

46-foot glass mural welcomes travelers at St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport

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Zach Kemper, 21, left, and Sam Kemper, 18, install the final panel in their father's 46-foot-long blown glass wall Friday in the terminal at St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport. Kentucky-based Guy Kemper was selected from a field of 45 international glass artists for the project.



[DOUGLAS R. CLIFFORD | Times]

Sunlight reflecting off a cobalt sea. Seagulls flying amid fluffy opal clouds.

That's the image artist Guy Kemper wants travelers to see as they enter St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport.

Friday, for more than six hours, Kemper and his sons Sam, 18, and Zach, 21, installed a 46-foot-wide blown glass artwork, titled *SunSkySea*, just inside the main entrance of the airport terminal. One by one, they carefully hoisted 150-pound sheets of glass into a track along the wall that separates the entryway from the security screening area.

"It makes you sort of relax," said Kemper, 51. "The idea is to make this passage to security screening a little more pleasant."

The Pinellas County Cultural Affairs Public Art Airport Project Selection Committee, in partnership with the airport, selected Kemper from a pool of 45 international glass artists.

Noreen Hodges, a member of the selection committee, said she was impressed by Kemper's personality and his portfolio.

"The minute we saw the work, that was it," Hodges said.

The \$120,000 work is part of the airport's terminal renovation project. The bulk of the project, \$110,000, was funded through the Public Art and Design Program with Penny for Pinellas funds. The rest was covered by the airport.

Kemper's art complements the terminal's new tropical theme, geared to the tourist-driven airport, said Michele Routh, the airport's community and media relations director.

Kemper, who lives in Versailles, Ky., said his new work was created using a complex ancient technique, much like many of his other artworks.

First, he painted a design that he thought would work with the architecture.

Then, he worked with master craftspeople in Germany to transform his concept into blown glass art.

At LambertsGlas, cobalt blue, opal and clear glass were blown into tubes, which were scored with a glass cutter, heated in a furnace and flattened into sheets about 2 feet by 3 feet.

Next, craftspeople at Derix Glasstudios used hydrofluoric acid to etch away layers of colored glass to replicate tones in Kemper's painting. Yellow swaths of sunshine were airbrushed over the glass. And after the sheets were fired in a kiln, slashes of white, symbolizing wind, were sandblasted on top. Glass seagulls, which turned yellow in the kiln, were added last.

Finally, each piece of glass was glued to sheets of tempered glass. All 15 sheets, each 2 1/2 feet wide by 6 feet tall, were flown from Germany to Florida and trucked from Tampa to Clearwater, Kemper said.

In a few weeks, a terrazzo medallion designed by Kemper will also be installed in the entryway near *SunSkySea*.

Kemper has created numerous private works and about 15 public art projects, including ones at O'Hare International Airport, Baltimore-Washington International Airport and Greater Orlando International Airport.

Kemper said public art projects are especially rewarding.

"It's an opportunity to create a special environment that a lot of people will enjoy and that will hopefully be around a long time."

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