



Coloured canopy and street style portraits among the artworks coming to eight TTC subway stations

By **BEN SPURR** Transportation Reporter
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A light display that mimics circadian rhythms, tile work inspired by urbanist Jane Jacobs, street style portraits of west-end transit users, and a brilliant 200-metre canopy made of translucent multi-coloured glazing.

These eye-grabbing projects are among eight new permanent public artworks that will soon grace Toronto's subway system after being approved by the TTC board this week.



Woodbine – Directions Intersections Connections by Marman Borins. This 1,000 square-foot mural by Toronto sculptors and installation artists Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins will be installed on the north-facing wall of the station's above-ground bus terminal. The work's brightly coated metal panels evoke transit routes and a sense of motion and connectivity. (TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION)

Collectively they represent a significant addition to the TTC's rather meager collection. According to the transit agency, 25 of its 69 stations incorporate public art.

Although it's not the norm on the TTC, Helena Grdadolnik, one of the agency's art consultants, says subway art can serve an important function.

"Art in transit can bring joy to the journey, and can give you something else to look at and think about instead of advertisements," she said. It can also "help stitch the station back into the community."

The eight stations receiving new art as a result of the board's decisions this week are Chester, King, Runnymede, Sherbourne, St. Patrick, Wilson, Woodbine, and Glencairn. The new works will be installed over the next few years in conjunction with planned renovations.

Grdadolnik, whose full-time job is director for the Toronto firm Workshop Architecture, facilitates the selection process for the TTC's public art. She's in charge of putting together the five-member juries of artists, educators, and local representatives, who judge proposals based on three criteria: artistic merit, relationship to the public, and relationship to the station site.

Grdadolnik said it's up to the artist how to make that connection to the nearby community, but the juries look for something uniquely suited to each stop.

"What we want is for (the artists) to have some kind of way that they're saying, this can't be just at any station. This works at Chester but it doesn't work at Runnymede," she said.

The artists in the current round of projects come from diverse artistic backgrounds, and each took their own approach to making their work site-specific.

Barbara Todd's tile installation at St. Patrick will consist of dozens of photographs of people from the neighbourhood, which Todd will render

as silhouettes coloured in with patterns from the nearby Textile Museum.

She named the project “Many Little Plans” after a phrase from Jane Jacobs.

“As Jane Jacobs suggests, a healthy neighbourhood or a healthy city has many people doing many different things and intersecting,” Todd explained. “Each is different but they’re crisscrossing each other.”

Sean Martindale took a different approach for his project at King, which will provide a counterpoint to the station’s location beneath the downtown financial district.

His animated underground light display will imitate sunbeams coming through a tree canopy, and will change according to the time of day and the season.

Martindale said an inspiration for the piece was the mental health benefits of being exposed to natural light, a suitable theme for the subway system where suicide is an all-too-common occurrence.

“I noticed that many of the TTC stations, and King station in particular, feel quite dark,” he said. “This is giving the opportunity for people to get at least a little bit more of that beneficial light.”

Of the eight artworks approved this week, seven were selected through the open call jury process. The finalists were chosen from 75 submissions.

The other project, at Glencairn, is the largest work, and a reinterpretation of a piece by renowned painter Rita Letendre that was installed at the stop when it opened in 1978.

Letendre’s original work, called Joy, consisted of bright multi-coloured panels in the skylight, but it had to be removed in the 1990s because of water damage.

For the new piece, the TTC will photograph a painting Letendre made around the time Glencairn opened, and blow it up so that it can be inserted as an interlayer in the new skylight, which will stretch for 200 metres across the top of the station.

“The new work is going to be equally vibrant as the original,” said Grdadonik. “I’m excited to see that one.”

TTC policy sets its art budget at about 1 per cent of the cost of construction of public areas in the station, and the seven projects that were selected through the jury process will cost a combined \$1.2 million.

The Glencairn project will be installed as part of the replacement of the existing skylight, which has leakage problems. The total cost of the work, including the art, is \$10.7 million.

TTC spokesperson Brad Ross said that the investment would be worth it.

“Vibrant, livable cities like Toronto embrace public art. As a very visible and vital part of Toronto, the TTC is proud to contribute to that vibrancy for our customers,” he said.