

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

14 WEST 49TH STREET, NEW YORK

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FOR RELEASE TUESDAY,
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SUBWAY ART AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

An Exhibition of Subway Art opens to the public today, Tuesday, February 8, at The Museum of Modern Art, 14 West 49 Street. The exhibition consists of sketches, details and models of murals and sculpture designed for subway stations by members of the United American Artists under the auspices of the Public Use of Art Committee. It also includes a large model of a New York subway station showing murals and sculpture in place. The model and the murals and sculpture shown in it were designed and executed by artists on the New York Federal Art Project which two years ago started working on a plan for subway art.

Use of the fine arts in subway decoration has been made nowhere in the world, so far as is known, except in Moscow. Even in the Moscow subway, however, no new technique particularly suited to subway murals and sculpture has been worked out. Experimental work in this country has been carried on for a year by members of the United American Artists (formerly the Artists Union) under the direction and encouragement of the Public Use of Art Committee. All research into new material was accomplished under the direction of Ralph Mayer, consulting paint chemist, and with the aid and cooperation of Porcelain Metals, Inc. and the Matawan Tile Company.

The problems of this project are both technical and esthetic. The medium for subway art must be resistant to the vibration, temperature and dirt of subways. It should also be impervious to mutilation and to the Surrealist scrawlings of those self-appointed subway artists who add moustaches to or delete teeth from the beautiful ladies on subway advertising posters.

The esthetic problems of subway art are equally complicated. The artist is challenged by the difficulties inherent in a new and untraditional environment for art. He must select fresh,

stimulating subject matter which will be appropriate to its unconventional surroundings and he must develop styles which will be both interesting and enjoyable to the subway public.

Solutions have been found for the technical difficulties. Three mural processes have been developed for use in subways. In one of these the artist uses tile or tile mosaic to build his mural. He draws the cartoon of the mural in exact size and detail on paper and, as the paints for use on tile in their raw state are colorless, he blocks the cartoon off into well-defined areas numbering each with the color he wants used in accordance with the numbered color chart supplied by the tile company. Technicians at the tile company then trace the cartoon on a tray of unglazed tile and fill in the color areas as indicated. The tile is then baked and ready to be laid.

For mosaic tile murals the artist obtains a great number of very small pieces of glazed tile in different colors. He then lays these in a bed of mortar or cement in accordance with his design. This technique differs from that used since the time of the Romans only in the use of glazed tile instead of colored stone fragments. The technique of glazed tile murals for subways was worked out in cooperation with the Matawan Tile Company of New Jersey.

The other two mural processes are entirely new and have been developed by Ralph Mayer in cooperation with members of the United American Artists. The first of these, a porcelain enamel process on sheet iron, seems the most highly successful of all mural techniques for subways. It consists of coating a piece of sheet iron with heavy black enamel, which is fired at such high temperature that the enamel and the iron are fused. After this a coat of white enamel is fired on and the panel given to the artist, who paints his mural on it with powdered enamel in various colors ground with a special oil. The panel is then fired a third time, producing a highly glazed, unified, practically indestructible mural. This process enables the artist to paint on enamel with the same easy control that he has with oil on canvas. He also has the advantage of seeing his colors as he paints instead

of working blind from a numbered chart as in the use of tile or ordinary porcelain. The development of the porcelain enamel process has been accomplished with the close cooperation of Porcelain Metals, Inc., which contributed its facilities and experience.

The other new medium for subway murals is the use of a silicon ester paint on cement or plaster in the manner of fresco painting. The surface may be either wet or dry. The final surface becomes pure silica and will withstand the most severe atmospheric conditions.

Most of the murals for the Exhibition of Subway Art are designed to be worked out in the porcelain enamel process.

Successful experiments for subway sculpture have been made in colored cement, the color mixed with the cement. Sculptures have also been developed in hammered sheet copper, other metals and in stone.

A Subway Art Committee composed of the artists Ernest Peixotto and Paul Manship, Mrs. Elinore M. Herrick of the American Labor Party, Mr. Frederick L. Ackerman of the Federal Housing Commission, Forrest Grant of the Board of Education, and Philip Youtz, Director of the Brooklyn Museum, presented the idea and submitted plans to Mayor La Guardia.

The artists represented in the Exhibition of Subway Art are as follows: Ida Abelman, Harold Ambellan, ~~Arthur J. Anderlet~~, Francis Avery, Otto Botto, Gustav Bethke, Ruth Chaney, Francis Costa, Robert Cronbach, Jacob Paul Daniels, ~~Herbert Ferber~~, Albert Friscia, Balcomb Greene, Jose Gutierrez, Hyman Haag, H. Harari, Abraham Harriton, Milton Hebald, ~~Getel Kahn~~, Ben Karp, Florence Kent, ~~Clara Kesler~~, Joseph Konzal, Claire Mahl, Isabella Meisels, Bruce Mitchell, Eugene Morley, Elizabeth Olds, Max Ratzker, Joseph Ringola, Arthur Schneider, Angelo Sottosanti, and Paul Weller.

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February 7, 1938.

The Museum of Modern Art, 14 West 49 Street, has just received the following letter from Eugene Du Bois, Sunday Editor of the Brooklyn Daily Eagle:

"In your press release concerning the opening of your Exhibition of Subway Art you state that 'the use of murals and sculpture in subway stations--except in Moscow--is a new idea in art and has never been fully developed.'

"I wish to correct you on the 'except in Moscow' phrase. While in Buenos Aires, Argentina, last year I observed with considerable interest and pleasure the very artistic mosaics which decorate the walls of the stations of the new 'CHADOPYF' line (Compania Hispano-Argentina De Obras Publicas Y Finanzas). These mosaics show different scenes in old Spain and were executed by a Spanish artist whose name I forgot to note."