

Terminals or Galleries? An Exploratory Study of Museum Operations in Airports

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Abstract

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Many airports are utilizing museum-quality exhibitions about history, science, culture, and art in their spaces. Some airports have even established a fully-fledged museum and incorporated the museum into the airport's operations. There are many similarities and differences between these airport museums, yet very little is known about the practice of operating within such a unique environment. The goal of this research was to establish a baseline understanding of how these museums came to be, how they function, what their goals are, and what their value is to the airport.

Four US airport museums with thorough exhibition programs were selected as case studies to explore these themes. Through interviews and document analysis, this style of museum was explored and a better understanding of their purposes and idiosyncrasies were discovered. This thesis also illustrates an approach for how to identify an appropriate nontraditional location for museum work – airport museums are successful because of reflexivity in the characteristics of airports and museums. This reflexivity is explored throughout the study and is encapsulated in the idea that both buildings are structurally apt for exhibition, both

museums and airports strive to represent their city in a positive light, both cater to tourism and travel, both grant the opportunity to travel and learn about new worlds, and lastly, both are places of wonder, observation, and introspection.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| List of Tables and Figures..... | 3 |
| Introduction..... | 4 |
| Literature Review..... | 6 |
| Museological Examinations of Airports and Museums..... | 6 |
| Museological Examinations of Airports and Museums..... | 8 |
| The Changing Role of Airports..... | 9 |
| Research Implications..... | 10 |
| Methodology..... | 11 |
| Results..... | 14 |
| Site Overviews | 14 |
| Howard W Cannon Aviation Museum | 14 |
| The SFO Museum..... | 18 |
| Phoenix Airport Museum..... | 22 |
| The Art and Culture Program at Albany International Airport..... | 27 |
| Common Trends..... | 32 |
| Impact of the Airport Environment..... | 32 |
| On Museum Growth | 32 |
| On Dealing With Space | 33 |
| On Curation..... | 34 |
| Who do these airport museums serve?..... | 35 |
| Passengers | 35 |
| Community/City | 35 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Airport Industry Employees..... | 35 |
| Value and Role of the Airport Museum..... | 36 |
| What is the perceived role of the airport museum to the staff? | 36 |
| What do the stakeholders see in the airport museum? | 36 |
| Airport museums establishing “place” | 37 |
| Implications..... | 39 |
| Limitations | 42 |
| Conclusion | 43 |
| Bibliography | 45 |

List of Figures and Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: Map of McCarran Airport with the museum space circled in red..... | 18 |
| Figure 2: Images of the Louis A. Turpen Aviation Museum and Library..... | 21 |
| Figure 3: Map of SFO Museum exhibition spaces in the terminals. | 21 |
| Figure 4: Picture of the <i>Art Gone Wild</i> exhibit..... | 26 |
| Figure 5: Images of works from the <i>Some Assembly Required</i> show in Albany..... | 32 |
| Table 1: Chart of Museum Growth and Airport Expansions..... | 32 |

INTRODUCTION

Nearly every major airport in America has some artwork or sculptures in it, probably for aesthetic and decorative purposes. Some of those airports have programs in place to choose this art very carefully and with a purpose. Then there are certain airports, nationally and globally, which take this practice further and utilize curatorial and collections management best practices to grow their collections and create art, history, and science exhibits. These airports exhibit regularly and ostensibly can be considered to have their own operation – a museum at the airport.

There is scant information about these airport museums as institutions other than an occasional newspaper article, and even then, many travelers and citizens are completely unaware of the museum work being done at the airport, despite walking right through the exhibits. So the visitor or traveler might ask – why? Why would an airport do this? Why should I care? The museologist prods deeper. How are these exhibits curated? What are the goals of exhibitions and museum programs at airports? Who benefits and in what ways? What makes an airport an appropriate venue for exhibits?

Marjorie Schwarzer wrote over a decade ago that, “museum exhibitions in airports have become a significant phenomenon. Around the world, from Frankfurt to Philadelphia, from Minneapolis to Melbourne, museums are working with airports to develop cultural exhibitions and interactive play zones.”¹ Defining what is known about these institutions overall is a challenge because each institution is distinctive and very little research exists in the literature. The goal of this research is to explore and understand the ways these institutions operate and what their curatorial goals are, as well as how the atypical space of an airport impacts exhibition.

¹ Marjorie Schwarzer. “Now Boarding: Airport Museums and the Global Audience.” *Museum News*. May/June (2001): 2.

From this research, the museum field may gain insight into new ways of engaging public spaces and how to format the museum to a nontraditional space, with regard to design and content. Examining how museum professionals in airports develop effective exhibits while the purposes of the space and visitors have a more primary objective may show alternative ways that museums can be publicly and commercially valued. This research also adds to the discussion of what museums can be and what they bring to their communities aside from the classic museum cause of education and preservation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to begin to understand how airport museums operate and what their exhibition intentions are. Additionally, the research hopes to explore how an atypical museum environment impacts museum work. There are three main bodies of literature that influenced the development of this goal and they are: museological examinations of the connections between airports and museums, museums that engage atypical and/or public space, and the changing role of airports.

Museological Examinations of Airports and Museums

Schwarzer and Hall-Patton wrote key articles directly addressing the airport museums, and they mainly address the possible reasons for the pairing and the affect of the airport environment on museum practice. Airports and museums “share much in common,”² and both are city amenities, both are concerned with visitor satisfaction, and both are attempting to “change their character-less image by fashioning comfortable and entertaining places.”³ Mark Hall-Patton also writes that there are shared traits between airports and museums but suggests in an article he wrote about his institution, the Cannon Aviation Museum, that it was born out of a more pragmatic “effort to merge existing professional museum expertise with a source for funding and visitation.”⁴

Airports are transitional places and not “destinations in and of themselves. They are not local place, but are linked to other airports, part of the experience of flight and travel, cities of transience.”⁵ She continues, saying “spending time in an airport feels like being in no place.”⁶

² Ibid, 1.

³ Ibid, 2.

⁴ Mark Hall-Patton. “The McCarran Aviation Heritage Museum: Defining a museum community in a transient environment.” Expanded version of article published in *Curator*. Given access by the author. 1

⁵ Marjorie Schwarzer. “Now Boarding: Airport Museums and the Global Audience.” *Museum News*. May/June (2001): 3.

This theme of airports as non-place is an integral part of the data collection process and will be expanded upon later. Schwarzer states that museums have the potential to “[infuse] local flavor and color,” into the non-space. Hall-Patton similarly defines his own museum as a place of transience.⁷

Schwarzer goes on to highlight potential problems these institutions face working in the airport. There are object conservation issues that arise from working in an environment that is perpetually open for business, preparators have to install while people move around them, there is the hazard of possible theft, and the bureaucratic nature of airports that impact museum expenditure, signage, and other graphics.

Lastly, both articles discuss the implications of content for an institution in an airport, noting that it can be challenging to provide appropriate context for an object in a place with a distinctly different objective. Schwarzer indicates that the museums do this by “[choosing] populist rather than scholarly topics, usually on local themes,”⁸ use visually exciting objects, large installations, use humor, and maintain a positive atmosphere (i.e. avoiding controversial art or tragic histories). At Cannon Aviation Museum, Hall-Patton agrees that humor is essential, and understands that his visitorship is in transit and “conditioned to think about aviation because of their recent of upcoming travels,”⁹ and therefore predisposed to enjoy an aviation exhibit in an easily relatable context. A visitor study of several institutions including Cannon Aviation Museum determined that passengers are the primary visitors of airport museums.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid, 3.

⁷ Mark Hall-Patton. “McCarran Aviation Heritage Museum: Redefining Museums.” *Curator* Vol 40n2 (1997): 97-100.

