

## Crossrail art reveals blue-sky thinking



It is not quite the Vatican's Sistine Chapel, rather it is the new Crossrail station at Paddington in London. But if you look up when jostling to catch your train, you will at least be looking at art.

"The Cloud Index", a 120m-long glazed glass canopy, is a vision of the sky depicting 25

different types of clouds in the style of the Romantic landscape artists John Constable and William Turner.

Designed by Spencer Finch, the American artist who designed pieces for the National September 11 Memorial Museum and the High Line park in New York, "The Cloud Index" is one of a series of artworks being planned for London's new £14.8bn railway.

Crossrail — recently renamed the Elizabeth Line — has teamed up with private galleries including the Gagosian, White Cube and Sadie Coles to deliver art work to six central London stations on the 26-mile east-west line, from Reading in Berkshire to Shenfield in Essex.

Ossian Ward, head of content at the Lisson Gallery, which is working with Crossrail at Paddington, said there would be something "beautifully light and transcendental about seeing the clouds as you set off on your journey".

"Public art often goes wrong when they put something there that wasn't meant to be or it's designed by a committee, but Spencer Finch has been working with the Crossrail architects and design team on the project from the beginning," Mr Ward said.

Mr Finch has drawn the clouds using pastels on paper, which have been transposed digitally on to glass. Passengers will also be able to look through the glass so there will be "clouds on clouds", added Mr Ward.

The art programme is being paid for entirely through private sponsorship, with more than £5m secured so far and more being sought. The City of London Corporation is matching contributions up to the value of £3.5m.

Terry Morgan, chairman of Crossrail, said the programme “builds on the longstanding association between London’s transport network and the arts.”

Eleanor Pinfield, head of Art on the Underground, a similar scheme for Transport for London, says the capital has used art at its metro stations since the 1920s, when Henry Moore, Eric Gill and Jacob Epstein produced work for St James Park station.

Nevertheless, the trend has come and gone. “There was a moment in the late-1970s and 1980s when there was significant use of art in the London Underground — think of David Gentleman installed in 1979 at Charing Cross,” said Ms Pinfield. But before that, during the war, the practice slowed, “and there is a notable absence [of art] on the Jubilee line extension [built in the 1990s], which focused on the architecture”.

Further afield, notable examples of metro stations with vibrant art include Moscow, Stockholm, New York and Cologne. “There is prestige for international cities in having high-quality international art,” says Ms Pinfield.

The question is “how do you take a large infrastructure space and humanise it? Metro stations can be busy and crowded so it’s about bringing that sense of uplift and beauty. In some ways it’s distracting us from an uncomfortable psychological space and playing with it.”

Mr Spencer’s work at Paddington, along the Eastbourne Terrace facade, which will be one of the first stations to open in 2018, has been sponsored by Heathrow Limited, the airport owners. The developers Canary Wharf Group are backing the work at Canary Wharf station, while Derwent and Almacantar London, also developers, are sponsoring the art at Tottenham Court Road.

Trains will start running on Crossrail next year, with the service running fully in 2019.