

**New Terminal**

**Washington National Airport**

**Washington DC**

**Cesar Pelli & Associates**

Architectural Record 10/97  
ARTNews 6/97





William Jacklin's mural (left) is hung in the Metro bridge well. Medallions by Michele Oka Doner (below left), Valerie Jaudon (below right), and Joyce Scott (bottom) appear on the concourse floor.

The architectural enhancement program at National Airport's new terminal includes the work of 30 nationally known contemporary artists, whose designs have been presented as mosaics, paintings, bronze and terrazzo, hammered metal, and art glass. From the very beginning, the work of these artists was planned as an integral part of the architecture of the terminal. This is a reflection of Cesar Pelli's belief that art and architecture are allied arts, and that to decorate a building with art once it has been completed is to continue a traditional split between artists and architects.

"With all of the negative publicity surrounding publicly funded art in recent years, there would be no worse place for an arts program to go wrong than in a public building here in Washington, D.C.," says Dan Feil, the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority's terminal design

project manager. To avoid problems, he and Pelli took extraordinary precautions in creating National Airport's arts program and in distinguishing it from other public arts programs.

First, the program was named the "architectural enhancement program" so there would be no confusion with the "one percent for art" programs commonly associated with public projects. The architectural enhancements were funded through the construction budget, and Pelli's office assumed all responsibility for selecting and supervising the artists and seeing that they fulfilled their contracts.

Feil researched arts programs to see why they had run into problems in the past. Often, artists did not have the technical expertise to execute their work in the required medium or to furnish work that would withstand the rigors of public



display. Sometimes artists could not keep their designs within budget.

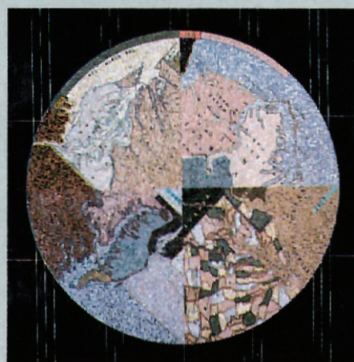
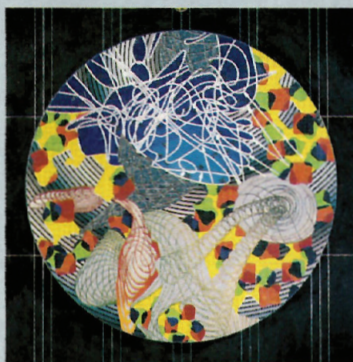
To avoid this situation at National, artists working in media unfamiliar to them were teamed with artisan collaborators who were used to dealing with architectural materials. This ensured that the work would be done on budget, that it could be cleaned, that it would be durable and safe, and that it could be installed by a subcontractor.

The artists were paid in two stages: when the concept was presented, and when the finished design was presented. "This avoided the problem of having Stalin's head suddenly showing up somewhere," says Pelli, laughing.

Feil and Pelli are often asked why they did not use a committee to select the artists. "Many artists are uncomfortable with selection committees," Feil responds. "They see them as unwilling to choose



anything but 'safe' art. Pelli was able to get some of the best artists in the country because they knew he would accept art that wasn't necessarily 'safe.' Pelli didn't intend that every piece of art would be liked by everybody. But in years to come National Airport's architectural enhancement program will serve as a time capsule of the state of contemporary American art in the mid-1990s, just as public art produced for Rockefeller Center captured the state of painting and sculpture in the 1930s.



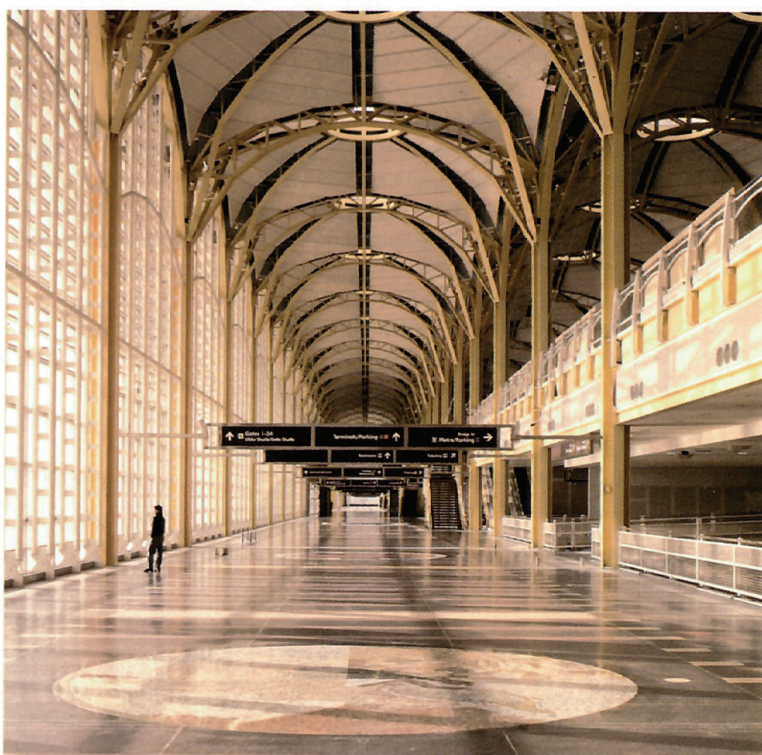
Floor medallions by Frank Stella (above left) and Joyce Kozloff (above right) are installed with eight other medallions on the concourse level. A mural by David Row (right) hangs in the Metro bridge well.







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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Art at National Airport: Lisa Scheer's screen wall; Kent Bloomer's aluminum, steel, and wood trellis, at the ticket level; Nancy Graves's marble-and-glass mosaic, one of ten 18-foot-in-diameter floor pieces in the terminal; view of the terminal's concourse, looking south; Frank Stella's floor medallion; Joyce Scott's medallion called *Lips*.

