

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## Art gallery entices travelers at John Glenn Airport

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By Allison Ward, The Columbus Dispatch

Soon to be hanging in the entryway of Jack Cleary's Honolulu home will be a painting of the two water towers near the corner of Henderson and Reed roads in his native Columbus.

A reminder of home -- and a nod to his profession of construction and architecture -- the piece from local printmaker Sharone Putter spoke to him.

It mattered little that he saw the artwork while on his way to and from the restroom at the John Glenn Columbus International Airport.

About to hop on a flight back to Palo Alto, California -- where he works and lives when not in Hawaii -- after visiting his mother here in November, Cleary took a few minutes to look at the 20 pieces Putter had displayed in the hallway off the ticketing lobby. (He went to her website the next day to inquire about purchasing.)

Welcome to the Gateway to the Arts Gallery.

"It's a nice use of space," Cleary said. "It's off the beaten path, but the work pulled me down into it.

"I fly often out of San Francisco, ... and I'm used to seeing this at . . . (San Francisco International Airport), but I'm glad to see this in Columbus. I'm glad to get a piece of artwork I appreciate."

"Brushstrokes in Flight" by Roy Lichtenstein, the large sculpture that arrived at the airport in 1984 and now resides in the atrium, is perhaps the most recognized work of art found at an airport in the United States -- but it's far from the only example of art the facility boasts.

From the gallery-esque hallway lined with pieces from a rotating group of local artists to a performing-arts program that invites musicians to play in its ticketing lobby twice a month, the airport has made a point to highlight the creative culture of the city.

With its recently completed terminal-modernization project, which wrapped up earlier this year, the facility also added artistic design aesthetics such as mosaics, photography and sculptures, said Angie Tabor, airport communications manager.

"The art at the airport is to enhance the traveler's experience, but it's also an opportunity for the artist to be in front of an audience of millions a year," Tabor said.

In the 60-foot hallway leading to the only restrooms in the ticketing area -- "It's a highly trafficked area," Tabor said -- the overhead lighting suddenly improves. Rectangle leather benches line the walls where Putter's "Workscapes" mixed-media prints that depict snapshots of central Ohio life hang from a sophisticated display system.

In true gallery fashion, "Please do not touch" signs hang, too.

The mostly gray and brown pieces offer pops of color, such as a yellow bulldozer or the green on the trees, to entice a closer view. Putter collaborated with Ran Berdichesky on the works.

"With the modernization, . . . we wanted to make sure it looked more like a gallery," said Tabor, who also manages the art space. "Travelers might recharge there -- charge their phones -- and they're taking in art without even realizing it."

John Glenn International isn't the only airport worldwide to dabble in the arts.

Around Ohio, Cleveland Hopkins International Airport boasts several gallery spaces with artwork from professionals from the area, children and even employees.

At the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport, the work of modernist Charley Harper (now deceased) brightens a food court and the Cincinnati Museum Center loans items, such as vintage cars, to put in exhibit space.

"Some have very robust collections and dedicated curators and others not much," Tabor said.

In recent years, John Glenn International has made the arts more of a priority.

The visual-arts program began in 2009 as a partnership with the Ohio Art League. The organization puts out an annual call for artist submissions and its board members, along with representatives from the airport, choose four artists to show their work -- three months at a time -- each year.

So far, exhibits have included photography, metal work, watercolors, 3-D sculptures and more.

Kellie McDermott, a painter of mainly industrial landscapes, said she had seen the artwork at the airport in her travels and always wondered how she might have her work displayed there. Then, she saw the Ohio Art League's submission call last fall.

"The exposure at the airport is just really great," said McDermott, of the Northwest Side. "You get to show to a whole different group of people who maybe aren't from Columbus or they don't go to the Short North galleries."

Her exhibit, "What's Left Behind," ran from mid-March to mid-June and she showed 25 pieces of various sizes, some of which she had to replace as they were sold to passengers.

"I expected to get contacted or inquiries, but I didn't expect people going through the airport to be that interested and purchase work," said McDermott, who sold at least a half-dozen pieces.

Kim Covell Maurer, whose exhibit of large, colorful paintings followed McDermott's, also experienced retail success, too.

The painter, who works mainly in encaustic -- a method that uses homemade beeswax paints -- said the airport was the ideal venue to showcase the galaxy-themed pieces on which she had been working.

"I think that every artist is looking for those opportunities to hang that large of body of work in one place," said Maurer, a resident of the Clintonville neighborhood. "It's similar to a solo show. I had 18 pieces and so much of the public goes through that space both nationally and internationally."

The airport, however, isn't only focused on highlighting the visual artists in town.

During a recent busy Thursday afternoon in the ticketing lobby, passengers were treated to some New Orleans-style jazz from the Ramblers.

The airport partners with the Greater Columbus Arts Council to provide local musicians for its Melodies in Motion program.

The music, said Jami Goldstein, of the council, puts John Glenn International on the same level as other airports who routinely have musical entertainment.

"This positions us as Columbus: a creative and vital city," said Goldstein, vice president of marketing for the arts group. "It's the vibrancy we want to share with people who come through the airport and into our city."

***award@dispatch.com***

***@AllisonAWard***