⁸ Marjorie Schwarzer. “Now Boarding: Airport Museums and the Global Audience.” *Museum News*. May/June (2001): 8.

⁹ Mark Hall-Patton. “The McCarran Aviation Heritage Museum: Defining a museum community in a transient environment.” Expanded version of article published in *Curator*. Given access by the author. 1

¹⁰ Valerie Grabski. *Speaking to Visitors About How they Use and View Airport Museums*. University of Washington, 2011.

Other articles spotlight specific exhibitions at museums or highlight other intersections of airports and museum work. In one there is the example of Costa Rica’s popular art museum, Museo de Arte Costarricense, which was in a deteriorating building and unable to keep up with the museum’s growth. The museum recently solved the issue by moving into La Sabana, a decommissioned historic airport.¹¹ Also, there was an exhibition at the Portland International Airport in Oregon of different bike designs by Portland bike makers. The article says 3.3 million people are expected to see the exhibit, that the bikes are on display in a 40-foot long floor to ceiling vitrine, and that a film is being made about the exhibit.¹²

Museums Engaging Atypical and Public Space

The New York Hall of Science mounted an outdoor exhibit in Herald Square and other parts of New York City in 1994 called *Science City*. The exhibit was planned similarly to typical exhibits, with some exceptions. Since the exhibit is in a “public site [it] is encountered by viewers, not visitors – people who are at the site for varied, unrelated reasons.”¹³ The museum was in a “visually, physically, and aurally competitive environment,”¹⁴ and this is one of the most common obstacles of using a public space. To attract attention exhibits were bright orange and the messaging was simple so that it could be understood instantly. This proved to be successful.¹⁵

Gail Dexter Lord says that place has an important function in museum context. Museums are “an interpreted space – a place with assigned meanings,”¹⁶ and these meanings can challenge visitors’ conceptions of the space. Lord says museums can seize the opportunity to juxtapose the

¹¹ Larry Luxner. “From Airport to Art Museum.” *Americas* Vol 63, issue 2 (2011): 5

¹² Jonathan Maux. “Homemade Bike Exhibit Entertains Passengers at Portland Airport.” *Bicycle Retailer & Industry News*. Vol 17, issue 7 (2008): 27

¹³ P.R. Cole and J.M. Cutting. “The Inside Story of Science City – An Outdoor Public Science Exhibition.” *Curator*. Vol 39n4 (1996): 255

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, 256

¹⁶ Gail Dexter Lord. “The Importance of Space and Place.” *Curator*. Vol 48n1 (2005): 23

physical space to provoke new thoughts and references an old jail in Johannesburg, South Africa that is now being used for historic interpretation amongst other urban renewal and an art exhibit of photographs from an artist that projects thought provoking images on ruins.

There is also discussion about what a museum can be with regards to space. Places like P.S. 1 in a school Queens, NY and the Los Angeles Contemporary Museum of Art (which originated in an industrial space) “have given rise to a small number of ‘non-museum museums’ that have immeasurably enriched the ways we now experience art exhibitions.”¹⁷ Dexter’s idea that space affects thought is further reaffirmed by Freudenheim who writes,

“The opportunity to see art in a wholly different environment challenges everything one *feels* about a museum visit (It also challenges the terminology with which we are familiar: ‘museum’ versus ‘gallery’ and whether they are meaningful distinctions.)”¹⁸.

The Changing Role of Airports

John Kasarda coined the term *aerotropolis* and which refers to urban development with the airport as the city center. An example of an existing aerotropolis is the Hong Kong International Airport in Hong Kong, China. The property owned by the airport is the size of Manhattan and the current phase of the “AirCity,” as its referred to, “includes over a million square feet of retail, offices and hotels , a nine hole golf course and a 1.5 million square foot exhibition and trade centre.”¹⁹ The concept is incredibly complex and is a whole system of economics and infrastructure, but the significance of the theory is that airport’s can sustain alternative purposes.

We see this further illustrated in a *New York Times* article in which a reporter documents a week he spent on a vacation to airports. The author visited eight airports

¹⁷ Tom Freudenheim. “The Not-a-Museum.” *Curator*. Vol 53n1 (2010) 47

¹⁸ Ibid, 48

¹⁹ John Kasarda. *Global Airport Cities*. Twickenham: Insight Media. 2010. 20

over a week and received massages, went shopping, ate fine foods, at local foods, visited a synagogue, visited an oxygen bar, experienced live music, enjoyed museums and art installations, and exercised – all while inside the airport.²⁰ Airports offer much more to their users than a place to get on and off of a plane.

Research Implications

The museum literature suggests that there are shared characteristics between themselves and airports and that airports impact the particulars of exhibition work. Museum professionals also identify the airport as a non-place and that museums have the potential to overcome that. The museum field has also identified ways in which museums can operate successfully in nontraditional places. It is clearly documented how airports are becoming places with more services to offer passengers. As airports renovate and build growth in services this will be a continually increasing trend and it is highly possible that museums will continue to be part of this trend.

The research intends explore these trends and how they manifest in practice. For instance, if we know museums in airports suffer from conservation issues, what do those issues look like and how are they mitigated? Or, if we know museums and airports share characteristics then how does that shape an airport museum's exhibition? As an exploratory study the research seeks to more clearly define airport museum operations and uniqueness.

²⁰ Joshnua Kurlantzick. "Project Runway." *New York Times*. 3 Mar 2007: F7. Web. 20 Jan 2013.

METHODOLOGY

The research explores the ways museums in airports operate and what their exhibition goals are. It also examines how the airport environment impacts exhibition and poses unique challenges. Case studies were conducted at four different airports to gather research.

Case studies were selected based on four criteria: The institution needed to have at least one rotating exhibit space, at least one person employed by the governing organization overseeing the development of the exhibits, exhibits before and after security checkpoints, and a its own mission statement. Seventeen possible sites were identified in the U.S. The museums and associated airports selected were the Howard W. Cannon Aviation Museum at McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas, Nevada, the SFO Museum at the San Francisco International Airport in San Francisco, California, the Phoenix Airport Museum at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport in Phoenix, Arizona, and the Art and Culture Program at Albany International Airport in Albany, New York. The sample was intended to represent both larger and smaller airports, and art and non-art exhibitions. The professionals that run the exhibitions were interviewed at each site. Time constraints, as well as availability and accessibility of the institutions factored into the sample selection process as well.

The methodology included site visits, observations, document review of relevant literature and semi-structured interviews with the curators or directors of these airport museums. The nature of this data is that it is highly qualitative. The interviews were informal in nature and semi-structured, utilizing a few questions that functioned as themes to ground the discussion.

Those questions were:

- Can you tell me the history of your museum and your involvement?
- What are the goals of your program and intentions of your exhibits?

- What is the role of the airport in your exhibitions, and what is the role of exhibitions for the airport?
- Can you tell me about the audience; who are they? What experience do you want them to have? What experience does the airport on them to have? What experience do you think they ultimately have?

The interviews were recorded and lasted up to two hours. At each site, the interviewee provided a tour of their facility and exhibits to provide a visual understanding of the concepts they were relaying. The staff at these museums also provided me with printed materials about their history and exhibitions, when available, which support and contextualize the interview data. Field notes and photographs taken of the airport, facilities, and exhibits also served as data.

