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## Tropical twist

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A silent but can't-miss menagerie of manatees, roseate spoonbills and anhingas has taken refuge in the pristine white corridors of Port of Miami-Dade terminals. No, this isn't a bizarre breach of security. These creatures have been captured in photography, sculpture and mosaics at the port, marking the most recently completed public art works commissioned by Miami-Dade Art in Public Places.

For cruise ship passengers, their cameras loaded and suitcases brimming with swimsuits and sunscreen, these artworks are a breed apart from usual memories that wind up in most tourists' photo albums. They make up a different sort of baggage, the kind you can't pack or buy in souvenir shops, but you might carry the best ones around in your mind even after your cruise has docked for the last time.

Call them Miami mementos, with an artfully populist twist. As public art, they're dedicated to a few of the special eras and places stamped into the heritage of this port city perched at the Caribbean's edge.

"There was no central theme, but I think the spirit we were looking for was to have projects that would be evocative of marine life, nautical themes and the excitement of travel," says Ivan Rodriguez, executive director of Miami-Dade Art in Public Places.

In December, the agency unveiled these five series of artworks for terminals 3, 4 and 5 at the Port of Miami-Dade, which were commissioned for a \$455,470. Among them are two by Miami-based artists Lydia Rubio and Carolina Sardi; the others are glass mosaics by Deborah Brown, photographic images of manatees and the like by Karen Glaser, and an undulating set of blue concrete benches by Nitin Jayaswal.

There are lots of colorful evocations of Florida fauna in this group, though Sardi's series is disappointing for the way it gets bogged down and boxed in by metallic outlines of baggage and directional arrows. Yet another project is an exceptional, buoyant blend of painting and sculpture.

### COLUMBUS INSPIRED

**This blended piece is Rubio's *All Night Long, We Heard Birds Passing in Terminal 3*. It travels beyond a rendition of nautical resources to a destination that's more reflective, while also delivering a historical punch. And compared to other projects in this series, it makes the most exciting use of the experience of traversing the terminals' lengthy white corridors.**

**Rubio was inspired by a line she found in Christopher Columbus' journals. On Oct. 9, 1492, as his ships neared the Bahamas, he wrote "All night long, we heard birds passing." This was a sure sign that landfall was near; in fact three days later Columbus and his crew reached an island they called San Salvador, their first encounter with the New World.**

**In this brief note unknowingly anticipating a hugely momentous event, these birds signaled the travelers' coming transition from sea to land. Their beating wings and soaring silhouettes foretold a new phase in a long journey so fraught with good and bad.**

**Quoting this line in aluminum letters spaced along the wall of the entire corridor, the artist uses Columbus' concise statement to anchor a visual poem yielding a story of change that can speak to any traveler. It's narrated by exquisitely painted skylscapes of night and day, as well as by sculptures of birds and boats imaginatively articulated in airy sweeps and curls of silver.**

**Positioned at varying heights and along intersecting diagonals, this mix of text, paintings, sculpture and simple white wall space all keeps your eye gliding forward. As you walk, you can follow this visual poem to its conclusion -- a circular painting of blue, gently clouded sky. This is shaped like the view from a ship's porthole, but also like the earth travelers still share with birds and boats.**

**And it's the first painting in this work to offer what seems like a complete view. Previous scenes, switching gradually from midnight spangled with stars to daytime, are painted on geometric slices and slivers of aluminum panels. Occasionally they bear navigational markings, but most of all they recreate the way a destination only gradually drifts into full view.**