



Second Avenue Subway Art

Beautiful mosaics cover the first stations opened on New York City's newest subway line.



After 88 years in development, New York City's new Second Avenue subway line has become a reality. And the two-block-long concourses and particularly high ceilings allow the line's first subway stations to house a permanent public art installation on a scale not previously seen in New York.

The first stations opened along the new line are the latest additions to the MTA's Arts & Design project to revitalize the city's public transit stations. Four high-profile artists were chosen for the Second Avenue subway project. The most well-known is Chuck Close, who adorned the 86th Street station with 12 mosaic portraits, each nine feet high. Among his subjects are musician Lou Reed, painter Cecily Brown, and Close's wife, artist Sienna Shields. In one of his self-portraits, the squiggly hairs of his beard are individually shaped tiles that differ from the otherwise mostly square tiles that make up the rest of the image.

CRISTIN TIERNEY

Brazilian artist Vik Muniz also incorporated a self-portrait into his contribution at the 72nd Street station, depicting himself tripping and spilling papers out of his briefcase. Like Close, Muniz used people he knew as his subjects, asking them to pose for the 36 life-sized mosaic portraits of New Yorkers who just seem to be waiting for the train like anyone else. They may be reading, they may be carrying their instruments of choice (a saxophone particularly pops), or they may be dealing with children. The piece is called “Perfect Strangers,” but the impression is of familiar characters one might see at a subway station.

At the 96th Street station, artist Sarah Sze used standard-sized tiles as her canvas, creating a smooth and immersive drawing for riders to descend through as they head for their trains. A collage of images of scaffolding, birds, chairs, leaves, and wind greet those entering the station, and along the concourse they pass through the illusion of paper blowing around them, as though they were walking along the street on a windy day. Her piece, which resembles the blue and white image one might see on an architect’s desk, is called “Blueprint for a Landscape.”

At the 63rd Street Station, artist Jean Shin used pictures she found in the archives of the New York Transit Museum and New York Historical Society to re-create images of riders from the 1920s, 30s, and 40s on the walls. She also depicted the demolition of the Second and Third Avenue elevated lines, from which her piece got its name, “Elevated.”

Know Before You Go

The Lexington Av/63 subway station can be reached at all times by the 4, 6, N and Q trains and also during certain hours by the 5, R and W trains. The 72nd Street, 86th Street and 96th Street stations are the northernmost stops on the Q and served on by that train.