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# OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

JOHN RUNYON EXPLORES THE DYNAMIC CONNECTION BETWEEN ART AND EVERYDAY SPACES.

BY DANIELLE AVRAM

For two decades people passing through the international terminal at DFW airport have been greeted by a massive eight-panel painting by artist Peter Halley. With its bold colors and network of lines and shapes, the piece captures the dynamism of travel and the various individual systems that work together to form an entity as sprawling as an airport.

The project is just one of many around the metroplex that John Runyon has spearheaded through his art advisory practice of 30 years. When he was tapped by the airport to find an artist who could handle such a large space, Runyon immediately thought of Halley, whom he had previously shown at his former

Deep Ellum gallery. The artist already had an interesting history with DFW airport. Inspired by the late Earthworks artist Robert Smithson, who had served as an artistic consultant for an architectural firm that was bidding on the airport's original design, Halley arranged a behind-the-scenes tour of the facility years prior to receiving the commission.

"It's a curious coincidence," says Halley. "My work as a whole has the subject matter of conduits connecting things, so it certainly applies to the idea of transportation. The real groundwork was done by John advocating for me getting that big commission. The painting is 16 by 40 feet, which is certainly the biggest



John Runyon with Roger Hiorns' *Untitled*, 2013, at The Joule Dallas Hotel. Photograph by John Smith.



Peter Halley, *Untitled*, 2005, Dallas Fort Worth International Airport Terminal D Ticket Hall. Photograph by Steve Wrubel.



Daniel Buren's *Steady Circles*, 2008, is located in the South lobby at Thanksgiving Tower. Photograph by Kevin Todora.

painting I'll ever make. I'm very proud of it."

Runyon speaks enthusiastically about the public art aspect of his practice and what it means for artwork to live in everyday spaces where the public can repeatedly engage with a piece. "It is all art advising, but the public realm involves some criteria that do not exist in the domestic space," he explains. "In the domestic space you are collaborating with homeowners that have their personal desires, taste, expectations... In the public realm the diversity and volume of eyeballs on that artwork is exciting."

Like Halley's painting, a number of other artworks have become emblematic of the spaces they inhabit. Tony Cragg's *Line of Thought* sits in front of the Rosewood Court in Uptown, a totem of abstracted faces that only reveal themselves as one walks or drives around it. This sculpture piqued the interest of the Nasher Sculpture Center, which wound up mounting a solo exhibition of the artist in 2011, the first in a US institution in over 20 years.

Roger Hiorns' blue-crystal covered engine has occupied a prominent place in the lobby of The Joule hotel Downtown since it was acquired. Hiorns created the work by submerging engine parts in a vat filled with copper sulphate solution; the resulting chemical reaction produced the vibrant crystals, which will fade over time. "When hotel owner Tim Headington and I spotted this work at Art Basel Miami over ten years ago, we thought what a perfect fit for the hotel," says Runyon. "It is industrial and elegant. A 'joule' is a measurement of energy."

Runyon also placed works in the lobby of nearby Thanksgiving Tower: *Steady Circles* by Daniel Buren in the south and *Reproductions (Close-ups II)* by Isabelle Cornaro in the north. Buren, a legendary conceptual artist known for his site-specific installations that use alternating stripes to highlight architectural spaces, designed the images to intentionally project into the street, their striped circles reminiscent of a car's spinning wheels. Says Runyon, "I still get a kick out of driving by this particular work."

Cornaro offers an antidote to the hustle and bustle of city life with fields of gauzy color achieved by spraying acrylic paint directly on the wall. Derived from a 16mm film the artist made, in which she documented the process of creating spray paintings based off reproductions of Impressionist works, the resulting images read as barely perceptible landscapes from afar and a sea of colorful flecks up close.

It's this type of viewing experience Runyon considers when



Tony Cragg, *Line of Thought*, 2002, located at The Crescent Hotel at Rosewood Court. Photograph by Steve Wrubel.

selecting artists and artworks for his public projects, understanding that they need to hold up over time and remain engaging over repeated viewings, as people will undoubtedly pass them day after day.

He serves on the committee that programs the art for the Katy Trail. "I brought the KTX Biennial concept to the group, and we have selected our first curator Jovanna Venegas, curator of the SculptureCenter, New York," he says. Last October, he was also invited by Texas Woman's University to nominate five artists to submit proposals for a site-specific outdoor sculpture.

As he says, "In the end, if the public takes notice and decision makers are thrilled with the outcome, I have done my job. Not to mention revisiting the public projects never gets old." **P**