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Interactive Sculpture Now Inspiring Travelers and Visitors at MSP Jen Lewin's *The Aurora*: A High-Tech Art Masterpiece Reflects Minnesota Spirit



The Aurora ©2021 Jen Lewin

MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL – Years in the making, the dazzling centerpiece of a terminal transformation is now giving travelers and visitors to Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP) an ever-changing Minnesota-inspired light show.

The Aurora is a 29-foot-high glass and metal sculpture that is suspended through an oval opening between the ticketing and baggage claim levels in Terminal 1. It's a twisting aerial wave of more than 20,000 aluminum rings that house over 1,900 hand-blown glass bulbs, each with a set of LEDs within. *The Aurora* is the creation of [Jen Lewin](#), an internationally renowned new

media and interactive sculptor who led a team to hoist the sculpture into place in fall 2020, and then finished the final phases of the installation in March 2021.

“*The Aurora* is meant to bring the majestic beauty of Minnesota inside the MSP Airport—connecting each traveler to the awe-inspiring landscapes that exist in the state and demonstrating the temporary and lasting effects we have on our living environments,” said Jen Lewin. “My hope is that through discovering *The Aurora*, visitors of all ages will feel the joy, beauty and inspiration that I find in all of Minnesota’s seasons.”

“*The Aurora* is a signature artwork for the airport and our region,” said Rick King, chairman of the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC), which operates MSP. “It offers visitors an energetic lasting impression of our state and is sure to become a beloved symbol for those returning home to MSP.”

Lewin programmed the sculpture’s nearly 6,000 RGB LEDs to use live weather data to alter their color palettes to reflect Minnesota’s seasons and weather conditions, such as blues and whites in colder times, greens and yellows during spring, or oranges and reds in the fall.

Below *The Aurora*, nestled within the baggage claim floor, Lewin created an interactive cluster of reflective glass platforms that take the forms of public lakes in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, including Lake Phalen, Lake Como, Lake Nokomis and Lake of the Isles.

People walking or dancing across the lake platforms trigger swirling light and color changes beneath their feet that match the seasonal colors of *The Aurora* above.

“My hope is that soon it will be common to hear travelers say, ‘I’ll meet you at *The Aurora*,’” said Jana Webster, executive director of Airport Foundation MSP, which coordinated the project through the [Arts@MSP program](#). “This sculpture will become a kind of guiding North Star that brings world travelers together.”

The MAC, in partnership with Airport Foundation MSP, commissioned Lewin to design and create the artwork in 2018.

“It’s even more inspiring than the concept the selection committee first embraced more than three years ago,” said Brian Ryks, CEO of the MAC. “It’s an anchor element in the ongoing modernization of the terminal’s ticketing and baggage claim facilities that will inspire millions of MSP travelers for years to come.”

A 16-member Blue Ribbon Artist Selection Panel, made up of Minnesota civic and arts community leaders, Airport Foundation staff and MAC staff led the artist selection process. Lewin and her design team conducted public meetings and surveys that yielded more than 10,000 engagements or ideas to help inform her design with the goal of reflecting the region and the local and international MSP Airport community.

Video and images available upon request.

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The Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) owns and operates one of the nation's largest airport systems, including Minneapolis-St Paul International (MSP) and six general aviation airports. The MAC's airports connect the region to the world and showcase Minnesota's extraordinary culture to millions of passengers from around the globe who arrive or depart through MAC airports each year. Though a public corporation of the state of Minnesota, the organization is not funded by income or property taxes. Instead, the MAC's operations are funded by rents and fees generated by users of its airports. For more information, visit www.metroairports.org.