

From the Daily Journal of Commerce

Art adds color to massive concrete structure

Local artists Buster Simpson and Linda Beaumont were commissioned for art installations at the Consolidated Rental Car Facility.

As an extension of the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, the Consolidated Rental Car Facility (RCF) has a significant visual presence within its immediate surroundings, acting as a gateway to the airport and the city of SeaTac.

In working with city officials it became apparent they wanted to minimize the impact of looking at another large parking facility. Two locations at the RCF were identified and later approved by the Port of Seattle's Art Oversight Committee for art installations: on the two large helices, and between the Customer Service Building and the employee parking lot on the fifth floor.

Helix art

The helices on the outermost corners of the building serve as circular access ramps to the parking floors. The helices were identified as two large areas where art could be added to minimize the visual impact of the parking facility.

Buster Simpson was selected as the design team artist for the helix art. Simpson is a local artist who in 2009 received the prestigious Public Art Network Award. He has been working to make his artworks "green" long before "green" and "sustainable" became the leading issues of our time.

The cost for the architectural elements originally designed for the helices, which Simpson's artwork replaced, was \$1.51 million. The cost for the artwork is \$1.5 million. This is integrated public art at its best!

The artist proposed that the helices be covered with a stainless steel mesh fabric, installed in layers, then lit with LEDs to provide an aesthetically interesting and pleasing covering for that portion of the concrete structure.

Simpson provided the following commentary that best describes his work:

"'Veiled Carbon' is a sculpture commissioned by the Port of Seattle for the Sea-Tac International Airport Rental Car Facility. The sculpture consists of a multi-layered stainless steel hexagonal mesh, which functions like a theatrical scrim to shroud two cylindrical automobile helical ramp structures.

"The veil curtain is drawn back where needed, to allow passage in and out of the structure. Both the ramp structure and the mesh are based on a hexagon, coincidentally, the symbol of carbon. Carbon is found in cutting-edge carbon fiber automotive and aeronautical composites as well as diamonds and carbon dioxide.

"The helices each measure 99 feet in diameter and 63 feet high. The mesh is attached to the top ring of (the) structural frame and secured with stainless steel cable. Three layers of stainless steel hexagonal twisted wire mesh, commonly used in highway rock fall stabilization and gabion applications, provide a vernacular highway reference. The reflective stainless steel mesh is responsive to changing natural light conditions and evening illumination events. The veil has a diaphanous quality, which is responsive to variable daytime light conditions and provides an elusive presence for the helices.

"As darkness approaches, 60 programmed LED fixtures per helix illuminate the veil to create a wide variety of light vignettes ranging from kinetically colorful compositions such as atmospheric indicators, and the color spectrum of oil and water. The installation is viewable from air, mass transit, pedestrian walkways, and automobile."

Employee parking screen

The large exterior departure plaza serves as a waiting area for customers returning to the airport's main terminal from the RCF via shuttle buses. This is the one place in this very busy facility where customers have a moment to linger.

Linda Beaumont was selected through an open competition to design and fabricate this large screen that will serve as a fence separating the public waiting area from the employee parking lot. An award-winning public artist, Beaumont combines traditional architectural materials with her personal vision to transform public space.

A mesmerizing array of brilliant colors and dazzling designs await travelers arriving at the RCF. "Spinning Our Wheels" is a composition of 91 steel discs, standing 6 feet tall, and running the entire length of a 600-foot steel fence. The wheels are painted with luminous auto paint and airbrushed in several layers. Each wheel is unique in design and color.

The wheels create a playful narrative for the travelers caught in between worlds — "spinning their wheels" while they await a shuttle bus to a flight into the skies, or a rental car for their visit to the Pacific Northwest. Set against the soft Seattle skies, the artwork brings a wondrous welcome into view. Beaumont always stays close to the heart of the fabrication and installation process, creating pieces with the expertise and imagination of fabricators, designers and engineers, many of whom she has worked with for several years. Inventing within both the technical and aesthetic realms, the artist creates work that is site specific, iconic and visually intimate.

On this project, Beaumont worked with air brush artist Jose San Juan to create the artwork. Over several months, the 91 wheels were fabricated at Diamond Painting. Many other local businesses were involved in the production and installation of the artwork. Fabrication Specialties of Seattle has overseen the entire fabrication and installation. The vinyl templates were done by Western Graphics. Blue Star Electric, Glen Harter of Motor Controls, and Piano Nobile all worked with the artist on the design drawings.