



Lobby Art for the 21st Century

Dynamic digital installations in office building lobbies can help lure office tenants and engage their employees and visitors, says Emily Webster, head of Media Architecture at ESI Design.

By Emily Webster

In 1937, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. commissioned Josep Maria Sert to paint a 16,000-square-foot mural in the lobby of 30 Rockefeller Center. Titled American Progress, the masterpiece set a new standard for how 20th-century corporations would use artwork in their lobbies to not just impress and awe visitors and employees but to define their power and influence in the world.

Fast forward 80 years to a new world where the lobbies of office properties are undergoing a stunning transformation that would make it almost unrecognizable to yesterday's titans of business.



Emily Webster

The days of static oil paintings and motionless sculptures that can signal permanence and rigidity are fading into the past ... and for good reason. People spend most of their lives at work and walking by the same artwork every day quickly becomes routine. Even the greatest masterpiece can dissolve into wallpaper after repeated viewings.

Now imagine if the artwork in the lobby or outdoor plaza changes as you pass by. Or if a sculpture transformed before your very eyes based on real-time data. Or if a different, entirely original digital mural welcomed you each morning driven by an advanced algorithm. Suddenly the office becomes a place of small delights and surprises, creating a fresh and evolving workplace. Fortunately, sweeping advances in display and software technologies are making it possible for commercial real estate developers, leasers, and investors to create dynamic, interactive art installations that draw tenants and engage their employees and visitors.

But the benefits do not end there. Workplaces that make the most of dynamic art are not only more interesting for prospective tenants—they help tenants attract and retain talent. In fact, a 2017 Capital One survey found that a majority of Millennial professionals highly desire artwork and creative imagery in their workplace. Even better, a 2017 study at South Korea's Honkgik University revealed that seeing works of art, and briefly reflecting upon it, enhances employees' creative capabilities.

So what type of digital artwork is right for your office property?



Terrell Place in Washington D.C.

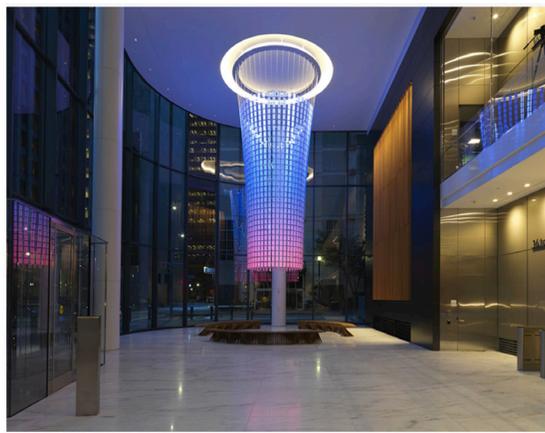
RESPONSIVE ARTWORK

Artwork that subtly and elegantly responds to tenants and visitors as they pass by is a surefire way to ensure that the daily journey from the street to the desk offers moments of charm and unpredictability.

In the lobby of Beacon Capital Partners-owned The Crossroads in San Mateo, California, a deer may run away or a bear may pause and lift its head as you enter. Powered by a customized version of Unreal Engine, the video game software behind hits like Fortnite that renders 3D simulations with uncannily accurate physics, the lobby features reactive-media panoramas in the style of vintage California travel posters that evolve constantly, responding to the presence of visitors, time of day and live weather data.

Across the country in Washington, D.C.'s Beacon-owned Terrell Place a similar experience unfolds but with a uniquely Washingtonian twist. As employees pass by a 1,700-square-foot mural in the lobby, the capital's iconic cherry trees bud, bloom and blossom in time with the seasons until eventually their petals drop off. Depending on the time of year, when people pause in front of the awe-inspiring displays, butterflies emerge and flutter or icicles grow on tree branches. A hurried walk past the digital art installation may even cause a snow-covered branch to shake and fall. The result is an ongoing opportunity to discover new layers of details in the art, with many employees coming to enjoy figuring out how the installation responds and evolves.

Reactive art can also be used to bring a brand to life in striking and unexpected ways. For Nespresso, artist Daniel Rozin created a large circular sculpture with 832 motor-powered tiles decorated with recycled aluminum coffee pod lids that react when a person walks by. While Rozin's piece was commissioned for a pop-up boutique, inspired sculptures like this could find a permanent home in office properties.



The Tower at PNC Plaza

The Tower at PNC Plaza

POWERED BY DATA

Visualizing data related to your company is a smart and effective way to create compelling artwork that creates an emotional connection with your company's mission. Translating real-time numbers into art means that it will also be constantly changing and refreshing, offering observers a chance to engage with it in new ways.

The Tower at PNC Plaza in Pittsburgh is one of the greenest high-rises ever built. Its lobby showcases The Beacon, a beautiful, 24-foot-tall light art installation that serves a critical purpose: interpreting and visualizing data in real-time from the building's advanced green systems and current environmental conditions like weather, occupancy and sunlight. Through ever-changing light, color, text and sound patterns, The Beacon reflects the tower's energy and water consumption, water recycling, sun exposure, natural ventilation, waste, composting, and use of artificial light. Employees and visitors can track what the various patterns signify on the chandelier-like sculpture about the building's performance through the building's website or on tablets offered to guests in the lobby.

A massive media wall in the lobby of the 350 Mission Tower in San Francisco, home of Salesforce, is using data in another way: to transform the virtual life of the city into a poetic digital sculpture. Powered by free datasets from the City of San Francisco and Twitter's real-time API service, the wall creates stunning digital artwork that never stays static and creates a unique and immersive experience every single day.

With countless sources of data from proprietary to public information like weather, social media and stocks the opportunities to create for original and striking art installations are endless.

ALGORITHMS AND AI

Artificial intelligence and algorithms can also be tapped to create an always-evolving lobby art experience that doesn't require a team to produce new content for it.

The lobby of another Beacon Capital Partners building, 515 North State, features a 14-foot-wide-by-23-foot-tall digital art installation that forever 'paints' new compositions. Titled "Canvas," the site-specific work deconstructs original video footage of life in Chicago's vibrant River North neighborhood into a museum-worthy piece of contemporary art. Using custom-designed software, the installation enables locally shot footage of scenes such as boats on the Chicago River and amusement rides on Navy Pier to dissolve into abstract patterns and then slowly sharpen back into clarity. "Canvas" has the ability to generate more than 5,000 unique compositions from nearly five hours of base footage.

More and more, lobbies in office properties are being transformed by interactive art installations into experiences where tenants and their employees and visitors are engaged and choose to meet, entertain, explore, and linger. By capitalizing on new and more affordable digital display technologies and collaborating with innovative artists and designers, properties can attract tenants, keep employees happy and engaged, and put their buildings on the map as 21st-century art destinations that rival the storied lobby of 30 Rock.