

## OAK Exhibits

Something for Everyone at Oakland International Airport



**When 13 million people walk through your house every year,** it's nice to give them something interesting to look at. OAK Exhibits, a unique partnership formed in 1998 to create a changing exhibition series at Oakland International Airport, does just that.

July 2004 marks the five year anniversary of this ongoing and flourishing relationship which has resulted in more than 25 exhibitions, all created and managed by the Oakland Museum of California's Professional Services Division. For over five years, airport patrons have enjoyed a wide range of exhibits—from the history of local rodeos and baseball's Pacific Coast League to displays of traditional Hawai'ian leis and regional wildflowers.

It began when the Director of Aviation and representatives from Aviation Marketing approached the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) for help in creating exhibits that celebrate the rich and diverse arts, cultures and history of the Bay Area. One of the first tasks for the museum was to renovate two locations at the airport to make them suitable for housing a variety of exhibitions over a long period of time. Sliding glass doors were replaced by interchangeable tracks for large-scale digital printouts; false walls were built over existing ones to protect the originals from wear and tear; windows were darkened to protect fragile objects from high light levels; exhibition lighting was installed to create an ambience for the exhibits; and exhibition cases and wall vitrines were created to display artifacts.

While renovations were underway, museum staff developed exhibition guidelines to assist in determining future programming. An Exhibition Selection Committee was formed of aviation and museum professionals whose task is to determine what exhibits will be developed each year. OMCA staff bring a variety of ideas to the committee annually. Those approved by the committee are presented to the Director of Aviation and the Museum Executive Director for final authorization. Once accepted, exhibit ideas are developed by both museum curators and outside experts, depending on the subject matter and availability.



*Dreams Aflight, 2003*

Individual OAK Exhibits logos are created for each exhibition and used in key locations throughout the airport as advertisement and to get travelers to go in search of them. Since one of the exhibit spaces is outside security checkpoint while the other is inside, exhibits are created to stand alone, yet complement each other. Each exhibit includes a curatorial statement which explains the inspiration behind the show and text panels and object labels which inform and engage passersby.

Each year, OAK Exhibits offers creative programming that reflects the community, showcases museum collections, supports local artists and is interesting and entertaining for travelers.

In celebration of Oakland International Airport's 75th anniversary, OAK Exhibits kicked off a year of aviation beginning in June of 2002. Museum staff researched, wrote and produced a 15-page commemorative brochure for distribution at various community celebrations and within the exhibit areas in the terminal buildings. *High Flying: 75 Years of Aviation Excellence* won a 2nd place award in the Airports Council International-North America's 2003 Excellence in Communications contest.



Three exhibitions were created over the course of the year to keep the celebrations going. *First Flights: Oakland's Aviation History* examined the colorful beginnings of aviation in the Bay Area. Starting with its founding in 1927, *First Flights* traced Oakland Metropolitan Airport's history through World War II to the advent of the jet age in the 1980s. Featured were record breaking events, such as the first trans-Pacific crossings and the Dole Race, along with celebrated fliers, like Charles Lindbergh, Amelia Earhart and Army Lts. Lester Maitland and Albert Hegenberger.

A second exhibition, *Dreams Aflight*, featured 21 Bay Area artists whose work is inspired by aviation themes. Curated by local arts professional Anne Austin, this exhibition clearly showed that the imagination still has a role to play in today's high tech world of aviation.

A third exhibition, *Flights of Fancy*, compared the early and ongoing role of imagination to the actual development of flying machines. Ancient Chinese kites, Mesopotamian and Egyptian gods, Greek legends and North American Indian tales all portrayed images of fanciful flight that one day made way for Leonardo da Vinci, Otto Lilienthal and the science of aviation.



*Dreams Aflight*, 2003



*First Flights*, 2002



*Flights of Fancy*, 2003



*Flights of Fancy*, 2003

Each year, OMCA develops an art exhibition to showcase the wealth of artistic talent living and working in the greater Bay Area. The first, *Art Takes*, was a collaboration with the California College of Art (CCA). Curated by Karen Tsujimoto, Senior Curator of Art at the museum, the exhibit featured work by alumni of CCA. A subsequent exhibit at the airport, *Being There: Here*, featured artists whose work was included in a larger, more comprehensive exhibition of Oakland artists on display at the museum at the same time.

