

First impressions are everything, especially for art at an airport

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by Gina Fairley



Archie Moore, *United Neytions*, 2018, installation for T1 International Terminal, Sydney Airport, MCA & Sydney Airport Commission, 2018, photograph: Anna Kucera

Sydney Airport serves more than 43 million passengers a year, a good number of whom pass through the T1 Marketplace at the International Terminal – that bustling zone where travellers pause to shop, eat and look around. This week, that experience will be permanently altered.

A major artwork by Kamilaroi artist Archie Moore has been unveiled – 28 colourful flags, dramatically suspended from the 17-metre-high ceilings of the Marketplace. They speak to the diversity of Aboriginal culture in Australia, but also more broadly to themes of movement, boundaries, identity and inter-cultural understanding.

The commission is the result of a landmark partnership between Sydney Airport and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA).

MCA Director, Elizabeth Ann Macgregor OBE told ArtsHub: 'Physically, the airport is the portal to an experience of Australian culture, and the opportunity to promote an artist in this environment was a "no brainer" for us. Archie's work will be a great signal to visitors that Australia is this extraordinary country with a dynamic history.'

She continued: 'Flags have such an emotive capacity – people respond to them in an emotional way – and like all good contemporary works of art, Archie's flags will stimulate curiosity; they draw attention to the multiplicity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander narratives in Australia.'

Titled *United Neytions*, each flag carries a unique graphic design. Moore said of the commission: 'This opportunity has allowed this series of flags that celebrates issues of place and identity to adopt a scale and status that official international flags have; drawing attention to the histories, voices and presence of local Indigenous people on which land the airport – an international zone/'no man's land' – lies, but also the passages of cultures, pasts, territories, ages and cultural knowledges that airports foster.'



Archie Moore, *United Neytions* (detail), 2018, installation for T1 International Terminal, Sydney Airport, MCA & Sydney Airport Commission, 2018, photograph: Anna Kucera

‘Whilst the work is imbued with local significance, it operates universally to be of meaning to everyone who passes through Sydney Airport. It does not require any prior cultural knowledge,’ he said.

Moore’s work was selected by a panel including Curator Barbara Flynn, Sydney Airport’s Kerrie Mather, Greater Sydney Commission Chief Commissioner Lucy Turnbull AO, City of Sydney Design Director Bridget Smyth, and MCA Australia Director Curatorial and Digita, Blair French.

Greater Sydney Commission Chief Commissioner Lucy Turnbull AO, who was a member of the panel that selected Moore’s piece, said: ‘Archie’s work plays a very important part in creating a sense of place for all our international visitors. *United Neytions* will be a conversation piece that captures the wonderful diversity of voices and stories across Australia.’



Elizabeth Ann Macgregor, MCA Director OBE; Geoff Culbert, CEO, Sydney Airport, MCA & Sydney Airport Commission, 2018. Photograph: Anna Kucera

Great artworks speak of innovation, but so too do great partnerships. While the modus operandi for many corporate partnerships is to find a dollar, the most successful partnerships formed by organisations are found in a sharing of core objectives.

Macgregor said: 'The point about corporate partnerships is that they should enhance your core mission. I am talking about being innovative in terms of thinking and ideas. It is the aspect of innovation that is not always spoken about – we immediately think of innovation as resulting in artworks or products that are breaking ground, but good collaborative thinking is the real success of innovative partnerships.'

Sydney Airport came to the MCA after the completion of their recent, multi-million dollar renovation, keen to create a cultural signature in the new space.

'For us, this one really mattered,' Macgregor said. 'One of our core missions is the promotion of Australian art and living artists, and an extension of that is taking contemporary art out of the museum. But it was two-fold for us – it also started the conversation for people who do not come to us at Circular Quay: "What's the MCA? Let's visit." And for the Airport there is great brand alignment with the MCA, which is forward looking, energetic, exciting.'

Sydney Airport CEO Geoff Culbert said travellers were certain to be captivated by *United Neytions*. 'We're proud to support Archie Moore's vision and are excited about the incredible cultural experience *United Neytions* will foster,' he said.

'We're committed to celebrating the very best of local and Australian talent and showcasing our city and nation's rich and wonderful stories. We're very much focused on continually finding new ways to ensure both local and international travellers enjoy a dynamic and unique experience whenever they visit Sydney Airport,' said Culbert.

Moore's commission joins a significant and growing collection of art featured throughout and around the airport terminals.

United Neytions will contribute to a strengthened sense of place for departing visitors and leave an enduring, positive impression of Australian culture.

Gina Fairley is ArtsHub's National Visual Arts Editor. For a decade she worked as a freelance writer and curator across Southeast Asia and was previously the Regional Contributing Editor for Hong Kong based magazines *Asian Art News* and *World Sculpture News*. Prior to writing she worked as an arts manager in America and Australia for 14 years, including the regional gallery, biennale and commercial sectors. She is based in Mittagong, regional NSW.