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14

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Art Connects Amway Center, Orlando

The trend of art in sports venues continues at Amway Center.

7 of 21



by Kyle Stack / @KyleStack

The value that a major sports venue can serve its community isn't always limited to the features of its architecture or the quality of the team playing within it. In some cases, the value is achieved by the venue practicing environmentally-safe building practices and operations. In other instances, such as at Amway Center, the home of the [Orlando Magic](#), value is delivered by the inclusion of a \$1 million art collection.

The prevalence of art in sports stadiums, arenas and ballparks isn't a new phenomenon. The subject can be traced back decades if one considers the presence that player statues, photographs and other works have held in sports venues throughout the U.S.

Yet the trend which has been taking place the last several years in professional sports is of franchises equipping their new homes with museum-quality art created specifically for that place. Some of it relates to the team, some of it to the history of the team's locale but all of it is representative of franchises making a financial and spatial commitment to art. Cowboys Stadium in Dallas and Safeco Field in Seattle are two prominent examples. Amway Center is one of the latest.

Opened in October 2010 to house the Magic and the Arena Football League's Predators, the \$480-million, 875,000-square foot Amway Center boasts an 80-foot tall main lobby, a 50-foot cable structure littered with stainless steel "raindrops" and a 180-foot outdoor tower that serves as a beacon for the downtown-based arena. But it's the art collection curated by Tracie Specia-Ventura that makes Amway a destination for more than just basketball or arena football fans.

The collection is a testament to Orlando's local artists, of which 14 contributed to a project that numbered 19 artists overall. There are 200 museum-quality photographs and 138 pieces of original work inhabiting Amway. The pieces range from mixed media to digital work to abstract paintings. They commemorate the Magic, the

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26

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team's history and the objects and places that define Orlando and Central Florida.

"Our main goal, because this is a public building, was to have the community and the spirit of the surrounding area brought to life," said Specia-Ventura, whose consultant firm, Los Angeles-based [Sports & The Arts](#), has also led projects at L.A.'s Staples Center and New Jersey's Prudential Center.

The Magic and the City of Orlando shared Specia's vision.

Building Amway's collection

Buddy Dyer, the mayor of Orlando, wanted artwork in Amway Center right from when the arena was approved in 2006, after a 5-2 vote by the Orange County commission to raise the tourism tax one cent to six cents per dollar provided most of the arena's funding. (*Orlando Magazine* reported in its October 2010 issue that the Magic contributed \$50 million to Amway's construction. The Magic are also on the hook for any cost overrun past \$480 million, which the *Orlando Sentinel* reported in its March 8 edition to be \$2 to \$10 million.)

"We wanted Amway Center to make a statement about our community," Dyer said during a phone interview. "And we did it with the architecture."

By that, he referred to the building's glass facade, the 180-foot beacon and the artwork within the arena, among other features. "I think it speaks to Orlando and, for the most part, the artists," Dyer said.

Art within Amway also provided a tie-in for other projects associated with the arena's conception. The Amway project approval in 2006 was part of a \$1.1 billion downtown revitalization effort which includes the construction of the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts and a renovation of the Citrus Bowl.

Ground was broken in late June on The Center for the Performing Arts, which is expected to cost \$354 million plus another \$71 million for land contribution and acquisition and road and site improvements, according to Mayor Dyer's office.

The City of Orlando recently completed a \$10 million initial phase in planned enhancements at the Citrus Bowl, which included structural work and lighting and technological improvements, also according to the mayor's office. The rest of the Citrus Bowl project, which will cost \$175 million, has no timeline for completion.

Dyer stated a yearning to bolster Orlando's art scene, which Specia considered vibrant even before working on the six-month Amway project. "It's such an arts community," she said, noting the five buses which, at the time of Amway's opening, traveled throughout downtown with image wraps of various art pieces from the arena.

Charles Freeman, the Senior Vice President of Business Development for the Magic, told SLAMonline that art was another way for Amway Center to engage the community. He wouldn't reveal the team's monetary investment in the art, including Specia's collection, but called it "substantial."

"We thought it was important – the culture it brings to the facility and how important it is in the city of Orlando," Freeman said via phone. "We wanted to build the best facility we could, and we felt like the artwork enhanced the facility that we had here."

Pages: 1 2 3

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