Analyzing the data utilized NVivo analysis software to code the interviews. NVivo allows the recordings from the interviews to be tagged at various points in the audio according to codes. The data was coded using two types of coding sets, a priori and emergent. The a priori codes were based on the type of information that the interviews intended to obtain, such as:

- Visitors
- Marketing
- Educative Objectives
- Curatorial/Exhibition Objectives
- Collections
- Funding/Organizational Structure
- Life at the Airport

As analysis progressed, a set of emergent codes was developed to identify common trends amongst the airport museums. The data within the a priori set was then coded by the following themes:

- Impact of the airport environment
- Who the airport serves
- Value and Role of the Museum

The printed materials from the museums, photographs, and field notes were studied and analyzed for these themes, but not coded. Reviewing these materials helped to better understand the ideas put forth in the interviews.

RESULTS

Site Overview

Howard W. Cannon Aviation Museum, McCarran International Airport, Las Vegas, NV

In 1941, George Crockett built the Alamo Airport and ran it with his wife Peg. In 1948, Clark County bought Crockett's land and built an airport called McCarran Field, named after Nevada Senator Pat McCarran who was influential in establishing regulations on commercial aviation. In 1963, the airport grew significantly as a new terminal was built with grandiose architecture to mimic the famous TWA terminal at JFK Airport.^{21,22} In 1968, the name was changed to McCarran International Airport and the airport began to grow rapidly. Over the next three decades, there would be high-budget continuous expansions to the airport to accommodate airline traffic.²³ In 1992, as part of these expansions, Peg Crockett's home was going to be demolished (George died in 1990). She had a substantial collection of aviation related items within the home and wished to donate it to the airport. The director of the airport at the time saw this as "an opportunity to offer something interesting and informative to McCarran's users."²⁴ Peg Crockett also contributed initial funding for the museum. The Department of Aviation of Clark County (DOA) contacted the Parks and Recreation of Clark County, which operates the Clark County Heritage Museum (CCHM) and the Searchlight Museum, to discuss building a

²¹ Mark Hall-Patton. Personal interview. 11 Feb 2013.

²² The TWA Terminal at the John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York was designed by Eero Saarinen in 1962. He also designed the St. Louis Gateway Arch and Dulles International Airport. After 2001 when TWA was no longer a company, the airport discussed how to repurpose the terminal but the Municipal Art Society of New York and the architecture community objected (the building has since been placed on the National Register of Historic Places). The space went unused until 2004 when the airport agreed to let an art show be curated for the space with themes about travel and the architecture of the building, and featured artists from all over the globe. The exhibition was slated to run for 15 months but did not last beyond the opening as opening night party guests smoked, became recklessly drunk, wrote graffiti, and broke a glass door that led to the runway at which point the disrespectfulness became a security concern. There have since been some renovations and presently the terminal functions as an entry to an adjacent operating terminal.

²³ Mark Hall-Patton. Personal interview. 11 Feb 2013.

²⁴ Ibid.

museum. The airport decided they wanted a historian and museum professional to oversee the project. They brought in Mark Hall-Patton and he began to build the initial exhibit and grow the museum. That was in 1997 and he remains at the museum today as the Museums Administrator for all Clark County museums.

Mark Hall-Patton was interviewed over the weekend of February 8-10. The mission of the Cannon Aviation Museum is

“To provide visitors and residents of Clark County with an interesting and informative museum operation focused on the aviation heritage of Southern Nevada, through exhibits located throughout McCarran International Airport and outreach and research programs based out of the Clark County Museum.”²⁵

The museum is funded by the DOA but operated by the Cultural Services department of Parks and Recreation of Clark County. Hall-Patton describes the arrangement as “the only such funding arrangement within Clark County, and...highly successful.”²⁶ The budget has two parts to it, the operational budget and the capital expenditures budget. The former is administered via the Parks and Recreation department, but funded by sign rentals in the airport designated for the museum. Arriving at this arrangement required approval from county supervisors, the DOA, and the airlines. The capital expenditure budget is administered by the DOA. The clearly defined budget is useful for outlining expenditures, but is also necessary because of FAA regulations regarding airport funds. There have been individual donors and some groups such as the Rotary Club (which the Crocketts participated heavily in) who have contributed to the museum, but the most substantial funding comes from the DOA.

There is an equally unique operational structure to the museum. The Clark County Museum and the Cannon Aviation Museum “operate out of the same building, with a thoroughly

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

intermixed staff.”²⁷ At one time, there was an administrator for each museum and they worked together, but now Hall-Patton is the administrator for all three Clark County museums. The staff is responsible for the professional functions of all museums. At its peak, there were nine staff members but presently there are four due to budget cutbacks in recent years. The shared responsibility of the staff is also reflected in the way Cannon Aviation Museum collects. The collections are housed in the same facility as the Clark County Museum collections. It is considered one collection, owned by Clark County. The museum does differentiate within the collection if an object is for Cannon, Clark County, or Searchlight, but there is shared use of the artifacts (they are placed in exhibits at any location).

The main location for exhibits in the Cannon Aviation Museum is on the 2nd floor of the main terminal, above baggage claim and in front of ticketing counters. Here there are 30 display cases in a 3000 square foot space that show what is essentially a permanent exhibit (see Figure 1). The cases are in an open area of the airport, not bound by walls, and have travelers walking through the exhibit space with their luggage in tow en route to ticketing and security, or after deplaning on their way to baggage claim. On occasion, something would be added or changed (for instance, a panel on Senator Cannon when the name of the museum changed from McCarran Aviation Heritage Museum to the current moniker), but the exhibit remains unchanged most of the time. This exhibit is before security. In the post security areas of the airport, several temporary rotating exhibits change roughly every year or when deemed necessary. When asked about the exhibition schedule of these exhibits, Hall-Patton remarked, “We don’t have an exhibition schedule. [Our staff is] just spread too thin. When its time for one to come out, we create the next to go in.”²⁹ At the time of the site visit, there were supplementary exhibits in A,

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

B, C, and D gates. The main exhibit tells the story of commercial aviation in the Las Vegas area through the 1960s. It should be noted that there are 31 works of public art around the airport as well, but these are not managed or utilized by the Cannon Aviation Museum.

The museum does not actively participate in education programming or marketing, for pragmatic reasons. Hall-Patton says of this, “Do you really want more cars in the parking lot? The airport doesn’t. They want the cars there handling people going through the airport, they don’t want people just coming in here seeing the museum. The museum is here for the people going through the airport.”³⁰ He goes on to say that his efforts to get visitors in the doors are focused on the Clark County Heritage Museum and the Searchlight Museum, and from there he can introduce the Cannon Aviation Museum when the opportunity presents itself.

Between 2011 and 2012, the Clark County Heritage Museum attendance has risen significantly, but Hall-Patton muses, “here [at Cannon] I’m already getting more people than any other museum.”³¹ The museum utilized a survey firm from the University of Nevada Las Vegas to ascertain some visitor information and it was determined that 1% of passengers are also visitors to the museum’s main exhibit area. With roughly 40 million people in and out of McCarran International Airport in 2012, it was the 24th busiest airport in the world. This figure puts Cannon Aviation Museum attendance at 400,000 visitors per year.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

