



TWO CIRCLES

TEXT Andrea Carson Barker

A SIMPLE BUT SUBLIME ARTWORK MARKS THE LOBBIES OF TORONTO'S RECENTLY COMPLETED BAY ADELAIDE CENTRE EAST.

A nearly seven-metre-wide black dot has recently made an appearance at the base of Brookfield Properties' gleaming new 44-storey Bay Adelaide Centre East in downtown Toronto. Taking up much of the eastern wall on the south side of the building's glassed-in lobby, the disc hovers just above floor level, drawing the eye of passers-by and punctuating the refined building like a giant period.

Stunning in its simplicity, the dot is one half of *Two Circles*, a public artwork by Governor General's Award-winning artist Micah Lexier. The other, on the lobby's north side, is a black 1.5-inch-wide outline of an identically sized circle, set against a white background.

In addition to providing an effective counterbalance to KPMB's sleek architectural lines, both walls are made of mosaic and fully integrate into their setting. They reference *Straight Flush* (2009), a similarly integrated lightbox installation by American artist James Turrell at the property's west tower. Both pieces were part of the city's Percent for Public Art Program, a juried process overseen by art consultant Rina Greer. "The idea was to build off the Turrell with something that had some of its characteristics, but wasn't a duplication," says Greer.

Of particular issue for Lexier was how to find balance between the lobby's two unequal spaces: the south wall bookends the lobby, while the north wall is double-height, with an escalator. After experimenting with other shapes, he found the solution in two equally sized circles, centred left-to-right on each wall and hung exactly the same distance from the ceiling.

Each circle responds differently within its space. While the black disc appears to be receding, the white one rises to the wall's surface. As Lexier points out, many employees will repeat a daily route, perhaps only ever experiencing one of the circles, while for others the artwork will simply distinguish the building from its neighbours. This fits well with the often deadpan words, shapes, numbers, diagrams and punctuation that define his artistic practice. "It was definitely about marking the building, in a communicative way," he says.

In *Two Circles*, much is revealed in the details. Fabricated in collaboration with Montreal-based manufacturer Mosaika, over 830,000 increments of black and white ceramic mosaic sticks were cut for the piece. Each slender stick was then broken and pieced together by hand into over 400 rows—each a subtle, fragile, occasionally

ABOVE A two-part artwork by Micah Lexier is integrated into the north and south lobbies of a downtown office building designed by KPMB Architects.

broken line, approximately 55 millimetres tall. Every line alludes to something akin to a heart-beat: Lexier wanted the viewer to be rewarded for looking, to create something both incredibly complex and incredibly human. "I really wanted this piece to be about a lot of individuals making a similar mark," he says. "You get up close and the uniqueness comes forward."

Lexier credits the team of architects, lighting designers, developer representatives and Greer with working together to prioritize the seamless integration of the mosaic with the building—from elegantly smoothing over an unsightly expansion joint with a false wall, to the elaborate lighting system that maintains consistent levels of illumination while the sun sets. The ability of *Two Circles* to function so well—and read so differently—from far away and up close allows for multiple relationships to the architecture. Not only is the piece a highly graphic contrast to the linearity so pervasive throughout the city's financial district, but it is also a testament to labour—including the labour embedded in the construction of the building itself.

Andrea Carson Barker is an art and architecture critic, and a member of the City of Toronto Public Art Commission.