With its interdisciplinary focus, the Oakland Museum of California has much to offer in California history and natural sciences as well as art. OAK Exhibits has capitalized on this expertise with exhibitions such as: *California Vacations*, a historical exploration of how Californian's traveled for leisure via the railroad, cruise ships, the automobile and the airplane; *Cowboy Up!*, a look at California's cowboy culture, then and now; *Wildflowers*, featuring East Bay Regional Parks, local wildlife photographers and specimens of the pollinators who spread the wealth over our hilltops; and *Arequipa Pottery*, created to coincide with a larger, California crafts exhibit at OMCA.



*Wildflowers*, 2000



*Arequipa Pottery*, 2001

Exhibitions also showcased some of the remarkable collections housed by the Oakland Museum of California such as: *Dorothea's Children*, black and white photographs of children taken by famed Depression-era photographer,

Dorothea Lange; *Miniature Masterpieces*, highlighting an exquisite collection of ancient snuff bottles displayed with mineral specimens from which many of the bottles were carved; and *Well-Heeled*, a selection of both designer and fun shoes from the museum's extensive costume collection.



*Well-Heeled*, 2000

Other exhibits were created or borrowed in support of the community the airport serves. *Our World: The Children of Oakland* featured beautiful photographs by Marianne Thomas. Her work documented the many different ethnic groups living in Oakland by capturing the faces and stories of their children. *The Coast League and Beyond* examined the history of baseball in the Bay Area while *East Bay Hoops* celebrated high school, college and professional basketball.

OAK Exhibits also helped the airport promote Aloha Airlines' inaugural flight to the mainland by creating the special exhibition, *Lei Aloha*, an exhibit about the history and significance of the lei in Hawai'iian culture.

*Celebrations Among Us* highlighted engaging objects used in the holiday rituals of several diverse cultures that shape and give perspective to daily life in the Bay Area. The celebrations included Chinese New Year, Hanukkah, Festival of Lights, Pow-wows, Santa Lucia, Ramadan and several others.



*Celebrations, 2003*



*Celebrations, 2003*

We also remembered September 11th by participating in an exhibition of children's artwork memorializing the tragic events two years prior. *Healing the World* traveled from Miami International to airports in Boston, Washington DC, Chicago and Phoenix before its final venue on the West Coast, in Oakland.

Over the course of the partnership, OAK Exhibits has been featured repeatedly in the airport's quarterly newsletter, *Point-to-Point* and written about in the OMCA magazine, *The Museum of California*, the American Association of Museum's publication, *Museum News* and the *Oakland Business Review*. The director of Professional Services, Cherie Newell, has been invited to speak about OAK Exhibits at two national conferences: Western Museums Association and Arts in the Airport Workshop.



*Air Strips, 2004*. Photographs by Michael Temperio

While on display, each exhibit created for the airport is featured on the museum's web site at <http://museumca.org/satellite/airport.html> and, upon closing, is archived on the site for future reference.

The past five years of OAK Exhibits have been fruitful. With over 13 million passengers annually at Oakland International Airport, the partnership has been valuable for both the airport (which benefits from the dynamic talents of one of the great California museums) as well as for the museum (which now has an important regional venue for its exhibits and an audience unparalleled).



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Since its opening in 1969, the Oakland Museum of California has become the leading cultural and educational institution on the West Coast. As the only museum devoted exclusively to the art, history and natural sciences of California, the museum represents a microcosm of the nation's most diverse and populous state. Through its special exhibits, educational services, outreach programs and permanent collections, the museum strives to inspire people of all ages to discover and explore California's rich heritage.

Among the most important challenges for cultural institutions today is to provide access and education in the language of the arts. The Oakland Museum of California's Professional Services Division (P.S.) was developed in 1998 to meet this challenge in a unique and visionary way. As a progressive arm of the institution, P.S. creatively fulfills the needs of the community while enabling the museum to share its resources and expertise beyond its physical perimeters. P.S. is committed to providing greater public access to the museum throughout the city of Oakland, the Bay Area and beyond.