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Underground art: the public works that are part of New York's \$100bn infrastructure plan

At MoMA, governor Andrew Cuomo outlined the state's projects, including pieces by Sarah Sze, Chuck Close and Vik Muniz

by [PAC POBRIC](#) | 20 December 2016



A mural by Vik Muniz at the 72nd Street station of the Second Avenue subway

Two weeks ahead of the opening of the Second Avenue subway in New York on 1 January, governor Andrew Cuomo outlined the role of public art in the state's \$100bn infrastructure plan.

Speaking at the Museum of Modern Art, where he was introduced by the museum's director Glenn Lowry, Cuomo linked the building boom to major building booms of the past. "What made New York [into] New York was the Erie Canal," he said, calling it "one of the greatest engineering marvels ever". The canal allowed New York to stake its claim as a gateway westward.

But Cuomo stressed that engineering was never undertaken for its own sake. "Every

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public work was also an art work,” he said, adding: “We didn’t build cinder block buildings. It wasn’t all about function.”

Function will be the priority on the Second Avenue subway, but the four stations that open in the New Year also include mosaic murals by Sarah Sze (at the 96th Street station), Chuck Close (86th Street), Vik Muniz (72nd Street) and Jean Shin (63rd Street). Governor Cuomo called it a “small museum” underground.



A mural by Jean Shin at the 63rd Street station of the Second Avenue subway

Asked about the cost of the murals, the chief executive of the Metropolitan Transit Authority, Thomas Prendergast, declined to cite details, but said it cost less than the 1% of the total building budget normally set aside for art.

The New York infrastructure project also includes overhauls at JFK and LaGuardia airports, open-road tolling across the New York metropolitan area and a new Pennsylvania Station.

Cuomo’s optimism this morning, however, was tempered by the day’s events. The Democratic governor, who is a member of the US Electoral College, planned to travel to the state capital after the press conference to cast his ballot for president. “Hope springs eternal,” he said in apparent reference to the forthcoming presidency of Donald Trump. Turning to Lowry, he added: “That wasn’t a political comment, Glenn. That was a philosophical comment.”