

San Jose Mercury News

Giant space robot headed for San Jose

By John Woolfolk
04/16/2009

It will stand more than two stories tall, with three giant legs and propeller-tipped arms. It will sense your presence. It will watch you.

Soon, it will greet travelers arriving at Mineta San Jose International Airport in a way city officials say will be so Silicon Valley. Some visitors might be startled, especially if their in-flight movie was "War of the Worlds." Some kids will wish they had one in their bedrooms.

Meet "Space Observer," an interactive sculpture proposed for the new airport terminal by German multimedia artist Bjorn Schulke, known for works that evoke 20th-century science fiction. The City Council is expected to approve the project Tuesday at a cost of \$300,000, which will come from designated art funds.

"It's kind of like this friendly insect or robotic thing that's greeting you," said San Jose Public Art Director Barbara Goldstein. "It moves and feels like something that might fly. I think they're going to think it's the coolest thing on Earth."



Space Observer will join two other artworks previously approved for the airport's makeover, all with a technology theme. The others, approved in November, are a \$1.1 million giant mural of waving hands for the rental car garage and an electronic glass "eCloud" in the concession area of the new Terminal B opening next summer. (Because public art funds are legally earmarked for the purpose, they can't be used to help offset the city's deficit.)

Space Observer will stand in the north concourse's mezzanine area, where visitors will walk through its eight-foot-tall legs. The sculpture's "kinetic camera arms" will collect live video for display on embedded monitors within its body.

"It's going to be really iconic for the airport," Goldstein said, insisting there's nothing to be afraid of. "It won't follow you anywhere."