

ART

Denver hopes to buy \$2 million sculpture by Ned Kahn for DIA

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By Ray Mark Rinaldi

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Denver International Airport is proposing the largest single purchase of public art in city history, a \$2 million sculpture by internationally recognized artist **Ned Kahn**. The piece, a kinetic work animated by the wind and spread across thousands of square feet, is intended to enliven the experience of air passengers crossing between the main terminal and the new transit station and hotel going up on the airport's south side.

The purchase is part of a massive art buy, totaling \$5.2 million, mandated by rules that require 1 percent of the construction budgets of major city projects go toward art. The set-aside, common to major municipalities across the U.S., ensures public officials will consider aesthetics, and not just function, when completing new buildings.

The south terminal project has an overall price tag of more than \$500 million. DIA has already hired Colorado artist **Patrick Marold** to create a \$1.5 million work for the massive bowl that will surround the train platforms where light rail passengers arrive and depart. Officials are also in talks with French installationist **Yann Kersalé** to create a \$1.1 million piece incorporating the escalator that will take rail riders to the **Jeppesen Terminal's** upper floor.

The projects are being ushered through the city's bureaucracy with considerable speed so they can be integrated into the South Terminal project's construction and landscaping, scheduled for completion by the end of 2015. Another \$1 million has been reserved for art that is temporary or needs a shorter lead time to place.

The large purchases require approval from the Denver City Council, which recently gave the nod to the **Marold** piece and is likely to have the Kahn sculpture on its agenda this month. The council's Business, Workforce and Sustainability Committee voted unanimously in favor of the idea last week.

The council's consent is one of several layers such deals must go through. DIA's art staff first proposes projects to its in-house Art Committee, made up of eight volunteers representing the fine arts, academic and civic communities. Then, projects proceed through the city's 24-member **Commission on Cultural Affairs**.

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Dozens of officials and art experts, as well as the building project's architects and construction staff, will have signed off before the latest pieces are completed, said Matt Chasansky, who oversees DIA's Art and Culture Program. "It's not just one guy making decisions on behalf of everyone," he said

The airport is perhaps Denver's busiest showcase for art. More than 53 million people pass through each year, half of whom never leave the building as they connect between flights. For many, the airport's design, efficiency and art provide their only impression of the metropolis. "What we say to them is basically what we're saying about Denver overall," Chasansky said.

DIA's art collection has been the subject of praise and criticism, much of it generated by artist Luis Jiménez's 32-foot "Blue Mustang," which greets visitors arriving via Federico Peña Boulevard. The fiery horse, with its electric, red eyes, has emerged as a lightning rod on public opinion about art. Among its nicknames: "Blucifer" and "Satan's Steed," though it has many defenders who cite its recognizability, as well as success generating wide-spread conversation about fine art.

The airport operates an aggressive, international art program that taps new technologies and evolving ideas about visual art. Recently, it commissioned several, short digital pieces to play in rotation on electronic screens above the security check-in lines.

Another work, "Lightning Blues Express," by artist Humberto Duque and on display through July, is a performance piece that has actors roaming the terminals, pulling behind them amplified music players that look like carry-on bags. The wheeled, boom boxes play various recorded songs with a theme of farewell, generating odd and amused stares from airport users. DIA paid \$75,000 for the work.

In addition to making the airport a more lively place, the pieces are meant to shake people out of their hurried routines, if only for a moment. For some passengers, the art fills the down time air travel forces upon them. For others, the works offer an invitation to relax. One "intent is to create artwork that will pull people out of their fear and anxiety," said Kendall Peterson, who is heading up the art efforts for the South Terminal expansion.

The Kahn piece will put Denver into an elite list of cities who own one of his works. Kahn, based in Sebastopol, Calif., is best-known for large, graceful and easy-to-like sculptures, often made of aluminum, that move without electrical power. His best works are at public spaces such as San Francisco International Airport, as well as private spaces, such as the ultra-trendy 21C museum and hotel in Louisville, Ky.

The exact shape and size of the DIA piece is yet to be determined. It will be mostly horizontal with moving parts that reflect the patterns of the wind and other natural elements. It will be integrated into the architecture in a way people can walk around and through it, Peterson said.

Marold is known for working with light, and DIA hopes his piece will be visible both day and night. **Kersalé** is creating an entire environment that will envelop the main escalator and entertain riders along their 90-second journey between levels.

In all, DIA solicited proposals from 180 international artists. Peterson said the airport wanted to work with established professionals who have demonstrated they can bring quality art projects in a timely manner to large public spaces. "There's a pretty small sample out there," she said.

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