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New Public Artworks By Katherine Bradford, Marcel Dzama Invigorate Two L Train Subway Stations

New public artworks by New York City-based artists Katherine Bradford and Marcel Dzama were unveiled in July this year on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)'s L Train Line at the 1st Avenue and Bedford Avenue stations, as part of the L Project.

Commissioned by the MTA's Arts and Design department and fabricated into long-lasting mosaics by glass design and manufacturing company Franz Mayer of Munich, the permanent works "celebrate the energy of the Lower East Side and Williamsburg, and the creative communities that have been home to so many diverse groups of people over time," MTA Arts and Design Director Sandra Bloodworth said in a statement.

Culled together under the collective title "Queens of the Night," five pieces in total by Bradford can be seen at the north and south mezzanines and three staircases at the Avenue A end of the 1st Avenue Station in Manhattan.

According to the same statement, ridership has increased 60% at 1st Avenue over the last two decades, and Bedford Avenue has become one of the busiest stations in Brooklyn.

"Once someone steps into the subway area, we become travelers, and my hope is that these artworks will transport you to another place," Bradford, who takes the L train to her art studio in Williamsburg, said during a press event on Sept. 23.

Two of Bradford's mosaics within the three staircases feature caped figures, a theme in the artist's work, and are subtitled "Superhero Responds." Sitting around the corner from Mount Sinai Beth Israel hospital and initially displayed amidst the ongoing pandemic, the public art projects memorialize the everyday users of the L train — the essential workers and creatives who labor to keep New York City lively and well.

At the Bedford station in Brooklyn, four works by Dzama, titled "No Less Than Everything Comes Together," color the mezzanine and stairways at the Driggs Avenue end. Inspired by Walt Whitman's poem "[Crossing Brooklyn Ferry](#)," the artist's work depicts mosaic curtains dotted with cheshire cats and other playful figures that, in turn, showcase the sun, moon and



Katherine Bradford, "Queens of the Night," 2021.
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dancers on stage. L train visitors can also find infamous Brooklynites like mobster Bugsy Siegel and Williamsburg namesake Captain Jonathan Williams alongside other fantastical characters such as Pinocchio in the artworks.

“What I love most about New York is its people, and for me it was important to represent them and all of their wonderful complexities and diverse beauty in the piece,” Dzama said in a statement. “People looking and quietly observing together. In the subway, it’s always a togetherness that bonds us uniquely like no other place in the world.”

Dzama, who is originally from Canada, draws from his experiences living in Williamsburg when he first moved to the city and previous work in his career for the installations. In 2016, he led the costume and stage design for New York City Ballet’s “The Most Incredible Thing,” choreographed by Justin Peck and based on Hans Christian Andersen’s fairytale. The dancers’ attires seen in “No Less Than Everything Comes Together” are echoes of the costumes from the 2016 production.

The original drawings Dzama created for the mosaics in the Bedford Avenue station can be seen at David Zwirner Gallery, which represents the artist, at its 69th St. location in an exhibition titled “Who Loves the Sun,” on view through Oct. 23.

Bradford’s and Dzama’s works are part of the bigger mission for MTA Arts and Design, which was created in 1985 with the intent to rehabilitate the ailing transit system and was inspired by the philosophy behind the nationwide, architect-led City Beautiful movement at the turn of the 20th century.

“The thought was, if you bring art into these spaces, people will take better care of this place. And they did, and it’s amazing,” Bloodworth told ALL ARTS. “It’s about engaging our public. Our mission has always been tied to that legacy.”

MTA Arts and Design’s work not only includes permanent installations like Bradford’s and Dzama’s works at the two L train stations, but also temporary digital works, graphic art, photography, live musical performances and Poetry in Motion across the city’s subways and commuter trains. The department’s projects are funded by MTA’s Percent for Art program, which requires that up to 1% of the budget go to permanent artworks in stations. To date, the program has commissioned over 350 works by renowned, mid-career and emerging artists.

Depending on the project, artists are either invited to create works for MTA Arts and Design or selected through a call for submissions. Entries go through selection panels comprising arts professionals and community representatives, according to the MTA Arts and Design website. For more information on MTA Arts and Design, its projects and opportunities for artists, visit their website.