and muted TVs to engage your senses for the duration of your too-long wait. But as the international design and architecture world steps up its game, the airport experience has been changing at hubs from Houston to Miami to Chicago. Nowhere is this more the case than in Los Angeles, where LAX has launched an expansion and renovation—with an innovatively integrated visual art program as the jewel in its crown of plans. Sarah Cifarelli, Airport Art Manager for the Los Angeles World Airports (the public/private organization overseeing the agenda) puts it this way: “By expanding the art presence at LAX, we hope to give passengers an art experience at all stages of their journey.”

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Courtney & Greene, Studio Furniture, Terminal 3 Arrivals. Photo: Panic Studio LA

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Occupying 11 diverse exhibition sites across Terminals 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and Tom Bradley International Terminal, a roster of both permanent and rotating temporary installations of painting, sculpture and video enlivens and redefines ideas about public space and reinforces the city's brand as a cultural capital and arts-driven economy. LA's Department of Cultural Affairs is a major partner in the undertaking, which explains why many of the artists involved are among the best-known in the city. Of course, that doesn't necessarily mean everyone will love everything they see. But that's fine, because the program aims to present not only pleasing pop or defanged decoration, but serious contemporary fine art, from the narrative and historical to the mysterious and experiential. While LAWA is busy figuring out the logistics of what an airport art-walk might look like, in the meantime you don't even need a plane ticket to see it all, as several artworks are mounted in parts of the airport that are open to the non-traveling public.

Mark Bradford's suspended sculpture in Bradley International Upper Departures Level is a permanent work called *Bell Tower*. Quite large, at more than 24 x 33 feet, it's constructed of 12,000 pounds of aluminum plates, tubes, wood and paper, and suggests a cross between Bradford's signature brand of palimpsestic abstract expressionism and the central broadcast module of a sports arena. Many find it haunting and unusual, a massive structure assuming the heft and panoptical presence of an information beacon, yet pulsing instead with richly layered texture, color, decay and the accumulation of emotion rather than directive. Its un-pretentiousness has been somewhat controversial, but the work's strangeness and tattered majesty succeeds in both activating and asking questions about the sometimes confusing qualities of shared experience in public spaces.

Also in Bradley, in the Arrivals Customs hall, is a dimensional mural-based installation by Erika Lizée. A temporary work on view through February, 2017, *Transfiguration* occupies a lengthy vitrine a few feet deep along a busy hallway.

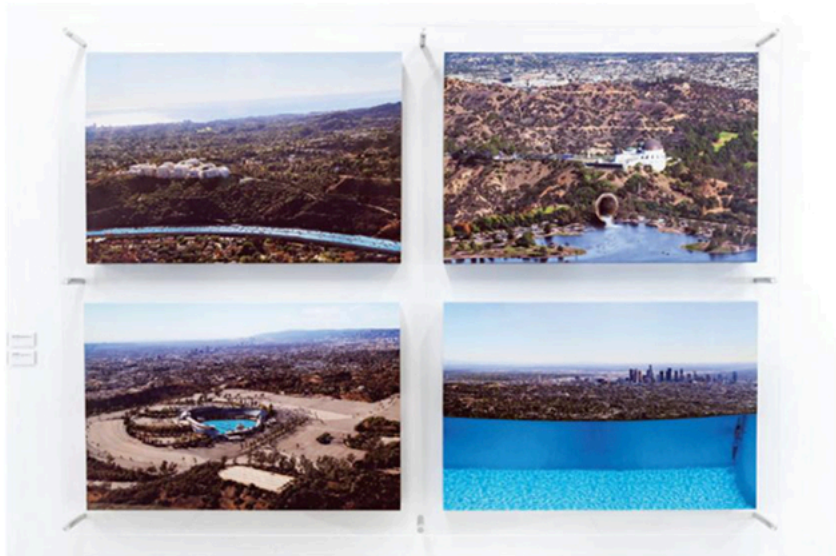
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Tim Nolan, LAX Terminal 7, *Like Sound Going Sideways*, *Shine On* Photo: PanicStudio LA Installation View

Lizée's gift for illusionistic depth and blended rendering techniques here combines with actual sculptural and bas relief elements, adding real shadow and movement to a large-scale, otherworldly form with the attributes of botanical and extraterrestrial sentience. In Terminal 3 Upper Level Ticketing (no ticket required) through July, 2018, Megan Geckler's *We've got to cross this great big world somehow*, tethers the earth to the sky in a pair of soaring sculptural vortices made of hand-dyed ropes and advanced mathematics. Geckler's trademark large-scale weaving technique is applied in hot and cool colors that occupy high-ceilinged spaces, flooded with natural light, in a manner both monumental and breezy, creating an engaging optical puzzle that actually makes your time in the security queue its own reward.

