

April 15, 2007



Christopher Janney's colorful, interactive Logan installations include sounds of New England. Above: "Rainbow Cove Green." (Jonathan Wiggs/ Globe Staff)

VISUAL ART

Red, green, and ready for takeoff **Christopher Janney's Logan Airport installations give commuters a lift**

By Cate McQuaid, Globe Correspondent |

If Christopher Janney could, he'd bathe in color. When he was a young man, he slept in it.

"When I was 20, I so wanted to be an artist, to color, I thought, 'I'll put my sheets up on my wall and paint them,' " Janney remembers. "I thought it would be a cool experience. Then I thought, 'I'll put the sheets on my bed!' I so wanted to be in the color."

He flashes a rueful smile. "I woke up tattooed. It took days to wash it off."

Janney, now 57 and an artist, architect, and jazz composer, hasn't lost his taste for color. His house in Lexington sports a teal glass wall. His daughter's room has a violet skylight. "The color wraps around you like a blanket," says Janney, tall and casually dapper in a suede jacket and silk scarf, with a thatch of silvering hair.

He's at Logan Airport, where his two new installations, "Rainbow Cove Red" and "Rainbow Cove Green," flood passageways between the newly renovated central parking garage and terminals B and C with several shades of red and green.

The eight-story towers at the eastern side of the garage gleam with glass curtain walls. Janney broke that glass into a grid and added color. Each floor at the Terminal C corner takes a different shade of green, from deep blue-green on the ground floor to a tart lime green at the top. Here and there, the artist broke the sea of green with a red square, winking in the purple-to-pink range. The corner abutting Terminal B features a similar design, only in red with green/blue accents. On a sunny day, tones dapple the walls and floors inside. At night, the towers glow.

The Terminal C tower also chirps, whistles, and bleats. There Janney has created an interactive component featuring natural sounds of New England. You can walk through the passageway every day, and you won't hear the same composition twice.

The score cycles through eight beds of underlying sound, each capturing a different aspect of the region, from the oceans of Cape Cod to evening in New Hampshire. People moving through the space trigger other audio tracks, such as gulls cawing or crickets chirping, which pipe individually through 38 speakers. Add the more melodic trills sparked by pushing elevator buttons, and you've got either a symphony or a cacophony, depending on how busy the area is. It's a refreshing place to walk through, though it might be vexing to spend the whole day there, as some of Logan's garage attendants do.

"I'm a visual artist," Janney says. "I'm just using sound as a medium. The sound images of places in New England let your ears paint pictures within your mind."

Commuters like it. The sound and light can effectively interrupt travel, opening a window into another state of mind.

"The last time we flew out, we were listening to the sound in the elevator," says Boston-area commuter Catherine Baker, passing through the tower toward the parking lot. "When you go in, everyone is quiet. And it sounds relaxing. Like a terrarium."

"We come in and out all the time," says her companion, Michael Norton. "When you're racing around, it's nice to relax. . . . I hope they do more of it."

That relaxation is what Janney's after. "It's a transition space," he points out. "The important thing is to give them an uplifting or curiously creative experience in the midst of this stressful condition of moving through."

"The sound is good," says Francesca Iaconi, arriving in Boston on her way home to Shrewsbury with her family. "I don't know if I'd like looking at it every day. The colors are iffy."

Janney has often blended sound design with structural design.

"I want to make music more physical," he declares. "When I do architecture, I try to think in musical terms."

He's done it repeatedly, starting in the late 1970s, when he was working on his masters degree in environmental art at MIT. "Soundstair" was a stairway with motion detectors that triggered sounds from a synthesizer. Boston choreographer Martha Armstrong Gray choreographed a piece for the project.

Janney has found a great deal of success with his unlikely, interactive blends of sight and sound. A book about him, "Architecture of the Air: The Sound and Light Environments of Christopher Janney," came out last year.

He has a passion for public projects. "Reach: New York," at the 34th Street/Herald Square subway station in Manhattan, encourages commuters to wave in order to trigger music. "Circling," at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, is a blue glass labyrinth through which travelers with time on their hands can wander, setting off lights and sounds that appear to rise from the ground beneath their feet.

He's been working on the Logan project since he was commissioned in 2002. It's been up and running since late last year; Massport intends to hold an opening reception on April 24.

Deborah Fennick of Fennick McCredie Architecture, who worked on the expansion of the parking garage, was a non-voting member of the Massport panel that chose Janney.

"They wanted it to be a calming experience for travelers," she says. "He probably would have been chosen on the color-saturated space alone, but the sound piece really sold it."

Fennick is pleased with the result. "It could have felt part of the hubbub of roadways and bridges," she says, "but he really created an internal-focused space."

In the Terminal B passageway, Janney pauses to gaze out the rosy window over the tarmac and out to Boston Harbor.

"It's like with sunglasses," Janney says. "I'm looking through red, and after a few seconds I don't see the red anymore. But then I look through the blue, and it makes me see the red again."

Colored glass, he muses, changes the perceptions of the people it surrounds.

"It's a kind of hyper-reality," Janney says. "I don't want to remove you from this world. I want to heighten your experience of it."■

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