

# Nashville's Out-Of-The-Box Art Gallery

DEK: An extensive Tennessee tribute is drawing attention at BNA International Airport

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Sixteen million passengers fly through Nashville International Airport—BNA—each year. While many of those travelers may never set foot outside the airport, according to Community Affairs, Arts & Events Director Cathy Holland, they still deserve an authentic Nashville experience.

Arts at the Airport was born in 1987 as a dream to decorate the airport's executive offices. It quickly morphed into a much more adventurous project, spotlighting artists with diverse interpretations of what Tennessee is all about.

The art—which includes 220 original works—appears in both the non-secure and secure sides of the airport, enhancing concourses, lobbies, and terminals with color and stories. One popular piece is Shan Shan Sheng's sound-wave sculpture depicting the first few notes of "Pan American Blues"—the final song ringing through Nashville the night the Grand Ole Opry was named.

One thing you may not see in this unconventional art gallery is explicitly guitar-themed artwork. "Although we love Music City and we love music, we're not literal about it," Cathy jokes.

Most of the airport's large-scale art came in to define new spaces in the building. The three keystone projects were Dale Eldred's "Airport Sun Project," a dazzling array of mirrors; Sherri Warner Hunter's "Flights of Fantasy," a mosaic playground with whimsical magic carpets; and Jack Hastings' "Dancing On Air," two 15-foot mobiles that float above passersby.

Why is this eclectic collection so important to the city? "We're about the BNA experience," the passionate Community Affairs Director says. "We're the first and last impression of someone new to Nashville."

Arts at the Airport has grown alongside Music City, resonating with the city's exploding arts scene. Recent airport art additions have been murals, just like those visitors would find downtown. One of BNA's most frequented murals, "On Air," is passed by thousands of people hourly and features a recording studio over a runway looking toward the Nashville skyline. "It's a popular spot for selfies," Cathy shares.

While visual art kick-started the initiative, Arts at the Airport embraces art of all forms. Visitors can experience five musical performance stages and two performance areas, interactive art events, and craft demonstrations in partnership with local groups.

"The goal is to reach outside the box," she explains. "It's still an airport. People are not coming to the airport to see art; they're coming to fly. They're moving quickly. But, if they happen to see something intriguing, they'll look at it."

For the Cherry Blossom Festival, Arts at the Airport hosted a Japanese country singer. For International Make Music Day, they handed out 400 kazoos with Make Music Nashville. In celebration of Bonnaroo, they are currently featuring four stunning sculptures hanging in skylights.

It's all representative of the energy happening right outside of BNA's walls. "Because Nashville is such a creative city," Cathy says, "having art and music in the airport creates a vibrant port of entry into a just-as-vibrant culture." Visitors and locals can check out Art at the Airport's calendar of events at [flynashville.com](http://flynashville.com).