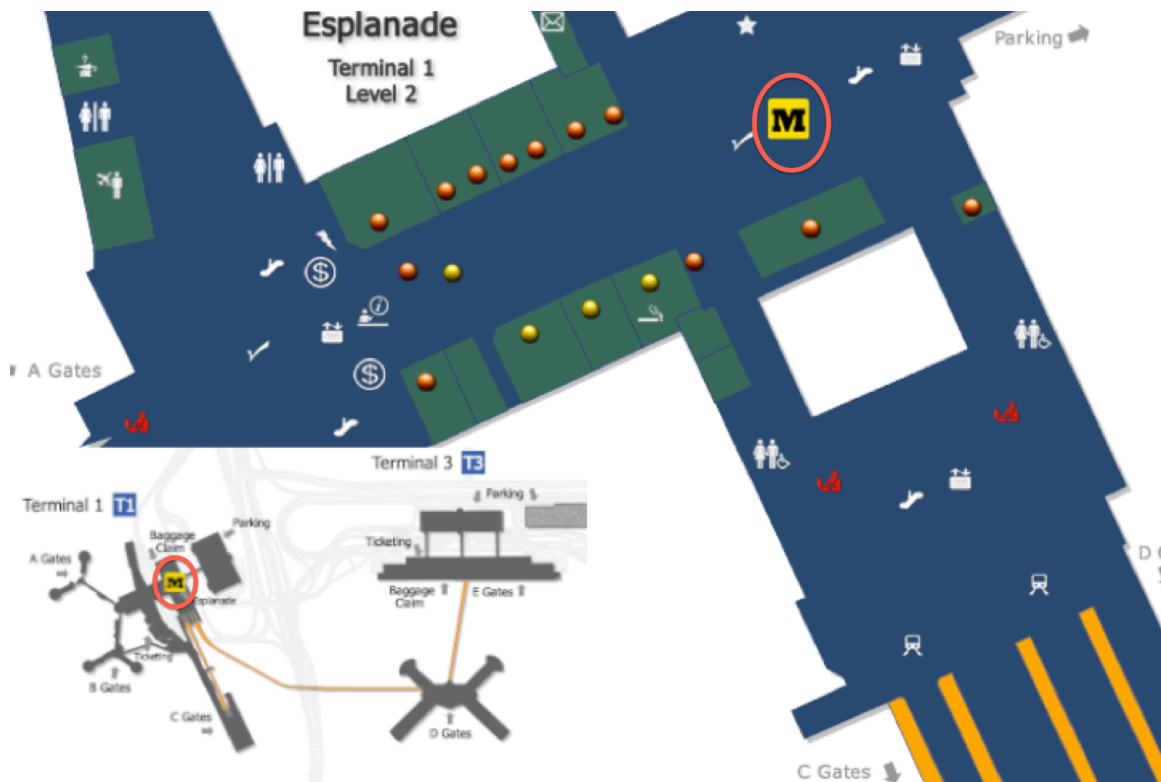


Figure 1: Map of McCarran Airport with the museum space circled in red

The SFO Museum, San Francisco International Airport, San Francisco, CA

The San Francisco International Airport opened as the Mills Field Municipal Air Port of San Francisco in 1927.³² In 1931, it was renamed the San Francisco Airport and in 1954, with the opening the Central Passenger Terminal (what is now known as Terminal 2), the airport became known as the San Francisco International Airport.³³ In 1970, the authority of the airport was reassigned from the Public Utilities Commission to the Airport Commission, formed that year. The Airport Commission is a five-person committee appointed by the mayor to four-year terms and is responsible for airport policies and appointing the Airport Director.³⁴ Nine years later, the Airport Commission looked into developing cultural programs “to humanize the

³² “Mills Field Memories, Part 2: An Air Port for San Francisco.” SFO’s Community Newsletter. (Spring 2007). 4

³³ “the history of SFO.” San Francisco International Airport. http://www.albanyairport.com/alb_history.php

³⁴ Ibid.

Airport environment”³⁵ and the following year in 1980, they partnered with the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco to create an exhibition program, and established themselves as the San Francisco Airport Museum. The museum was granted its own department within the airport’s organizational structure.³⁶ The SFO Museum (as it came to be called) received accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums in 1999. The SFO Museum is comprised of gallery spaces throughout the airport and the Louis A. Turpen Aviation Museum and Library. The SFO Museum will be under review for reaccreditation in 2018.³⁷

The mission of the SFO museum is robust. In their five-year strategic plan covering 2011-2016, it is written thusly:

The mission of the SFO museum is to provide a broad range of exhibitions and educational programs, collectively represent the diversity of human achievement, enrich the public experience, and differentiate SFO from other airports.

Megan Callan, the Assistant Curator of Museum Affairs of the SFO Museum was interviewed on February 15 and the SFO Museum’s offices. The off site offices are located on the airport’s campus but detached from the terminals. It is also the facility in which the museum houses its collection has wood and metal workshops, and exhibit staging areas. The museum is funded by the airport, which in turn is funded by the city. The airport is the largest single generator of revenue for the city.³⁸ There is a museum advisory board of six people, comprised of equal parts museum professionals and airport professionals. The board is fairly hands-off and confident in director and the curators. At the SFO Museum, there are 30 people working as full-time staff, 8-10 part-time staff, and interns.

³⁵ Megan Callan. Personal interview. 15 Feb 2013.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

The museum has a fairly extensive collection. When the program began, non-aviation items were bought at auctions in order to supplement exhibitions. In preparing to become accredited by AAM, the organization implemented a collection scope that determined they would focus on commercial aviation related objects only, with some focus on the Pacific region. They have slowly been working on deaccessioning non-aviation items, but this is a challenge because of FAA regulations involving what funds objects were purchased with and how they will be deaccessioned. In the collection, there are 8,000-10,000 books, 40,000 archival materials, and roughly 30,000 objects. The museum collects everything from models of aircrafts to drink swizzle sticks (they have 2000). Additionally, the museum houses and cares for the airport's collection of 90 pieces of art, bought by the San Francisco Art Commission with airport building funds from a city mandate declaring 1% of building funds go towards the arts.

The museum has 19 different exhibition locales throughout the airport. Presently they have 14 rotating exhibits, ranging from aviation to art to board games. The other five exhibition sites have more permanent installments (art, children's installations, and hanging planes). The Louis A. Turpen Aviation Museum and Library is housed in the corner of the International Terminal and is a striking architectural redesign of the 1937 San Francisco Airport passenger waiting room (see Figure 2). The space has rotating aviation exhibits on the lower level and a library and extensive archive on the upper level. The Aviation Museum and Library as well as 4 larger sized gallery spaces in the International Terminal are before security and the remaining locations are behind security check points in Terminals 1, 2, and 3 (see Figure 3).

The exhibitions in the Aviation Museum are always about some type of aviation history. There is an ongoing exhibit about PanAm clipper "flying boats" and trans-Pacific flight. In February,,the temporary exhibits were of model plane cutaways and the former Chinese airline

Civil Air Transport. The exhibitions outside of the Aviation Museum and Library delve into a variety of content. There were exhibitions on travel souvenirs, board games, Hindu sculpture and Asian ceramics (both from the collection of the Asian Art Museum), and Shaker furniture among others. There are three exhibition spaces that are dedicated spaces for photography exhibits. The museum produced 38 different exhibitions in 2011 and “when AAM came through to do [the] accreditation the reviewing team said [they] do more shows per year than the Metropolitan does.”³⁹



Figure 2: Images of the Louis A Turpen Aviation Museum and Library



Figure 3: Map of SFO Museum exhibition spaces in the terminals

³⁹ Ibid.

There is a modest education program in place at the SFO Museum. There have been programs for school groups that take place primarily in relation to the exhibits that occur in the Turpen Aviation Museum and Library space. There have also been exhibition related seminars for adults. There has been little marketing for the museum itself. They use social media for external promotion and use graphics and signage within the airport. For an exhibit on vinyl records, they had a DJ come and play in Terminal 2 as a promotional event, and it was well received by the public and administration at the airport. Otherwise there are few marketing activities. The museum's current strategic plan expresses the desire to increase these activities in the coming years and the director of the airport has specifically endorsed broadening their visibility in the city.

