

# The NEW YORK Sun

VOL. 123 No. 178

Published at New York City

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2007

www.nysun.com

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\$1.00

## ARTS & LETTERS

# Windows Worth Waiting For

By VALERIE GLADSTONE  
*Special to the Sun*

When Eugenie Tung waits at Myrtle Avenue for the J train every morning, she often peers into the windows of the apartments that border the tracks. "I like to speculate on the lives of the people inside," she said recently, shivering in the cold at the New Lots Avenue station of the L train, which is now adorned with 16 luminous glass panels that she designed. "Unlike my stop, there aren't buildings close by," she said, casting an eye over the desolate surroundings. "I wanted to give riders something to look at."

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Arts for Transit commissioned the work from Ms. Tung, 30, for \$90,000 after she won a competition for the project. Launched in the 1980s, in conjunction with the MTA's huge rehabilitation program to modernize the subways, Arts for Transit

was created to oversee the selection of artists and the installation of permanent artworks in subway and commuter rail stations. The works now number in the hundreds.

Ms. Tung's panels — each approximately 48 inches tall and 29 inches wide — were fabricated in the renowned Franz Mayer stained glass studios in Munich, Germany. They are the result of six layers of cut and screen-printed glass, fused together inside a kiln under extreme heat for five days.

Part of the station's general makeover, the panels were permanently installed in the fall. "We selected Eugenie's concept," the project manager, Lydia Bradshaw, said, "because it speaks to everyone."

But the MTA commission wasn't the first plaudit for Ms. Tung. Last year, New York's National Academy Museum and School of Fine

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KONRAD FIEDLER

LOOKING IN Artist Eugenie Tung with part of '16 Windows,' her stained glass series installed at the New Lots Avenue station in Brooklyn.

A CHAT WITH THE ARTIST

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An Artist's  
World*

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Arts awarded her a fellowship to attend the Edwin Austin Abbey Mural Workshop, where she studied with the artist Grace Graupe-Pillard. "I love the way Eugenie integrates the personal and the public in her artwork," Ms. Graupe-Pillard said. "Her drawings, in their simplicity, reveal the oneness of cultures and folk with compassion and humor."

Ms. Tung's work depicts scenes of everyday life, in jewel-bright reds, blues, yellows, and greens. She grouped her subjects into two categories: before and after the commute. "I tried to choose activities that are most likely to endure the test of time, that represent the perpetual cycle of life," she said. On the Manhattan-bound platform, riders find eight panels showing people going through morning rituals — a man sips a cup of coffee while looking out the window, a boy brushes his teeth in front of a mirror, and a woman picks up a baby. Coming home after work, they step off the Canarsie-bound train to discover people engaged in evening rituals.

The artist drew on her own life for subjects. She pointed to a somewhat lonely looking man waiting for laundry to dry. "That could be my boyfriend," she said, before moving on to a panel showing the back of a woman at a desk in front of a computer screen. "And that's me because I always work at night." Farther down the platform, she paused in front of another panel depicting a woman with a watering can.

"My mother inspired this one," she said. "I don't know when she became interested in plants, but last time I visited her in Hong Kong, her apartment was full of them. Notice the windows. They aren't like ours here — they open out instead of up."

"For years I've used my apartments as the subject for my works," Ms. Tung said. "It started



EUGENIE TUNG

PICTURE SHOW A panel from Eugenie Tung's '16 Windows' at the New Lots Avenue subway station in Brooklyn.

when I wanted to send my mother pictures of where I lived. Then, I began painting over the photos and they'd get a kind of mysterious look. But I didn't realize until I did this subway project how much I like the idea of doing site-specific work. I like seeing people come up to these panels and touch them, and hear adults telling their kids what they are all about."

Born in Hong Kong, Ms. Tung became involved with art as a child, but had little patience for the way art was taught at school, as she was uninterested in the traditional practice of working on still lifes or in ceramics. At 17, she left home to live with a relative in Kennewick, Wash., where she soon quit high school, impatient again with the classes. A couple of years later, regretting her decision, she returned to school for her degree and decided to study to be an accountant.

"Everyone told me I wasn't the accountant type," she said, "but I had a couple of teachers who understood that it was possible to like both math and art." She moved to New York in 2002 and earned an MFA degree from CUNY in 2004, when she also became one of 10 recipients of the Joan Mitchell Foundation MFA grant. She also began showing in galleries all over the country as well as at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Connecticut. She now works as database manager at the New Museum.

Having conquered the subway, she now has grander aspirations. "I love airports," she said. "What I really want to do is something at JFK." Indeed, Ms. Tung's philosophy toward art fits perfectly with such public art projects. "Stumbling upon art may be the best way to appreciate it," she said. "Art anchors a place."