Art to fly by

Lafayette airport’s visual appeal puts it in a class with the biggies

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Lafayette Regional Airport is a mid-sized facility, but its recent renovation has placed it in a class with major terminals throughout the nation in visual appeal. Joining such cities as New York, Seattle, Chicago, San Francisco, Denver, Boston, Tokyo and Tel Aviv in making large-scale public art an integral component of the airport.

Walking into the ground-floor lobby, and you see not just a huge circular support column by the stairs, but a galvanized steel chain from the roof to the floor, designed by William Lowery. The chain was designed to bring a bit of the feeling of flight and outer space to the area.

Look up, and there are airy, sparkling sculptures hanging from the atrium ceiling. "Whimsical Cosmos," in the work of the husband-and-wife team of Dennis Barter and Monique Girouard, both Baton Rouge artists, already a favorite of travelers, particularly with children.

As you continue on, you are greeted by a mahogany wall sculpture, topped with totemic images of Louisiana landscape into artistic focus.

Arriving passengers are greeted by a mahogany wall sculpture, topped with totemic images of Louisiana landscape into artistic focus.

 percent of construction costs, about $75,000, for art, and appointed an Interior Design Committee to work with the artists. The committee was designed after art in the airport was identified as a "glamor" item. The artists recommended the selected artists, and the art was approved by the airport.

"ItInfoh the building exciting," said Print Makers of The Mekelson-Majestic Group. He was design architect with firm member Mark Stiepler.

I've worked five years on this project, and this is the last part," said Douglas as he led visitors on a tour of the airport. "Art is something we try to come up with projects when the budget permits. We worked with each individual artist on location.

The art project won the 1989 Governor's Arts Award for its emphasis on improving both the interior and exterior environment of a major public facility.

Lowery, who became chairman of the Commission in the 1980s, said he became involved with the project at the end, and was on the commission when the site and the art works were approved.

Art is like apple pie and motherhood. It does enhance the building and some people like it," he said.

He talked about the long-range plan for the exterior and explained that it is waiting on major improvements.

"The main thing holding it up is renovation of a new lighting system," said Dennis Douglas, who became chairman of the Commission last year. "The airport is now the largest in the world, and it is very difficult to get up there and it is hard to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is hard to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get up there and it is very difficult to get 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"We did even better than during the boom years," he said. "It is pleasing to see that the airport has done that and we are pleased to continue to improve our service.

Former Commission member Marilyn Perpy, who served on the Interior Art Committee, pointed out that emphasis was placed on limiting the project to Louisiana artists. "It was not that Louisiana artists could not compete nationally, but we wanted to keep the recognition in the state, and we felt Louisiana artists could best interpret this area," she said. "This improves our Louisiana image for the rest of the world. We're excited about it."

Response to art in the airport from travelers has been very positive, Lafayette tourism officials report. Hotels find visitors impressed by the artwork. "We're definitely getting favorable comments," said Danny Bonaventure, director of sales at Hotel Acadiana on Pinhook Road. "Usually visitors say they love the facility and comment on the artwork."

Pat Dakin of the Lafayette Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), who established a visitor center at the airport, said travelers ask about the art and are interested. "To me, the art depicts the progressive, modern approach Louisiana is taking to the travel and tourism industry," she said. "It makes our arrival center at the airport attractive and indicates how our people feel about their area. The colors are very soothing and still appealing."

David Thomas, director of the Acadiana Arts Council and a member of the arts committee, praised the installation. "It's an inviting atmosphere and I'm excited about the quality of what's out there. We're very proud of what we've accomplished."

Guichet, an associate professor of painting and drawing at LSU, says the design enables viewers to enjoy the floating art from all points of view. Constructed of polyester resin over an aluminum frame, the pieces convey a sense of light and air. They are translucent, reflecting the changing light through the atrium. Although each sculpture is an individual creation, the entire group is designed to work together. The two that were removed are a large, diagonal cone shape and a "whale-shaped" piece with a spiraling cone. The smaller, remaining pieces hang on either side of the atrium, reflecting the ideas of flight and space, including a "celestial harp" and a fanciful planet. The controversial atrium sculptures are light and airy despite their large size, with a sense of movement and flight. Barker says the intent was "to create a sense of the cosmos and yet be whimsical in overall spirit."