The SFO Museum estimates they reach 10% of visitors to the airport, which is to say those people who take notice of the exhibits though they might not explore them thoroughly. San Francisco was the 22nd busiest airport in the world in 2012 with 44.4 million passengers in the airport last year: therefore the SFO Museum had 4.4 million visitors.⁴⁰ Front desk volunteers at the Aviation Museum and Library are able to track visitorship more closely and reported 30,657 visitors in 2011.⁴¹ Callan did mention specific exhibits that cater to loyal fanbases had visitorship outside of travelers and indicated that they would like to appeal to a wider audience, but acknowledged that the traveller is the primary audience.

Phoenix Airport Museum, Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, Phoenix, AZ

In 1928, an airline company called Scenic Airways created a small airport in Phoenix that they called Sky Harbor. The next year that company folded with the stock market crash and in 1930, Acme Investment Company purchased the airport. They then sold the airport in 1935 for

⁴⁰ ACI Figures, http://www.aci.aero/media/afc782a2-a258-4c49-a700-fea9047d15fb/News/Releases/2013/PR_260313_Prelim_2012_World_Traffic_Rankings-final_pdf

⁴¹ SFO Strategic Plan

\$100,000 to the City of Phoenix. It was a major airport from early on and by “1948, the Civil Aeronautics Administration declared that Sky Harbor was the busiest airport in the United States.”⁴² Between 1952 and 1990, the airport constructed 4 terminals to keep up with the airport’s speedy growth. In 1986, the Office of Arts and Culture in Phoenix established a 1% for the arts mandate on all budgets for capital projects. The airport had been acquiring art without focus for the offices and some to augment the aesthetics of the terminals as they were being developed. In 1987, the airport hired Lenee Eller part time to assess, clean, and maintain the small collection of 28 works. In July of 1988, there was a request to show student artwork promoting dental sealants, which spurred a fully-fledged show of that work along with “contemporary sculpture from local artists, a dental chair from the Arizona Historical Museum, obsolete dental tools from private collectors, and dental history and trivia.”⁴³ With this exhibit, the Phoenix Airport Museum was born.

Twenty-six years later, Eller has stuck with the institution and taken on the title of Museum Curator, helping to build the collection and exhibitions, as well as helping to define the museum itself. The museum’s mission is to “enhance the public’s experience by creating memorable environments that promote Arizona’s unique artistic and cultural heritage. The museum strives to educate airport visitors about the art and objects on display.”⁴⁴

Lenee Eller was interviewed at Sky Harbor International Airport on the weekend of March 8-10 and, like Mark Hall-Patton, she has overseen every aspect of the program from its inception through to the present day. The airport funds the exhibition program. Eller reports to the Assistant Aviation director and the museum is considered part of the administrative department. Therefore, it is given its own budget within that larger budget. However, the funding

⁴² Phoenix Sky Harbor International, <http://skyharbor.com/about/earlyYears.html>

⁴³ “Promoting Arizona Arts Since 1988 brochure” Phoenix Airport Museum

⁴⁴ Ibid.

to grow the collection is all from the 1% for arts mandate and donations. This is notable because the collection has grown notably.

Their collection has grown to over 700 works from the initial 28, and is housed in an off-site storage location. The Phoenix Art Commission purchases the works with guidance and input from Eller, using the 1% from capital projects. Because of this collecting structure, all works in the collection are considered public art. The collecting goal of the Phoenix Airport Museum is to purchase [the?] “best art...that relates to Arizona or the southwest region,”⁴⁵ and preferably from Arizonan artists. The individual pieces are as large as commissioned permanent installments like the terrazzo floors⁴⁶ in the baggage claim and sky train areas and as small as a ceramic work that will fit into the palm of your hand. One aspect of the collection that makes it unique, according to Eller, is that it consists of details in the architecture (i.e. the terrazzo floors or ornate black columns in Terminal 4) as well as studio art. Another thing that sets their collection apart is the idea that some of the items will not be held in perpetuity. The airport is an environment in flux and “public art has taken on new meaning.”⁴⁷ Eller suggests that this new meaning for her museum manifests in the possibility that the collection may not be held in perpetuity. Eller says that the museum’s paintings and prints, though well taken care of, are vulnerable and may not be conserved to last forever. Additionally, accessioned works like the decorated columns and terrazzo floors could be taken up as soon as the airport decides it wants to rebuild or renovate that area. The collection is cared for, but the airport is not a reliably stable environment with the resources or need to conserve the collection indefinitely.

⁴⁵ Lenee Eller. Personal interview. 11 Mar 2013.

⁴⁶ The series of terrazzo floors at Sky Harbor recently just won a National Terrazzo & Mosaic Association ‘Best of 2013’ award.

⁴⁷ Lenee Eller. Personal interview. 11 Mar 2013.

Some of the 700 works are occasionally utilized by an exhibition when appropriate but is predominantly placed throughout the airport to stand on its own merit, when used at all. The exhibition program has its own mission statement, apart from the overall mission statement of the museum. The exhibition mission statement is:

The goal of Exhibitions Program is to present temporary high quality educational and entertaining displays that promote Arizona arts and culture in order to link the traveling public to the Arizona community and to provide a positive impression of the state. The exhibitions' primary focus is to showcase traditional performing, literary and visual arts. Programming also includes architecture, history, archeological and heritage sites. When promoting science, children's and natural history museums the exhibition will include fine arts to exemplify the theme.

Exhibitions will strive to:

- Reflect Arizona's cultural community
- Be eclectic in style and medium
- Present diverse subject matter
- Represent the diversity of our artists and cultural heritage
- Provide opportunities to all artists through open competitions
- Serve as an extension to museums and their programming
- Highlight Arizona's natural and historic places
- Present information about the lenders
- Educate about the region, its culture, the artists, the institutions, the artwork, and the process.⁴⁸

There are over 35 different exhibition spaces that the Phoenix Airport Museum uses. The primary space for exhibition is Terminal 4 at Sky Harbor Airport. It is in that space where most of the exhibition cases are. Some are freestanding and others are built into the wall.

Additionally, there is the Phoenix Airport Museum Gallery in Terminal 4, which is the same size and shape as any other commercial entity in the airport but houses a gallery space. The exhibit in the space was about the history and art of the bolo tie. In addition to Terminals 2, 3, and 4 at Sky Harbor, the Phoenix Airport Museum is also responsible for exhibit spaces at the Sky Harbor Rental Car Center and two other area airports: the Phoenix Deer Valley Airport and the

⁴⁸ "Exhibition Mission Statement." Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport.
<https://skyharbor.com/Museum/ExhibitionsMissionStatement.html>

Phoenix Goodyear Airport. The exhibitions are always focused on art and Eller says that she tries to emphasize the artist as a person and the processes in the exhibits.⁴⁹ There are four other employees working with Eller. Each person has their own skill set that they call upon for curation depending on the type of exhibit. One employee is well versed in nature art and landscapes, another with folk art, and creating the exhibits is a collaborative effort. They all write copy for labels and they all contribute to the design. Furthermore, though the Phoenix Airport Museum curates their own shows, they often partner with other local institutions. For instance, the aforementioned bolo tie exhibit was done with the Heard Museum and they honored the 50th anniversary of the Phoenix Zoo with an exhibit of animal sculptures called *Art Gone Wild* (see figure 4). The average exhibition stays up for 6 months at a time.

The museum does not have education programs. They do not conduct tours and except for individuals at the information desk and airport “navigators” whose job it is to help passengers with queries, there is no staff on site to interpret the exhibitions. They have in the past had receptions for exhibits, but they are on a small scale and the initiative of the artist having his or her work shown, not the museum.



Figure 4: Picture of the *Art Gone Wild* exhibit.

⁴⁹ Lenee Eller. Personal interview. 11 Mar 2013.

