



A new art installation by Rico Gatson is brightening up Penn Station

The installation was inspired by Indigenous and African patterns.

By Ian Kumamoto | 26 January 2024



Photograph: By David Plakke / Courtesy of Amtrak

If you're like most New Yorkers, then you probably try to avoid going through the old Penn Station at all costs — it's hectic, windowless and no amount of Dunkin' Donuts could conceivably make it enticing. But now, there's an actual good reason to walk through: The new and extremely colorful art installation by artist Rico Gatson.

Located in the Upper-Level Main Rotunda between the 8th Avenue Amtrak Departure Concourse and 7th Avenue NJ TRANSIT Concourse, it's hard to miss the station's latest addition. The art installation, named "Untitled (Collective Light Transfer)," features a series of shapes and vibrant colors that convey a type of rhythmic movement and light up the usually-gloomy space.

Gatson drew inspiration from Native American and African Indigenous cultures for the colors and patterns. Parts of the installation resemble totem poles, and he wanted to infuse the space with a sense of spirituality and tranquility, while also reflecting the dynamic movement and political consciousness of the city itself. It's a clashing contradiction of concepts, just like New York — the constant push and pull between work and play, silence and noise, rootedness and rootlessness.



Photograph: By David Plakke / Courtesy of Amtrak

“I really wanted to kind of try to do something that didn’t so much brighten the space in the physical sense, but more so bring calmness to the space,” Gatson tells *Time Out New York*. He thinks that the state of the world necessitates art that makes us pause. “It’s a real honor and privilege to be able to activate a space like this in the center of the city. I feel that as much as anything, this is about the experience of the commuters.”

The artwork, which covers several pillars and a large wall, features triangular-shaped patterns in vibrant hues surrounded by stripes of black and gray.

This is the work of Art at Amtrak, an initiative that started in 2022 that commissions exhibitions for Penn Station by artists from New York and New Jersey. Other artists who have been highlighted in the space include Shoshanna Weinberger, David Rios Ferreira, and Derrick Adams.

But beyond the stories that exist within the art itself is a story of a New York artist who has gotten a chance to transform one of the most iconic spaces in the city.

“I’ve visited Penn Station, obviously taken trains here, and when you’re here you kind of cue Jay-Z’s *Empire State of Mind*,” the New York-based artist says. “I feel like I’ve arrived, this is a moment. I’m a New Yorker.”

Gatson’s artwork is going to be on display at Penn Station for the next six months.