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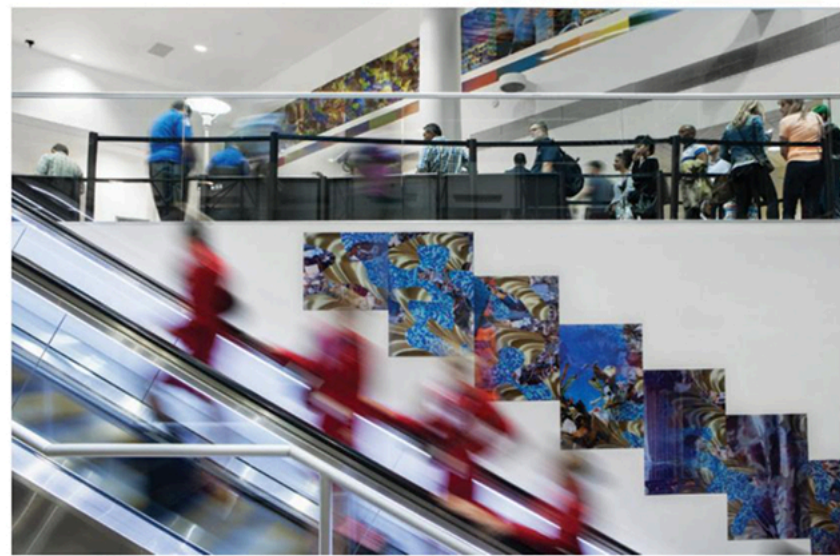
Luciana Abalt, Terminal 3, Arrivals.



Megan Geckler, Terminal 3, Departures.



Erika Lizée, *Transfiguration* installation, Tom Bradley International Terminal, Arrivals.



Barbara Strasen, *Flow & Glimpse*, Terminal 2

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Carolyn Castano, *Desert*, Terminal 1.

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Elsewhere at LAX, Ball-Nogues Studio and Pae White Studio have each created permanent installations, *Air Garden* and *Woven Walk* respectively, also playing on the idea of suspended, hovering and weaving-based architectural interventions. *Air Garden's* color and contours were planned according to vagaries of ambient light, while the “tapestry” *Woven Walk* is a colorful play off the undulations of extant ceiling cables, augmented with fiberglass and aluminum threads. In Terminal 2 Departures Atrium, (non-ticketed space) the long-term installation by Barbara Strasen, *Flow and Glimpse*, is composed of some 90 wall-mounted panels. In its way, Strasen's work is designed to be responsive to ambient light and the changing perspective of viewers in motion. The images are lenticular, with each panel combining two images of Los Angeles—one natural environment and one manmade—into a flip-flopping interspersed whole, orchestrated across six walls of the atrium.

Terminal 1 Baggage Claim (non-ticketed space) features *Ventanas* by Carolyn Castano, a series of watercolor paintings mixing landscape, abstraction, references to the history of air-travel graphics and the compositional structure of the window. In the Terminal 7-8 Departures Hallway and Ticketing Lobby, Timothy Nolan's *Like Sound Going Sideways* and *Shine On* also directly reference the everyday surrealism of air travel in their collage-based images merging natural and built images, original photography and vintage decorative and topographical source materials. Both are vibrant, Pop-inflected collections that combine narrative, poetic content with the simple joy of enlivened transitio space. Speaking of which, back in Bradley International, the permanent video installation *See Change* features 28 site-specific works and four hours of looped programming by 17 artists from LA, New York and beyond. The installation includes a 58-screen, 90-foot video array suspended from the ceiling, and a 25-screen wall, streaming non-stop every day from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m.

In past years, musical and even site-specific dance performances have taken place throughout the terminals, no doubt to the happy bewilderment of unsuspecting travelers, and more such events, as well as the idea of a public airport-wide artwalk, are currently being planned. Visit www.lawa.org for emerging details as they align.

