Arts & Humanities

6 Major Artworks You Might Not Know Were Created by Columbians

From sculptures to subway art, these permanent installations in the New York City metro area were conceived by alumni and faculty.

By
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|
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Ursula von Rydingsvard

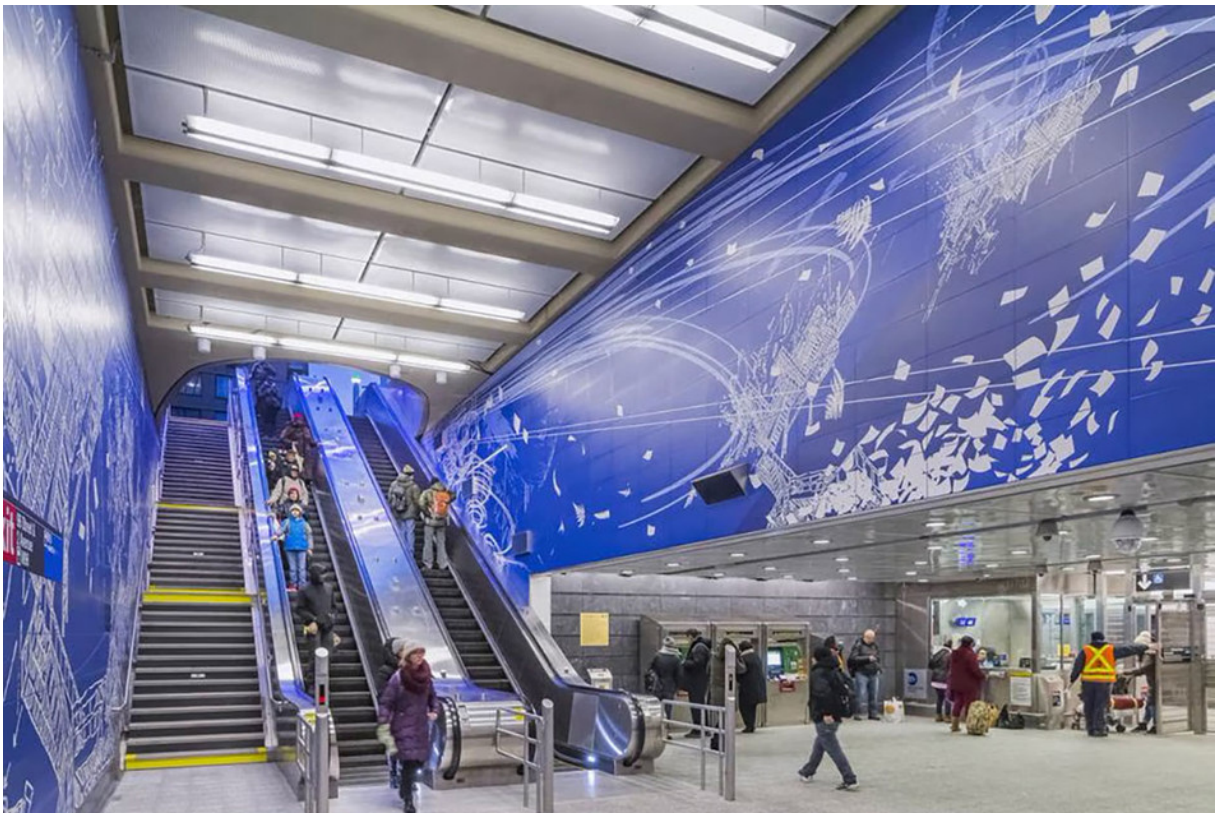
Ona

Reminiscent of a flame, tornado, or stalactite (depending on who you ask), this 12,000-pound bronze sculpture at the entrance of the Barclay's Center in Brooklyn is the creation of Ursula von Rydingsvard '75SOA. *Ona*, which means "she" in Polish, was installed outside the arena in 2013. Since breaking onto the scene in the 1970s, von Rydingsvard has been featured in numerous exhibitions across the United States and internationally. A solo show at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut is planned for 2025.

Nina Cooke John (DreamPlay / Cesar Melgar / City of Newark Press Office)

Shadow of a Face

This monument to abolitionist Harriet Tubman was created by Nina Cooke John '98GSAPP, a Jamaica-born architect and the founder of Studio Cooke John. The structure in downtown Newark was unveiled in 2023 and includes a timeline of Tubman's life and a relief of her face. Cooke John, an adjunct assistant professor at Columbia's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, previously created the interactive work *Point of Action* for the Flatiron Public Plaza Design Installation initiative in 2020.



Sarah Sze (Jeff Goldberg)

Blueprint for a Landscape

Columbia School of the Arts professor Sarah Sze was one of three artists chosen to beautify the first phase of the 2nd Avenue subway extension. For the 96th Street station on the Upper East Side, which opened in 2017, Sze conceived *Blueprint for a Landscape*, an installation meant to capture the frenetic energy of the city. “I wanted all the entrance ways to this subway station to mirror how we move through space,” Sze has said about the work.

Mary Ann Unger

Ode to Tatlin

Mary Ann Unger ’75SOA, a New Jersey-born artist known for her large-scale abstract sculptures, was commissioned to create this 1991 installation outside the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College. The colorful steel structure, which serves as a gateway to the school’s entrance, references the never-built “Tatlin's Tower” designed by Russian-Soviet architect Vladimir Tatlin. Unger, a former Guggenheim fellow whose work continues to appear in exhibitions in and outside of New York City, lived and worked out of a 2,000-square-foot East Village loft until she died in 1998.

Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya (findingsproject.com)

A Cluster of Enigmas

Painted in 2020, this celestial mural in Fort Greene, Brooklyn by interdisciplinary artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya ’10CC is an homage to the “bold, mysterious, and irrepressible” women of New York City. Phingbodhipakkiya, who studied neuroscience at Columbia College, says she was inspired by the research of Jackie Faherty, an astronomer at the American Museum of Natural History, and by Josephine English (pictured second from left), the first Black woman to open a private medical practice in New York City. Phingbodhipakkiya’s colorful murals can also be found in Denver, Albuquerque, Seattle, and other cities in the United States and abroad.

Ann Gillen (Wade Zimmerman / Ann Gillen / Artists Rights Society NY)

Flying Red

This aluminum sculptor by Ann Gillen ’69SOA has stood outside the office tower at 909 Third Avenue in Midtown Manhattan since 1987. Gillen, whose other public works include wall art for the Lincoln Center garage and a stairwell installation for CUNY’s graduate school of journalism, originally designed Flying Red out of her Soho loft in 1973. As the artist told *Columbia Magazine* in 2023, the energetic work “recalls an array of figures that combine to form a body splitting apart.”

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