



Public art project at Boston Properties' Back Bay Station

Boston Properties Finds Art Is Key

by Jordan Frias

Boston Properties (BP) has entered into the public art realm at the request of tenants in its 200 Clarendon Street tower.

The tower's art advisory committee, comprised of eight representatives from different companies in the building, formerly known as the

John Hancock Tower, has spurred the idea to include art in and around the location, most notably on the façade of the building.

Cambridge-based art curator Pedro Alanzo was hired by BP to handpick artists to create pieces for the tower's lobby, plaza and façade, which resulted in the inclusion of artwork on

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Back Bay Station, which is managed by the company.

"We at BP have over the last eight to 10 years found that our best spaces and best places have an ingredient of art to them," said Brian Koop, senior vice president and regional manager of BP. "The committee [members] came together and said they were up for unique demonstrations of art that are temporary in nature in the plaza and around the building."

The first piece of work in the art series was a mural done by street artist MOMO (David Moymer), which hung in the building's lobby for months. The following piece was a wooden structure created by Brazilian-born artist Ernesto Neto, which supports hammocks that are placed in the building's front plaza area.

The third and final project in the series was an enlarged vinyl photograph taken by the internationally known French artist JR.

The seven-story tall installation on the side of the tower may have been the most notable art piece in the series, since it garnered the most public attention out of the three.

Meg Mainzer-Cohen, executive director and president of the Back Bay Association, said that the appearance of the installation on the building was quite unexpected.

"It's a very refreshing art installation that draws attention to the world in a way that is amusing," she said. "It's creative to have it be a part of a building that you wouldn't expect. It helps break

the everyday monotony and allows us to step back and look at something anew."

The photograph, which shows an unidentified figure, also drew mixed reactions on social media, which is something that the artist JR intended and hoped for, according to Koop.

"We were concerned with there being a negative response since there is so much love for the building, but we thought it was well worth the risk," he said. "We've had nothing but positive responses. [The building's] such an interesting canvas that you wouldn't expect to see that artwork on it."

"We wanted something people would respond to and that's what [JR] gave us," said Alanzo. "The image is devoid of any context or references; the idea is everybody brings their own history to the piece and their own interpretation."

Alanzo's contact Kate Gilbert then suggested that some artwork be included in and around Back Bay Station.

Gilbert is the executive director of Now and There, a public art nonprofit organization, that helped JR bring his global participatory art project, Inside Out, to the City of Boston.

The project consisted of photo portraits taken of local participants, which were spread across the walls of the station during the month of October.

Gilbert said the portraits of locals and commuters at Back Bay Station were a contrast to the unrecognizable figure on the tower.

"It was nice to add a local component to this otherwise international artist," she said.

To preserve the element of surprise, BP and Alanzo would not speak on plans for future installations but are hoping to have more in the works at the station and at the building.