

# When Art Comes Along for the Ride

By Carrie Seim

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## San Francisco



A drone view of the Salesforce Transit Center and public park in downtown San Francisco.  
Jane Tyska/Bay Area News Group via Getty Images

As buses rumble down a corridor in the new Salesforce Transit Center (which recently has been closed after the discovery of structural cracks) they trigger 247 water jets to spout in “Bus Jet Fountain” by the San Francisco artist Ned Kahn. The 1,000-foot-long aquatic installation, on the rooftop of the hub, entices pedestrians above to trace commuters’ progress (or lack thereof) in splashy real time.

“The buses are the choreographers of the artwork,” Mr. Kahn said. “The waiting, the times of no activity, build a sense of expectation — drama — when the bus does come.”

Jill Manton, director of public art trust and special initiatives for the San Francisco Arts Commission, praised it for being neither didactic nor formulaic. “It’s such a site-specific work that engages the commuters and the community,” she said. “That’s what makes it so brilliant.”

## New York City



The series “Perfect Strangers” at the 72nd Street station includes a life-size mosaic of the chef and restaurateur Daniel Boulud. Damon Winter/The New York Times

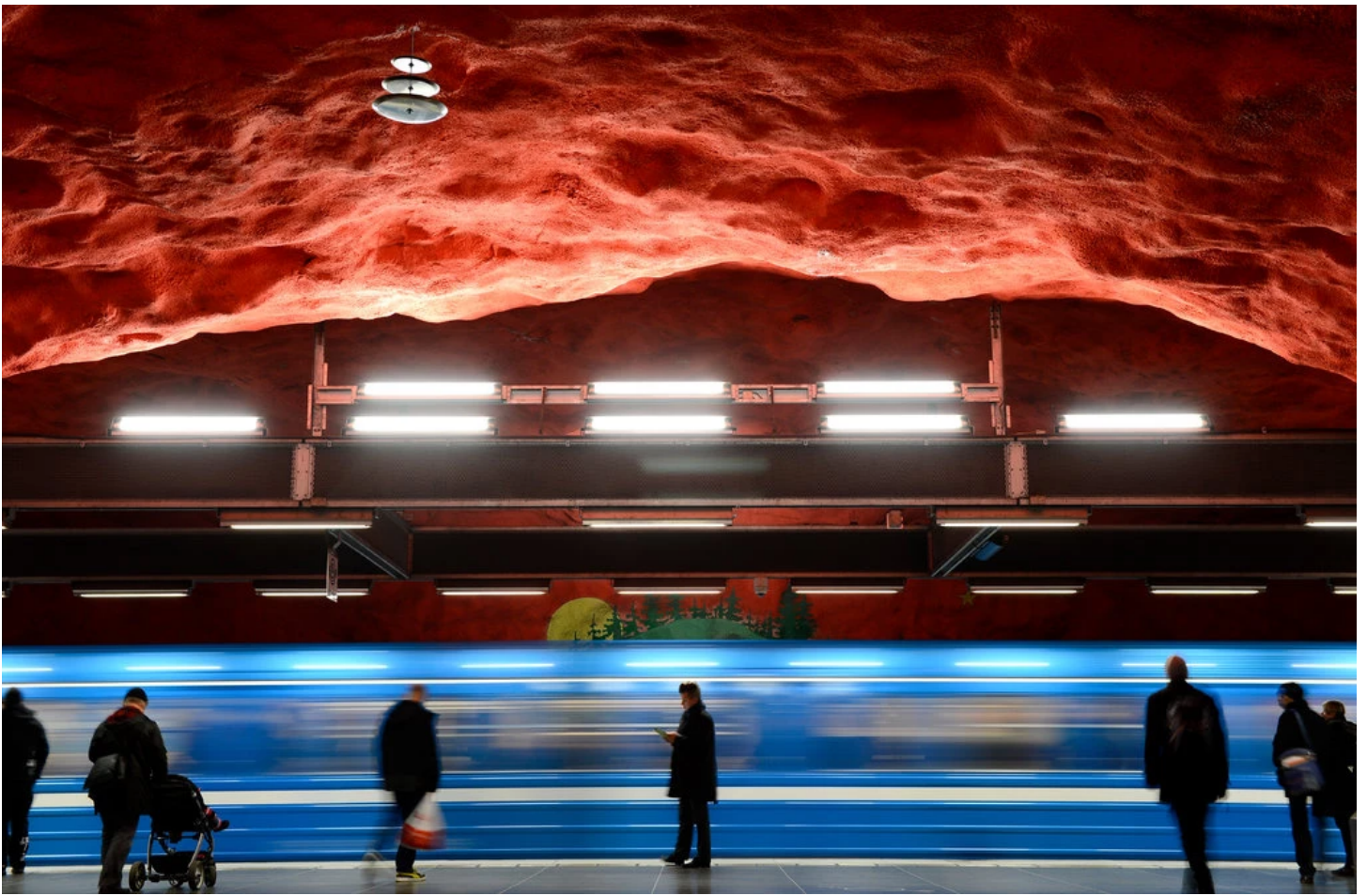
Vik Muniz’s “Perfect Strangers” murals — colorful mosaic portraits that made their debut in 2017 on the walls of the M.T.A.’s 72nd Street station on the Q line — reflect a diverse range of New York straphangers, often with a beguiling twist. A tough police officer brandishes a Popsicle; a man in a tiger suit clutches its furry striped head and a cellophane bag.

