

ATTACHMENT #3

Couple creates second sky at airport

Posted: August 3, 2011 - 3:59pm

[Back](#) | [Next](#)



Michael Penn / Juneau Empire

Steve Henrikson works on a tern for the airport's new art piece, created by Henrikson and Janice Criswell, at the airport Friday. The work also features geese (yellow), mallard ducks (teal) and gulls (red).



Michael Penn / Juneau Empire

Steve Henrikson installs the airport's new art piece, created by Henrikson and Janice Criswell, at the airport Friday.



Michael Penn / Juneau Empire

Janice Criswell checks out a tern, one of 44 birds recently installed in the vestibule of the airport.

By Amy Fletcher

JUNEAU EMPIRE

One of the interesting things about the Percent for Art program, aside from the obvious benefit of enriching our public spaces, is that it can stimulate artists to produce work that

otherwise would probably never have been created. In that way, the possibilities for an artist's work can be expanded by the constraints posed by a building's location, structure and purpose, shifting the course of an artist's natural expression in ways they might not have expected.

In the case of the new installation at the Juneau International Airport, the program has fostered the creation of an art piece that is uniquely informed by both the artistic vision of its two creators and also the history and natural environment of the building in which it is housed.

Created by Steve Henrikson and Janice Criswell, a local couple with a long history of artistic collaboration, the airport art piece, a metal mobile, is made up of four groupings of migrating birds — terns, gulls, geese and mallards — suspended from the ceiling on cables in loose formation. The pair considered many factors when choosing their design: the human and natural history of the area, traditional Tlingit art and, of course, the concepts of flight and migration, arrival and departure.

"We were guided by the birds that are in the Mendenhall Wetlands, that's the theme," Henrikson said. "Each species has its own migration scenario, and they all fly through Juneau on their way somewhere else. That's why these are all heading north, this is sort of a spring migration."

Not all of the birds are on their way somewhere else, he said. Some of the species are also residents of the area.

The installation was funded through the Percent for Art program, which stipulates that one percent of the construction costs of public buildings must be set aside for the design and installation of permanent art. The couple's art piece was selected from among 17 proposals for the airport from all over the state.

The installation, completed last weekend, hangs from the ceiling above the escalator and staircase travelers use en route from arrivals to baggage claim. It is surrounded on two sides by giant exterior windows, and is visible from both the first and second floors, as well as from the outside.

Overall Criswell said the piece comes very close to what they originally envisioned for the space. The original design called for five species, not four, but Airport Architect Catherine Fritz said the six-member selection committee decided one should be dropped after it was determined that five might make the area too crowded.

Early on in the process, the couple created a model complete with paper mockups of the birds, at that point settling on colors — mustard yellow, red, blue and teal — and a general design. However, the project, which has spanned two years, was very involved.

The smaller birds, such as the terns, were created from a flat sheet of metal, while the larger ones, such as the geese, came in parts — head, body wings, tail. The forms, made from copper and aluminum, were created in Seattle, on a machine that translated Henrikson's sketches into patterns and then cut them out with a water-powered jet cutter containing garnet dust.

"It will cut through a piece of steel like 5 inches thick, it's amazing," Henrikson said.

Henrikson then shaped the metal pieces into three-dimensional form.

The birds are designed to be true to life and yet carry Tlingit formline design, featured in the cutout work, which accentuates the delicacy of the birds' forms and allows light to pass through them.

The birds eyes, made of dichroic glass, were created separately by an artist in Seattle, and change color depending on the light.

When viewed as a whole, the staggered and layered placement of the bird groups creates the sensation of movement. And, unlike in other cities where the birds might translate as mere symbols of air-based travel, here they provide a reminder of the fact even a major urban structure like the airport is still intimately connected to the landscape around it. Here, the natural world provides the context within which the buildings exist, not the other way around.

The bird installation was influenced in part by a previous project the couple designed for the Juneau Douglas High School. That project, Daaxhaanaak Al'eixh'ee (Berner's Bay Dance), was inspired from a dream Criswell had in which she was watching fish and animals swimming by. The creatures appeared translucent in the dream, visible to her in Tlingit formline. This idea was translated in the JDHS project into cutout forms of sea lions, similar to how the birds have been rendered in the airport piece.

Criswell said the couple often comes up with too many ideas to use in one place.

"We brainstorm together and we share ideas and it just evolves over time," she said

"When we did the sea lions it kind of inspired us to do the birds in the same way. So one led to the other."

Like the airport project, the mobile at the high school honors the creatures living within the Juneau area, and highlights the Tlingit idea of interconnection and the importance of respect for all living things.

Criswell and Henrikson have also collaborated on other projects, such as the Fish Trap Replica featured at the Juneau Douglas City Museum, a Fish Trap Mobile created for Craig High School, a Alutiiq-style spruce-root hat created for the M.V. Kennicott and the Wasgo Basket, woven by Criswell and painted by Henrikson.

The two are also active artists on their own.

Criswell is a well-known Tlingit and Haida weaver whose works include Ravenstail robes and spruce root and cedar bark hats and baskets. She was one of the weavers involved in the "Hands Across Time" robe, a project commissioned by the Alaska State Museum that resulted in the first original Ravenstail ceremonial robe to be woven in Southeast since the early 1880s. Henrikson, who is curator of collections at the Alaska State Museum and a former student of Bill Holm, is also an accomplished artist whose other works include Tlingit-style bentwood bowls, Soapberry spoons and wooden ladles and canoe paddles.

Both Criswell and Henrikson are adjunct faculty members of the University of Alaska Southeast.

Criswell said the bulk of the work on any given project tends to shift from one of them to the other, depending on what they are working on.

"Sometimes he has more work than I do and sometimes I have more work than he does, depending on what the project is," she said.

The bird installation was largely Henrikson's work, Criswell said, though the ideas were shared.

A total of 44 birds were created for the installation in a process that spanned more than two years. Criswell said each project takes on its own history as it evolves.

"When you're working on something, things happen, and a special event or whatever is going on in life kind of becomes part of the project. You have to work around it and work through it. So it's a journey."