

Montreal subways a unique showcase for the city's artists

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Riders on Montreal's metro can now admire the longest underground murals in Canada — if not in all America — with the opening yesterday of extended lines to Vendome, Snowdon and Villa-Maria stations.

Just as spectacular as Claude Guite's four 500-foot murals at Snowdon is Marcelle Ferron's combined blown-glass window and stainless steel sculpture at Vendome which now becomes the major work of art of the ever-expanding metro system.

Artwork at station Villa-Maria — for which Andre Leonard served as both architect and artist — is on a smaller scale. But it's the most successful of all metro stations from the point of view of integrated, overall decorative design.

Artists consulted

There's one obvious reason for the high quality of art in these large, airy, new stations. The artists were in on the project from the beginning — they were not parachuted onto the scene after the completion of architectural plans.

Serge Melancon, a civil engineer and specialist in the use of the concrete in the stations — built by the Bureau de Transport de Montreal for the Commission de Transport de la Communaute Urbaine de Montreal — emphasized the importance of the

intimate collaboration between architect and artist, on a tour of the stations last week.

And Jean Dumonthier, chief architect of the metro system, explained that "artists were called in much too late for the first stations that were built. Now, the architect selects his artist and submits the designs to a three-man jury to make sure the art is integrated with the station, that it's permanent and can be easily maintained.

Had assistants

Guite, a 37-year-old artist best-known to the public for his outdoor murals on some 29 buildings, used acrylic-latex made especially for the 130 joined panels — eight ft. high — which are composed of a concrete-asbestos mixture. Each mural took 3½ weeks for Guite and two assistants working with sprayguns, each one assigned to a color and with the design traced on the panels.

Guite, asked if he considered his style abstract lyricism, laughed and replied: "Sure, if you think so. I am self-taught and don't go for fancy titles."

The two sprightly murals are winter on the first level and spring on the lower level. When Line 5 opens later on passengers will see the summer and autumn murals. The gay spring mural contains stylized apple and pine trees, lilacs, shrubs and other flowers, all in attractive pastel blues, greens, yellows and pinks. They seem sure to make the weariest metro rider smile and feel a little better.

Beaulieu also had the happy idea of creating natural landscape scenes near the platforms by exposing outcroppings of the actual limestone rock on which the metro is constructed.

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