Similarly, the museum also has very little marketing. There was a time where Eller would print announcements for upcoming exhibitions in the local arts publications, but has cut back since the economy weakened. Internally, however, there are several different types of brochures a visitor can pick up about the museum including an exhibition guide, program overview, and information about the Sky Train art (the terrazzo floors). Also, the museum has adopted a very clever way of promoting individual exhibits within the airport. For nearly each exhibit, the museum prints a folded one-page pamphlet with an image and “Phoenix Airport Museum” on the front. When opened, it is revealed that the front image is a postcard and the other page is more information either about the image, artist, or exhibit. These postcard-pamphlets are accompanying many of the ongoing exhibits.

When Eller began the program, the airport only had 13 million passengers annually. Today the airport accommodates roughly 42 million passengers annually. Seventy percent of the airport’s passengers go through Terminal 4 and Lenee and her colleagues suspect that roughly 1%, or 300,000, of the passengers through Terminal 4 view the exhibits. As with the other airport museums, this is substantially more than any other museum in the state. Though the vast majority of visitors are travellers, Eller did mention people from the community coming to view the exhibits on occasion.

The Art and Culture Program at Albany International Airport, Albany International Airport, Albany, NY

Albany lays claim to “establishing the first municipal airport in the United States,” on an airstrip at a polo field three miles north of the city in the early 20th century.⁵⁰ In 1928, the City of Albany acquired land near that airstrip from the Watervliet Shakers and opened an airport that

⁵⁰ Escobar, Deborah. Teaching the History of the Albany International Airport. Albany International Airport: Albany. NY. 2000

carried mail West. The airport continued to grow but remained very small by comparison to the other airports detailed here. In 1960, the City of Albany sold the airport to Albany County. The rest of the 1960s saw continuing improvements to the airport that included basic amenities and a new terminal, and in the 1970s, the runways were increased and the terminal was extended. The airport continued to operate in a small but vital capacity for the Albany area and “in 1993, the Albany County Airport Authority was created to oversee the Airport's operation.”⁵¹ This group put forth plans for the airport's largest expansion that included a new terminal, parking garage, cargo facility, and control tower. The terminal opened in 1998. Jon Egan was the CEO of the airport from 1995-2003, and at the time of the new terminal's opening convinced the Airport Authority Board that there should be some type of public art in the airport. Egan had worked with Governor Rockefeller early on in his career and saw the impact art had on the Empire Plaza in downtown Albany.⁵² Since his involvement with Rockefeller, “he had made a commitment from that point on that any public building he was involved with would have some kind of an art component...Also at that time [art programs at airports] was a growing trend and as you traveled you could see that other airports were doing this. [Albany] didn't have a mandated percent program [like the ones in Phoenix and San Francisco] so it was something [the Airport Authority] had to buy into and agree to.”⁵³ So in 1998, Sharon Bates was hired as a consultant to bring art into Albany International Airport and she created the Arts and Culture Program at Albany International Airport.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² The Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza is a building complex in downtown Albany where there are municipal buildings, arts and culture buildings, and an underground commercial complex. The Plaza has its own art collection featuring 92 works by prominent artists in the New York School and Glen D. Lowry of the MoMA has said that it is “the most important state collection of modern art in the country.”

⁵³ Sharon Bates. Personal interview. 20 Mar 2013.

Program Director Sharon Bates was interviewed on March 20th in her office, adjacent to the main gallery. She is an artist herself and had been a curator for galleries prior to establishing the Arts and Culture Program that she is now the director of. The mission of the Arts and Culture program is to “showcase the work of artists in the region...and learn more about the culture and artists of the region.”⁵⁴ The emphasis on region is important for the program, as Albany is nestled in a part of upstate New York that gives access to many resources, artists, and organizations of the upstate area, Massachusetts, Vermont, and even Canada. Bates remarked that many artists in New York City also have homes in Albany and upstate New York to retreat from the city and be inspired by the more rural surroundings (making those artists eligible to show at the airport). It is important to make a distinction here – the art program at Albany International Airport is not a museum like the other sites, it functions more as a gallery (but without directly buying and selling the art). However, the institution has the same quality and amount of exhibits as the other sites. The main difference is that in Albany, they do not have a permanent collection and they have a regular exhibiting partnership with local institutions that they refer to as their ‘Exhibition Case Program’

The Arts and Culture Program is funded by the airport, and is considered a line item in their budget. Money from parking, advertising, and fees paid by the airlines can be used for the program: taxpayer dollars cannot. Bates submits an annual proposed budget to the airport for approval. In 2008, there was a downturn in funding and the program received a 62% budget cut.⁵⁵

In 1998, the juried art show *Artists of the Mohawk Hudson Region*, was being held in Albany. It was decided that an accompanying gala and adjunct exhibition should be held at the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

newly opened Airport terminal's observation area. A 2500 square foot gallery space was built adjacent to the observation area specifically for this occasion and it has remained as the chief exhibition space today. The space is pre-security giving access to travelers and non-travelers on the floor above the security checkpoint. The Arts and Culture Program puts on an exhibition every six months and the main panels and bulk of the art is in the gallery space. There is exhibit space after security check points as well: a space in Concourse A and another in Concourse B. These exhibit spaces change twice a year as well and are often, though not exclusively, part of the same exhibition going on in the main gallery. The exhibit in place in March was titled *Some Assembly Required* and was an impressive exhibit about collage utilizing all types of media, and featuring over 15 artists (Figure 5). Throughout the airport in both pre and post-security areas, the Arts and Culture Program also commissions sculpture and site-specific art installations. On average, these pieces will stay in the airport for 2-5 years, though a handful have surpassed that time frame and remain installed today.

The program also runs an "Exhibition Case Program" wherein six local institutions are each given cases in the post-security concourses for them to display a mini-exhibit about their institution's work or upcoming exhibits. As a service the airport provided to these institutions, this used to be free and was a collaborative effort between the Arts and Culture Program and the local organizations, but in recent years the Program has been forced to charge a fee and have the participants pay for their own design. Every year to year and a half they rotate the exhibit and participants. The participants during the case study were were The Tang Teaching Museum Art Gallery at Skidmore College, The Curtis R. Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC), Mass MoCA, The Shaker Heritage Society/Shaker Museum, The Bennington Museum, and Chesterwood, the historical home of artist Daniel Chester French. The program

gave up some control of the exhibit feel and look when they invited these institutions into their space, but they gave the participants parameters for the work regarding word count, label size, and mounting expectations. The organizations are welcome to vary from these standards with approval of the program.⁵⁶ Bates mentions that the Exhibition Case Program “is highly beneficial to the cultural community, [and] we’re really providing a marketing opportunity that [the institutions] could never [afford] through [the airport’s] advertising program.”⁵⁷

The Arts and Culture Program itself does very little marketing for itself. Though there is printed material about the program and the exhibits, it is not widely distributed. There are single page flyers available about the exhibit in the main gallery, but none in the concourses. However, there is more educational programming than some of the other institutions. For some exhibits the airport provides a self-guided tour of the exhibit and they get school groups and senior groups that come in for tours.

The Albany International Airport does not have the same passenger traffic that the other airports examined here had. Roughly 3 million passengers come through the airport annually. The Arts and Culture Program estimates that 10% of those passengers, 300,000 visitors, see the exhibit the main gallery. Bates puts the number slightly higher, around 500,000, when she includes the post-security concourse exhibitions.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.



