

Art Now LA, October 3, 2017
Shelf Life: Art on the Fly
by Jody Zellen



Los Angeles World Airport, Terminal 6

Los Angeles World Airport (LAWA) has worked in partnership with the **City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA)** for 15 years to create exhibitions at **Los Angeles International Airport**. *“The mission of the LAWA Art Program is to enhance and humanize the travel experience by providing diverse and memorable art experiences throughout the airport. The Art Program includes temporary exhibitions, permanent installations, and cultural performances. With an emphasis on local and regional artists, the Art Program provides access to an array of contemporary artworks that reflect and celebrate the region’s creative caliber.”*

At any given moment in one or all of the eleven exhibition sites located in Terminals 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and **Tom Bradley International Terminal**, passengers can peruse contemporary art works and installations, momentarily taking their mind off their travels. Often, the selected artists create site-specific projects.

In September 2017, Santa Monica based artist **Eileen Cowin** installed a large-scale photographic mural in the departure level of Terminal 6, up the stairs behind the Alaska Airlines ticket counters. Entitled *Shelf Life— read between the lines: a visual poem, a family portrait, a collision of mementos*, this expansive and thoughtful photographic piece spans a 63-foot wall presenting a sequence of images that poetically address increased anxieties over the current political climate. The piece uses sections from several bookshelves, each one containing a sequence of carefully arranged book spines juxtaposed with family photographs and typical keepsakes — toys, vases, cameras, pencil jars and a dictionary.

The dictionary is open to the immigration page, directing the reading of the work and subtly calling attention to those who can and cannot easily move through airports. While other words pop from the dictionary page: imminent, immoral, immortal, etc., Cowin's curation of the book titles is what gives this work its resonance. The books depicted in the composited images segue from a section on love to books with titles that are directives: **Look, See, Unless, Even So**. Also included are the titles, **Citizen, Strangers, Identity, Bearing Witness, Shifting Tides**, that when read in sequence have poetic as well as political resonance. Cowin's book choices touch on time: **Believing is Seeing, Waiting** as well as place: **Last Exit to Brooklyn, Night in Bombay**. The sequence approaches its conclusion with **The Book of Goodbyes, Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay**, and ends with **Home Ground and Family Happiness**.

inserts props suggesting family life and the comforts of home among the book spines— some perfectly upright, others leaning in myriad directions. The work suggests that the universal stories of love, family, life and travel should be accessible to everyone, yet for those who cannot venture far from home, books are another way to experience the world.

For additional information please visit:
www.lawa.org and www.eileencowin.com

<http://artnowla.com/2017/10/03/shelf-life/>