



NEWS

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PUTTING A HUMAN FACE ON THE MTA

The MTA is more than buses, trains and subway tunnels—it is people who are dedicated to serving the public and who have interesting stories to tell.

That's the aim of a MTA public art project, which will showcase its employees in a series of interior bus posters that has begun to appear throughout the MTA bus fleet.

“Our employees and our customers are our most important assets,” said Joe Drew, MTA’s chief executive officer. “We think our customers could benefit from learning more about our drivers and other front line employees who make our system work. The MTA is not a faceless bureaucracy. We’re people who not only care about delivering quality transit service, but also care about our community”

The first series of five posters feature two bus operators, a customer information agent, a diesel mechanic, and a transportation technical manager. Each poster features the employee in an off-duty pose by photographer Willie Garcia and short narrative by writer Marisela Norte.

The posters pay tribute to the dedication and humanity of each employee profiled.

Diesel mechanic Dyana Elorriaga works a non-traditional job, and was photographed not in her coveralls but a formal gown because, she said, this time she wanted to be beautiful.

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The accompanying narrative tells readers that she volunteers her time with elementary school children in an anti-graffiti program, that “when her hands aren’t repairing an engine, they’re learning how to play piano,” and that she has worked at the MTA for 11 years.

“I wanted to give a voice to the people who go unrecognized, and to show the human element so others could relate to them on a personal level,” said Marisela Norte, the project’s writer. “Their lives are more than their jobs.”

Norte describes herself as a self-taught writer who “did my residency at Clifton’s Cafeteria.” Buzz Magazine listed her among “The 100 Coolest People in L.A.” and named her the “Muse on the Bus” because she uses the MTA for transportation and inspiration. Norte has been writing professionally since 1982, and is working on a play commissioned by the Mark Taper Forum.

Marie Tervalon is a customer service agent at MTA headquarters. Her poster depicts her signing, a skill she learned on her own time to better serve her hearing-impaired customers.

“I enjoy photographing people,” said Willie Garcia, who learned his craft apprenticing to professional photographers. “I spent a great deal of time going to the different bus divisions and hanging out in driver break rooms. When I found someone interesting, I tried to capture his or her essence, more so than their jobs.”

Garcia has documented youth subcultures and local music scenes, and his work has been shown at more than 20 local exhibitions and shows. Publications in Mexico City, Dallas, TX and Southern California have featured his photographs. He teaches at the Los Angeles Photography Center.

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Both Norte and Garcia were given the freedom to locate and select MTA personnel they wished to profile for the project. They ultimately will feature 25 employees.

Detroit native Hank Dixon, a bus operator from the Sun Valley Division, was a tenor with the Motown group The Originals. He still tours with an oldies group, which sings "stone classic oldies to sold-out crowds."

Jesse Simon has overseen the installation of 150 bicycle lockers at MTA rail stations while working as a transportation technical manager. He is a true believer in bicycles, and has commuted to work via bike for the last 25 years. His poster reveals that he spent his honeymoon on a bike tour (presumably with his bride).

Aldolfo "Fito" Cabrera was a teacher in El Salvador before the war forced him to flee to a new life as a bus operator for the MTA in El Monte. Fito's poster describes him as a good listener who can communicate in different languages and with many cultures.

The stories of these first five MTA employees will remain on display on 2000 buses for three to four months. Then they will be replaced with a second group of five posters, each featuring the human face of the MTA.

Metro Art commissions projects throughout the Metro system with the objective of enhancing the transit environment and contributing to a sense of community ownership and pride.

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