Figure 5: Images of works from the *Some Assembly Required* show in Albany

Common Trends

Impact of the Airport Environment

On Museum Growth

Across all of these sites, the museums originated out of structural growth and organizational changes to the airport. It was only at these points of reinvention for the airport that they were able to incorporate the museum entity into their budget and space. Even with already established airport museums, the museum's continual growth is often hinged on change

(See Table 1). When Terminal 2 at San Francisco International Airport was rebuilt in 2008, the SFO Museum was consulted for where they would like exhibit space and chose a central location in a hallway that would be impossible for passengers miss. Presently a section of Terminal 3 at SFO is being reconstructed and when it reopens, the museum intends to install video kiosks that they are calling an InfoTerrace to provide information on the museum and the airport itself.⁵⁸ The opportunity for these museums to exist at all and then grow their operation would be impossible if the airport were not “in a constant state of flux and change.”⁵⁹

| | LAS | SFO | PHX | ALB |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Capital Project that accompanied the creation of the Museum | Demolishing two separate terminals and building Terminal 2 | Expansion of Terminal 1, creation of Terminal 2 | Terminal 4 | 2 nd terminal, parking garage, cargo facility, and control tower |
| Additional expansions/change in museum | Ticketing kiosks in 2003/500 sq. ft. reduction in gallery space | International Terminal built in 2000/Turpen Aviation Museum and additional exhibition space | Sky Mover train opened in 2013/ Terrazzo floors installed | |

Table 1: Chart of Museum Growth and Airport Expansions

On Dealing With the Space

The airport space proves to be an occasionally challenging to work within for all sites. At Cannon Aviation Museum, installations can only be done in the wee hours of the morning because the galleries exist in the passenger’s walkway. The SFO Museum also installs in the early morning and they utilize their staging areas in the offsite facility to arrange and prep the exhibits so they can be placed in the galleries with maximum time efficiency. In Phoenix and Albany, they do not have to install in the morning but do make a point of waiting for non-peak travel hours and have limited time to work. In the same way that construction can be a boon for growth, changes in space and general airport operations can disrupt exhibits. In Las Vegas,

⁵⁸ Callan, Megan. Personal interview. 15 Feb 2013.

⁵⁹ Eller, Lenee. Personal interview. 11 Mar 2013.

Mark Hall-Patton mentions how early on the frequent power surges that often happen in airports blew out all of the bulbs in the cases (he now uses LED lights).⁶⁰ Lenee Eller mentions that “if the airport decides they want to put an ATM where you have a case at the last minute, sometimes you just have to accept that and work around [the issue].”⁶¹ There was a similar issue at the Cannon Aviation Museum when the gallery downsized from 3500 square feet to 3000 because the airport wanted to install self-ticketing kiosks.

On Curation

The curating of the exhibits is subject to the airport space as well, with regard to content and conservation. All of the airports had unofficial policies about what they cannot exhibit. Though seemingly obvious, all of the museums avoid using imagery of crashing airplanes. In Phoenix, they even go as far as to avoid using images of airplanes with their noses pointed downward. In Las Vegas, there is a case that briefly mentions a famous crash in the label, but the crash is not the main point of the information and there is no imagery of the tragedy. The museums also avoid guns, death imagery, explosions, and nudity. Eller recalls an incident where they wanted to do an exhibit of portraits of cancer patients accompanied by their stories. The airport vetoed the exhibit (which happens rarely). She explains, “Our job is not controversy.”⁶² The exhibits are also subject to conservation issues. The cases at the SFO Museum are climate controlled with adjustable lighting, but the other three sites have no control over the atmosphere their exhibits are in. It is challenging to control the temperature and humidity in the airport and often times the walls of the terminals are all glass, allowing lots of light in. Cannon Aviation Museum circumvents the issue by using reproductions for all paper items on display. The other institutions mitigate the problem as best they can and regularly inspect the objects to ensure their

⁶⁰ Hall-Patton, Mark. Personal interview. 11 Feb 2013.

⁶¹ Eller, Lenee. Personal interview. 11 Mar 2013.

⁶² Ibid.

well being, but the museums acknowledge that airports are not ideal for managing these problems.

Who do these airport museums serve?

Passengers

All museums expressed that they mainly served the passengers. Rather than try to tailor the museum experience to the spectrum of visitors, they relied on a continuous visitorship and took advantage of what Mark Hall-Patton says is “a location where people have the time and interest to learn about the subject at hand.”⁶³ Similarly Megan Callan said that it was “freeing”⁶⁴ to not worry about what type of visitor views an exhibit and just make a good generalized exhibit. The museums aim to make the passenger’s travel experience more pleasant, be it by an educative encounter or a more aesthetically pleasing experience. All interviewees also expressed the notion that the service offered to the traveler makes the traveling experience unique because the exhibit is so unexpected.

Community/City

All interviewees referred to their airports as “gateways to the community.” In each mission statement they express the desire to tell the stories of their city and the communities in the region. They also tap into the local cultural resources to provide materials or partnerships for the exhibits. The airport museums want to make sure they represent their home in a positive light and show off their best cultural assets which Eller notes can also be a financial benefit to the area.

Airport Industry Employees

⁶³ Hall-Patton, Mark. “McCarran Aviation Heritage Museum: Redefining Museums.” *Curator*. V40n2 (1997): 99.

⁶⁴ Callan, Megan. Personal interview. 15 Feb 2013.

Lastly, all of the interviewees stated how important the exhibition program is to workers at the airport. It makes their work experience unique and they enjoy the exhibits. In Las Vegas, Mark Hall Patton said that the janitorial staff asked for extra time to make sure the exhibit spaces were cleaned perfectly. In some instances airport employees also contribute their own artifacts and art to exhibits when the opportunity presents itself. Megan Callan says the SFO Airport is a “point of pride for the staff.”⁶⁵

Value and Role of the Airport Museum

What is the perceived role of the airport museum to the staff?

The interviewees expressed the opinion that the museum creates a feeling of respite and in what can otherwise be a chaotic and vexing situation. As one professional stated, the airport can be “an environment that’s frustrating to get through [and] you now create a little calm in the craziness.”⁶⁶ These museums do intend to educate and individual passengers remark having learned. But for the masses and to the airport, the museum’s role is much more akin to entertainment and distraction. Keeping passengers happy is “good business”⁶⁷ and the museum provides value on that end.

What do the stakeholders see in the airport museum?

The stakeholders of the airport museum may approve and encourage education and conservation, but they see something else in the museum that provides value to the space. All of the museum professionals interviewed commented how the airport invests in them by virtue of giving them space to work rather than putting more commercial entities in their place, so there must be a monetary value to the stakeholders as well (though it is presently uncalculated). The museums give the airport a *vibe* or a *feeling* that is consistent with the branding and business that

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Eller, Lenee. Personal interview. 11 Mar 2013.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

the airport wants to provide. In that same respect, Sharon Bates says that the reason for the museum is not entirely altruistic but that the museum can potentially provide to the economy, relating a story of a person potentially

“Flying in for a job interview and going to relocate [his/her] family and you walk into Albany airport and the airport is filled with the cultural offerings of the area it certainly paints a much more rich kind of picture of the region. [The airport museum shows that Albany] has that to offer.”⁶⁸

The interviewees all mentioned that the museum generated good press for the airport, another element of the airport as a business. In a speech Mark Hall-Patton gave at AAM in 2001, he said “The museum’s job, as seen by the airport management and airport users, is to provide an entertaining and educational experience to travelers and other airport users.” What the stakeholders are saying of the museum but not so directly, is that the museum helps to make the airport a place.

Airport museums establishing “place.”

