MTA’s $27 Billion Spending Plan Will Bring New Art to 31 Stations

Look out for work by Sarah Sze, Vik Muniz, and more.

Sarah Cascone, July 19, 2016

New Yorkers pretty much have a love-hate relationship with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), but hopefully that will get better under Governor Andrew Cuomo’s new five-year, $27 billion spending plan, announced on July 18. In addition to new “open gangway” style subway trains that allow passengers to move freely between cars, the plan also will bring new art to 31 stations across the system slated to undergo renovations.

Though it’s easy to miss it in the hubbub of rush hour, the subway system actually doubles as something of an underground contemporary art museum, thanks to the efforts of MTA Arts & Design, led by director Sandra Bloodworth.
Among the hundreds of works on view throughout the system are pieces by the likes of Roy Lichtenstein, who created a mural for the Times Square station, Sol LeWitt, whose mosaic at 59th Street-Columbus Circle station was completed after his death, and Tom Otterness, who filled the 14th Street and Eighth Avenue station with quirky bronze figurines.

Cuomo’s announcement offers no specifics about planned art additions, noting only that the renovated stations will include “amenities such as cellular connectivity, Wi-Fi, and new art.”

“It’s too early in the process to talk about what kind of art will be coming into those stations,” said Amanda Kwan, a spokesperson for the MTA, in a conversation with artnet News.

Currently, the MTA is hosting an open call for artists for five stations along the N and Q lines in Astoria. Under the MTA’s previously-existing 2015–2019 capital program, Arts for Transit was allotted $1.7 million a part of the East Side Access project, which looks to extend the Long Island Railroad from Penn Station to Grand Central, all earmarked for 2016.
The first phase of the 2nd Avenue line is currently set to open in December, and will feature 12 large tile mosaic portraits by Chuck Close at its 86th Street station. Curbed reports that the total budget for the works was $5 million.

Other artists on deck for the new line include Sarah Sze at the 96th Street station, Vik Muniz at the 72nd Street station, and Jean Shin at the 63rd Street station.

Under yesterday’s announcement, the MTA will begin expanding the new, long-awaited line up to 125th Street. Other planned improvements to the system include a new fare payment system to replace the MetroCard and the construction of four new Metro North stations in the Bronx.