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Murals by late Brazilian artist to hang at Miami International

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Two huge, brightly colored murals by the late Brazilian artist Carybé, which were salvaged after hanging for nearly half a century at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, will soon be on permanent display at Miami International Airport.

After removing the artwork from the American Airlines terminal at JFK, and undergoing nine months of painstaking restoration at a cost of \$2 million paid by Odebrecht Construction, the murals have been installed at Miami International's South Terminal.

Donated to Miami-Dade County by American, the artwork will be unveiled to the public for the first time on June 25.

"This was an unplanned but very welcome addition to our terminal," said Miami-Dade Aviation Director José Abreu. "It's a nice welcome for passengers."

The 16.5-foot by 51-foot murals were created by the late Carybé -- whose real name was Hector Julio Páride Bernabó -- after he won both first and second prizes in a competition to bring public art to JFK.

Carybé, who died in 1997, was born in Argentina in 1911 and moved to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1919. When he was in a Rio Boy Scout troop, he received the nickname Carybé, a fresh water fish, for which he later became known worldwide. In 1950, Carybé moved to Salvador, Bahia, and became a Brazilian citizen. Much of his work reflects the vibrant colors, multi-ethnic culture and religious traditions of Bahia.

At MIA, one of his murals depicts dancers from popular festivals throughout Latin America. The other shows individuals exploring the American West. Both are in the tradition of artists Rufino Tamayo and Diego Rivera, said Yolanda Sánchez, director of airport fine arts and cultural affairs.

Carybé used oil on canvas and adorned the works with gold leaf, glass, mirrors, buttons and hundreds of coins. He used a variety of techniques to create different surfaces, Sánchez said.

Yet the artwork, *Rejoicing and Festivals of the Americas* and *The Discovery and Settlement of the West*,

was at risk of being destroyed because the American Airlines terminal at JFK was slated to be demolished in 2007. The artwork was attached to the terminal walls.

A sureptitious turn of events, which began with a skycap at JFK, led to the artwork's salvation and restoration, said Renata Pinheiro, marketing manager for Odebrecht, part of a joint venture involved in massive construction at MIA.

American Airlines baggage porter Darren Haggard mentioned that the art would be lost to a Brazilian passenger, Beatrice Esteve. Luckily, the passenger happened to know a board member of Odebrecht, Gilberto Sá.

When she returned to Brazil, she called Sá, who personally knew Carybé and his family.

That set off the process that later involved local executives from Odebrecht, American Airlines and county leaders.

Sá contacted Gilberto Neves, Miami-based chief executive of Odebrecht in the United States, who contacted Peter Dolara, American Airlines' senior vice president for Miami, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Once the murals were removed from JFK, it took a team of six people nine months to restore the paintings at a warehouse with 25-foot ceilings in the Bronx, said Timothy Burica, owner of Burica Fine Art Conservation, who oversaw the project.

The process involved cleaning, removing old coatings, and re-painting with the original colors.

"They were faded and in poor shape, and we basically brought them back to life," Burica said.

Yet neither American, MIA nor Odebrecht could provide an estimate for the artwork's value.

The last appraisal was done several years ago, when the murals were still at JFK.

According to the website ArtNet, the highest price paid at auction recently for one of Carybé paintings was \$43,103. *Sapateiro*, an oil on wood painting from 1980, is 24 inches by 18 inches. It was sold by James Lisboa Escritorio de Arte, in Sao Paulo, on June 10, 2008.

To transfer the murals to Miami, both pieces of art had to be removed, and each cut into six panels of 16.5 feet by 8.5 feet, then crated and trucked to a warehouse in Miami.

Each panel weighed 2,700 pounds, and the walls of the South Terminal had to be reinforced to hold them.

The murals could only fit in the South Terminal, where 20-foot-tall structural columns, hold them up, attached in four places, said Doug Creel, senior superintendent for Odebrecht Construction. It took eight months just to design, engineer and fabricate the structural reinforcement for the panels, he said.

Passengers and visitors will find the enormous murals between the second and third floors of the South Terminal, near the international greeters' lobby. A kiosk will be set up with information and a video on Carybé, the history of the artwork and the conservation project to restore it.

"It's going to give it another life," said Max Fajardo, Miami-Dade Deputy Aviation Director.

`` It had a life in another facility, and now it has a new life."

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