

# Airport mural celebrates state's diversity

By STEVEN TONTHAT  
Oregon Public Broadcasting

At first glance, Eugene artist Liza Mana Burns' latest mural is a bright and colorful panorama depicting Oregon's diverse landscape.

However, the work, titled "Celebrate Oregon!" actually contains images of 127 seemingly random objects: a wine bottle, a Chinook salmon, a comic book, the Siuslaw Bridge — all on display at Portland International Airport's Concourse B, near Alaska Airlines gates.

Individually, the objects depicted in the mural might seem inconsequential. But take a step back and you'll realize that every one of them represents a part of Oregon's history.

At the bottom left corner is a beer glass, a nod to Oregon's reputation as being at the forefront of the craft beer industry.

Shift your eyes to the right, and you might find the books "The Left Hand of Darkness" by Ursula K. Le Guin and "Only What We Could Carry" by Lawson Fusao Inada, two of Oregon's most prominent writers.

Suddenly, the mural's message becomes clear: Oregon isn't a homogenous place.

Much like it's diverse geography, the state is a collection of different people and customs that come together to form a giant cultural mosaic.

"You think culture is opera and ballet but it's everything. It's history, it's language, it's dance, it's food, it's Indigenous culture," said Burns, the mural's creator.

While working on the project, Burns said, she learned a lot about aspects of Oregon's history that she was unaware of growing up.

"I didn't know who York was, which is embarrassing to say," Burns said, in reference to the African American man who was an



Athena Delene

Liza Mana Burns paints her mural, 'Celebrate Oregon!'

integral part of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. "So we got to include him. I didn't know about the city of Vanport. So I learned a lot of pieces about Oregon history."

Vanport was the state's second largest city in the 1940s, before completely disappearing after a catastrophic flood in 1948.

Burns said that the most challenging part of the project was making sure to include all aspects of Oregon's history and culture.

She admitted that being a 32-year-old white woman meant that her worldview was inherently limited. So she reached out to various community leaders to learn about what she might be missing or getting wrong. "I

said, 'I would like to work with people from the community to say, OK, what symbols are we missing?'"

Burns worked with volunteer cultural content experts like Chuck Sams, a member of the Oregon Cultural Trust board and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Sams was recently named head of the National Park Service.

"He was helping with selection of the Indigenous symbols and he brought up the American Indian movement. So we looked up that symbol and included that symbol," Burns said.

She also worked with Linda Castillo,

the diversity, equity and inclusion manager at the Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization.

"She came up with the hummingbird and a sunflower, which are two symbols that I didn't know had cultural meaning to Hispanic Oregonians," Burns said.

The hummingbird, she discovered, is treasured for its almost magical qualities and is an important symbol for the Mexican and Indigenous communities.

The sunflower has been used in Hispanic culture as ornaments, a food source and as medicine.

Through those conversations, as well as many others, Burns selected the 127 elements that represented a part of Oregon's culture that, when looked at as a whole, make up the entire state.

Viewers can scan a special QR code with their phone that will lead to an interactive key to help decipher the meanings of the symbols.

The mural is the result of an 18-month long project by Burns and the Oregon Cultural Trust to commemorate the trust's 20th anniversary.

The Oregon Cultural Trust was created in 2001 by the state Legislature and funds multiple arts and cultural projects across the state. According to the trust's communications manager, Carrie Kikel, the fund has raised more than \$74 million for arts and culture programs.

The trust is partially funded through a cultural tax credit, where a private donor will receive a tax credit for donating to the trust and any of the 1,500 cultural organizations across the state.

"In establishing the trust, the Legislature was saying to Oregonians: 'We will fund culture with state dollars, but only if Oregonians tell us it matters to them,'" Kikel said.

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K A V Y V C K : A Q Z H Z N U S Q W .  
Saturday's Cryptoquip: GUY WHO GIVES CANS OF DECAFFEINATED COFFEE TO FOLKS EVERYWHERE FOR THE HOLIDAYS: SANKA CLAU.  
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X H V J V O K Q X L E V T H K M O X L C X  
K A Y K M Q B X V E Q E I N I E K H M K B T W .  
E C S X W W Y X ' W N B N E H - E N V .  
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