Sociologist Marc Augé coined the term non-place to refer to indistinguishable places of transience.⁶⁹ Hotels and airports are examples of this – where you can be in any number of them in any location and not necessarily tell them apart. What the stakeholders and the museum professionals are determining through their own lens is that the museum is a method of turning the airport into more of a place and less of a non-place. When asked about this, Mark Hall Patton said,

“A lot of people think about airports in terms of walkways and gates and checkin and baggage claim, and those are physical needs that you have to have...those give you a sense of non place. but you also have airports that say we want to be ourselves, we want to set ourselves apart. This is how we did it, by saying let’s talk about our heritage or history.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Bates, Sharon. Personal interview. 20 Mar 2013.

⁶⁹ Schaberg, Christopher. *The Textual Life of Airports*. Cointinum International Publishing Group: New York, NY. 2012

⁷⁰ Hall-Patton, Mark. Personal interview. 11 Feb 2013.

Many airports are now trying to distinguish themselves for this reason and museums are just one way.

IMPLICATIONS/FUTURE STUDY

The implications of these findings are that museums can do very successful work in a nontraditional and non-museologically focused location, where the visitor is “serendipitous, as opposed to intentional,”⁷¹ as Schwarzzer put it. Contemplating on the case studies suggests that what makes a nontraditional location appropriate for good museum work is reflexivity between the museum and the intended locale. In the instance of airports, this reflexivity manifests in their architectural magnitude, civic representation, inherent links to tourism and cultural exchange, and histories as places of observation and wonder.

With regard to architecture, many airports and museums are designed by world-renowned architects and lauded for their design. In both places the buildings can be grandiose and cathedral-esque. Their high ceilings and open spaces make good places for large art installments, and indeed both are utilized for that function. Further illustrating the connection between airport architecture and museums, the architect Curtis Fentress, whose firm has designed six airports globally including Sea-Tac had a travelling exhibition made of his work. The exhibit is traveling to art museums, several in the cities where he has built airports. The exhibit is called *Now Boarding: Fentress Airports + the Architecture of Flight*, and “weaves the past, present, and future of airport design into a captivating museum exhibition that speaks to the visitors' emotion and intellect.”⁷² We find many museums whose structures are similarly considered works unto themselves and the Canadian design publication, *Azure*, “in its cover story on the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco, blazoned the headline, ‘Herzog and DeMeuron’s

⁷¹ Schwarzzer, Marjorie. Now Boarding: Airport Museums and the Global Audience. Museum News, May/June 2001. 8.

⁷² “Now Boarding Exhibit.” Fentress Architects. <http://www.fentressarchitects.com/edge/now-boarding-exhibit/>

new DeYoung Museum is a work of art itself.”⁷³ Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim and Frank Ghery’s Experience Music Project are other well-known examples of this.

Schwarzer perfectly sums up the connection between museums and airports as forms of civic representation. She writes, “Both are symbols of civic status; many cities proclaim in the same breath that they have an international airport and world-class museums. Both are gateways to a metropolis, with airport serving as entry and exit point and museum serving as interpreter.”⁷⁴ Cities often define their quality by the features and amenities they offer visitors and denizens. A superior airport and “world class” museums as public amenities represent the city in which they exist. Although this research only addressed airports with their own exhibition programs, many other airports invite local institutions into the airport to create exhibits – like an entire program modeled like Albany’s exhibition case program. For those institutions it is great marketing and for the airport it is unifying itself with the city’s cultural offerings. This instant pairing of the two as a traveler gets off a plane helps to instantly convey a sense of the city.

In that same vein, airports and museums both have a direct relationship with tourism and cultural exchange. Nearly four fifths of all U.S. leisure travelers participate in cultural and/or heritage activities while traveling.⁷⁵ Additionally, half “of U.S. adults reported traveling by air for leisure trips taken between August 2008 and July 2009.”⁷⁶ It is a symbiotic relationship where museums cater to tourists and airports are a necessary element of many tourists’ journey.

Lastly, Museums are places of wonder, observation, and introspection. Airports, though less obviously, also elicit these actions and feelings. Historically people visited airports just to

⁷³ Francis, Richard L. “The Explosion of Museum Architecture.” GlobalProvince.com <http://www.globalprovince.com/museumarchitecture.htm>

⁷⁴ Schwarzer, Marjorie. Now Boarding: Airport Museums and the Global Audience. Museum News, May/June 2001. 1.

⁷⁵ “Museum Facts.” American Alliance of Museums. <http://www.aam-us.org/about-museums/museum-facts>

⁷⁶ “Travel Facts and Statistics.” U.S. Travel Association. <http://www.ustravel.org/news/press-kit/travel-facts-and-statistics>

watch the planes take off and land, and ponder the modern-day miracle of flight. Anne Lindbergh, aviator and wife to Charles Lindbergh understood the power of flight and wrote, “Flying was a very tangible freedom. In those days, it was beauty, adventure, discovery -- the epitome of breaking into new worlds.”⁷⁷ Literature suggests that museums also grant the opportunity to travel and break into new worlds, or more intellectually that “museum visits can be a form of transformational travel, [where] we are changed by our intentionally sought encounters with the unknown.”⁷⁸

If museums wanted to create solid and effective exhibits outside of a traditional museum setting, it behooves the institution to identify key areas of reciprocity. In other nontraditional spaces that have housed museums or exhibitions, such as malls, libraries, and casinos, it is likely there was a clear reciprocity in the areas outlined, and probably additional shared qualities as well

⁷⁷ Lindbergh, Anne Morrow. Hour Of Gold, Hour Of Lead: Diaries And Letters Of Anne Morrow Lindbergh, 1929-1932. 1973. Reprint. Mariner Books: New York, NY. Print. 1993.

⁷⁸ Pivnick, Billie A. “A Museum Visitor’s Guide to the Universe.” *Curator*. IVol. 53n3 (2010) 359.

LIMITATIONS

As an exploratory study, various limitations were discovered as the research evolved. The largest limitation was discovering that the subject matter was richer and broader than the initial scope of the research. At the onset of the data collection period and through much of the collection, the intent of the research was to discover the exhibition methods of airport museums with regard to the unique visitor. As mentioned in the common trends, the airports tended to not be significantly impacted by the unique visitor and it was revealed how complex and different the institutions are in areas beyond exhibition. So the limitation that arose out of this was that the methodology was did not speak to the findings as directly as it could have. Time is another large limitation. If there had been more time to revisit with the sites and develop a more robust line of questioning the findings would have been more clearly discussed. Also, it would have been helpful to have more time to talk to more people.

CONCLUSION

The research suggests that museums occur at airports when the airport has the opportunity to expand and decides to highlight the cultural capital around them as part of that expansion. The museums are all intrinsically linked to the region's offerings (artistic or historical). The museums are have varied funding methods but are tied to the airport's funding in some way.

Airport museums are unique in their specific missions, but generally aim to produce quality exhibitions, educate, entertain, and take the airport from non-place to place. Having exhibitions in the space appears to provide a value to the airport, but the value is challenging to quantify in dollars or articulate succinctly. With regard to exhibition, the research showed that the unique type of visitorship does not affect the content of the exhibit, and that the museums can count on having one of the largest audiences in the state they are operating in. The research also illustrated characteristics of nontraditional venues that allow for museum work, and the idea that these shared characteristics are a signifier of a viable nontraditional museum space.

As an exploratory study, the work here has only peeled the first layer off of what these institutions' operations and exhibitions look like. Any one of the facets that play into these museums' successes and uniqueness – collections, relation to airport's business model, use of space, and so forth – could all ultimately be its own study. Furthermore, though the institutions have much in common, they are also idiosyncratic in how they approach some aspects of their work. Existing in the airport atmosphere makes these institutions and the challenges they face different from standard museums. If the trend of airports including museums in their realm continues, then the topic should be explored further, building upon the research that forms this

baseline understanding of what airport museums are, how they work, and what potential they have.

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