



Artists developing artworks for Bush Intercontinental Airport: Graciela Hasper, Reginald Adams, Emilie Duval, and Lovie Olivia

## Houston—America’s New “Art City”— Is Ready to Welcome Travelers with a Whole New Art Experience

**New works by artists across the Americas are sure to inspire and delight travelers and art-lovers alike.**

**by Theresa Escobedo,  
Houston’s Civic Art Program Manager**

With a return to international travel and a resurgence of airport terminals filled with visitors moving to and from the nation’s most diverse city, the City of Houston has orchestrated a boom time for the arts, commissioning an astounding 22 new artworks for Houston’s airports since 2020. This is in addition to the Houston Airport System hosting the first-of-its-kind program of live musical performances through Harmony in the Air and a new Artist-in-Residence (AIR) Program, both of which see Houston-area artists working “live” in airport terminals for air travelers to enjoy.



*Concept rendering from Houston-based, Venezuelan artist Gerardo Rosales for the Mickey Leeland International Terminal.*

Recently installed artworks and those in the works for Houston’s airports are the product of more than ten million dollars invested in the work of some of the most dynamic artists working today.

Recently, at an event for Houston’s Civic Art Collection at William P. Hobby Airport, Mayor Sylvester Turner celebrated the completion of ten of these artworks, dubbing Houston the “Art City” —words that mark the city’s current initiatives supporting the creative economy in Houston and also foreshadow the growing significance art-making plays in shaping the character of the nation’s fourth largest city

The Houston Airports System, whose locations include two award-winning international airports and a spaceport, manages the care of almost 350 artworks in the Civic Art Collection—the largest number of artworks, its curator says, that is hosted by any airport program in the aviation industry.



*Houston artists and partners Nick Vaughan & Jake Margolin developing artworks for the Mickey Leeland International Terminal. (Photo credit: Janice Rubin)*

## International Terminal Named for A Homegrown Hero

Like many airports across the U.S., Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH) is undergoing massive redevelopment to accommodate new international travel routes and updated, more spacious aircrafts. This work, dubbed the IAH Terminal Redevelopment Program—the largest capital improvement program launched in the history of Houston Airports—is well underway and actively expanding the airport's Mickey Leland International Terminal Complex, named for the Texas-born, Houston-raised anti-poverty activist and congressman. Once completed, the state-of-the-art airport terminal will welcome and “bid farewell” to all international travelers touching down, connecting through, and departing the U.S. from IAH.

### **Perhaps of interest to art-lovers especially is that capital improvement —new building construction and renovation—funds public art in Houston.**

A substantial investment in building improvement has made possible a substantial investment in the arts and IAH now finds itself at the forefront of receiving 12 additional site-specific artworks from local and international artists. The artworks' global perspectives will create an airport experience, which—like Houston—is unmatched in its flavor and diversity.



*Collaborators on artwork for the Mickey Leland International Terminal: Leslie Gaworecki, Marlo Saucedo, and Houston Poet Laureate Emanuele "Outspoken" Bean.*

## Equity Brings New Depth in Art for Houston

Working closely with Houston Airports, the Houston Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs (MOCA) collaborated with contract partner Houston Arts Alliance to release a call for submissions in late 2021 to Houston-area artists and embark on a new nomination process for requesting proposals for artworks. MOCA and partners also announced the Civic Art Program's first ever public international call to artists across the Americas for the opportunity to develop artworks for the City's collection.



*London-born Colombian artist Carolina Caycedo is developing artwork for the Mickey Leland International Terminal.*

“We are truly in a new era for art-making in Houston, and it is underscored by our desire to tell the story of our city through the work of artists creating meaningful, one-of-a-kind artworks for Houston’s collection and by our commitment to amplify those voices and the global perspectives they come from,” said Mayor Sylvester Turner. “We’re clear about the power of art, its purpose, and its potential, and we’re confident in the results of our search for artists to create these works.”

Indeed, the synergy and connection between the artists and new artworks coming to IAH is far and wide beyond what Houston could have anticipated, even with the most strategic planning.

“We’ve put a system in place for commissioning that we trust—that we believe artists can trust,” Mayor Turner emphasized, “and now we’re heading into the exciting phase of seeing these artworks manifested through artists’ ingenuity.”



*Concept rendering for artwork from Brazilian artist Regina Silveira for the Mickey Leeland International Terminal.*

New commissions for the terminal project were the first commissions whose selection processes benefited from, beginning to end, an overhaul of the artist contracting process overseen by MOCA and the influence of new leadership for Civic Art at both the city and at Houston Arts Alliance. The publication of Houston’s first Equity Review of the Civic Art Collection in 2020 promised immediate change to Civic Art Program operations, and the most recent report released affirmed the impact those changes have had since. These projects are bringing in artwork from the most diverse group of artists Houston’s Civic Art Program has yet seen.



*Concept rendering from Bolivian-American artist Miguel Arzabe for Bush Intercontinental Airport.*

Once construction is complete, the new international terminal will see artwork from Houston-area artists at six new terminal gates, saluting passengers and, for some, offering a first look at art from Houston’s creative community. The artists and artist teams developing these works are Reginald Adams, Emilie Duval, Jake Margolin, Lovie Olivia, Gerardo Rosales, and Nick Vaughan as well as a team with Leslie Gaworecki, Marlo Saucedo, and Houston Poet Laureate Emanuelee “Outspoken” Bean.

Suspended artworks will abound in the new terminal, as well as colorful large-scale murals—each of which give way to Houston’s presence as an international hub for culture, industry, and travel. Artists creating these artworks include Miguel Arzabe, Carolina Caycedo, Marta Chilindron, Graciela Hasper, Regina Silveira, and Rafael Vargas-Suarez of Vargas-Suarez Universal.



Artist developing artwork for Bush Intercontinental Airport: Rafael Vargas-Suarez.



*Argentine artist Marta Chilindron, developing artwork for Bush Intercontinental Airport.*

“All of the artworks will be wonderful enhancements to the visual experience at the airport,” says MOCA Director Necole Irvin. “Upon close inspection, passengers will find deeply meaningful works, which speak to the unique perspectives of each artist and about how they connect with and perceive the world around them.”

Together, these artworks will convey what’s exceptional about Houston—that it is a place that has been home and host for people from around the world since its earliest days, and which will maintain that character well into its future as a forward-looking city.