Sandra Bloodworth, director of the transit authority’s Arts & Design program, recalled a rider from Queens named Sumana Harihareswara, who broke into tears when she stumbled upon Mr. Muniz’s mural of a woman in an elegant sari glancing at a cellphone. “There’s nothing like seeing something that represents you on a New York subway wall,” Ms. Bloodworth said.

“For nearly 30 years, the philosophy of this program has been to engage and create work for local riders — the place is for them,” she said. “Of course, you never have to tell a New Yorker why art is important — they get it.”

## Stockholm





Over 90 of the 100 subway stations in Stockholm have been decorated, including the Solna station.  
Jonathan Nackstrand/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Nicknamed “the world’s longest art exhibition,” the Stockholm metro presents a robust mix of permanent and temporary works meant to engage — and challenge — riders. Liv Strömquist’s “The Night Garden,” 42 felt-tip pen drawings on display in the Slussen station through this month, do just that, vividly depicting menstruation in pastoral ice skating scenes. The cheerful sketches have kindled both praise and outrage online, but Sofia Broman, business manager for art at the stations, stands staunchly by the work.

“The illustrations have certainly gotten attention from our commuters and sparked a debate about public art, which I think is very important,” Ms. Broman said. “We have received a massive positive response for standing up for equality between the sexes and lifting taboo subjects like menstruation in a humoristic way.”

Other new installations include “And Action!” — a video series that will be projected in various Stockholm metro stations through next September. One standout is “Tear Dealer”: Filmmakers set up a temporary store in a Polish town rocked by unemployment, then invited passers-by to come in, weep and sell their tears for 25 euros.

## Toronto



In Toronto's Pioneer Village station, travelers can become artists by typing phrases to be displayed. The artwork should be functional by the end of the year.  
Steve Russell/Toronto Star, via Getty Images

The six new stations in Canada's \$3.2 billion Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension feature expansive works by a myriad of global artists and architects, but keep the focus on local riders. At the extension's Vaughan station, for example, a mirrored ceiling installation by Paul Raff Studio reflects daylight, spotlighting commuters as they descend underground.

And travelers become artists in the Pioneer Village station, tapping out phrases (up to eight characters) that are illuminated on a giant overhead installation. "LightSpell," a \$1.9 million work, was to make its debut when the station opened in December, but it has yet to be flicked on by the city's Transit Commission, which has expressed concern that some words might cause panic or qualify as hate speech.

"We think the fear behind it is rather paranoid," said Jan Edler, co-founder of Realities: United, the Berlin studio that created the work, noting that anyone has the power to override an offensive phrases simply by typing in a new one. Mr. Edler is working with the commission to create a short list of banned "safety" words (profanity will still be allowed) to begin operation of the art by the end of the year.

## Delhi





Art in the Moti Bagh Metro station in the Delhi area. via Delhi Metro Rail

Opened in August, the new Sir Vishweshwaraiah Moti Bagh elevated station, on the Metro's Pink Line, features ornamental jali installations (imagine the Taj Mahal's elaborately perforated stone screens, but rendered in nightglow vinyl for a modern twist) that reflect a local architectural tradition. Students from a nearby girls' school also were selected to decorate seven pillars along the elevated corridor leading to the station, giving the community's young women a powerful role in transit art.

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