

Arthur Price (1918–2008)

Birds of Welcome, 1971

Cast bronze and silicon aluminum

Height: 4' 7.5"

Width: 3' 5"

Length: 9' 11"

Weight: Approximately 1,800 pounds

Sunnylands Collection 2009.1.100



Description:

This piece is one of three metal sculptures titled *Birds of Welcome* by Art Price. The Annenbergs commissioned this piece in 1971.

Talking points:

As art collectors, Walter and Leonore drew aesthetic inspiration from various influences, such as what they saw when they traveled. Passing through the Gander International Airport, the Annenbergs spotted *Birds of Welcome*, which resulted in them commissioning this outdoor abstract avian group to display at Sunnylands. According to the Gander Airport Historical Society, the work “[represents] the welcome accorded by Canada to air travelers from abroad.”¹ It is no accident that one of the first sculptural expressions that guests saw while approaching the front entrance to the house represents an international welcome expressed within the modern sculpture vernacular.² From *A Cross-Section of Work by Art Price*, published in 1968, the author lists *Birds of Welcome* at Gander as one, among others, of the best known metal commissions made by the artist.³

Details:

Dwell magazine describes the importance of Gander International Airport to VIPs flying across the Atlantic ocean: “In the early days of transatlantic travel, flights had to stop to refuel. Gander, Newfoundland, a tiny town in Canada’s easternmost province, was geographically situated to step up. Halfway between New York and London, Gander’s airport became known in the late 1950s as the ‘cross roads of the world.’”⁴ By the late 1960s, advances in technology expanded the distance that aircrafts could travel which reduced traffic at Gander.⁵ The Annenbergs, however, traveled using their own aircraft, and continued stopping at Gander to refuel.⁶

On February 23, 1971, Walter recalled to Ambassador Schmidt his impressions of the seven stylized bird forms on view in the international transit lounge: “My wife and I were struck by a work by the Canadian sculptor Art Price.”⁷ Walter reached out to the artist asking if another could be made for Sunnylands. In a letter dated February 4, 1971, Walter wrote to Art Price: “We contemplate placing your distinguished piece somewhere on the grounds in an appropriate manner that will indeed help to welcome our guests.”⁸

Although we do not yet know the kinds of birds that Art Price represented in his piece, we are aware of Walter’s interpretation: “I had seen this particular sculpture at the center of the airport at Gander, Newfoundland, and was impressed with the spirit of it—a circular cluster of birds resembling ganders.”⁹ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *goose* is the female term for the bird while *gander* is a word to describe the male.

Art Price informed Walter that he no longer owned the original molds or models used for the Gander installation,

but that he could make new models and molds to create a very similar piece. Price also suggested that although the piece at Gander was made of three different alloys, that only alloys suitable for outdoor placement should be used for this new piece. The Sunnylands version is composed of four silicon aluminum birds, three bronze birds, and a bronze base. Before sending *Birds of Welcome* to the Annenbergs, Price informed the Annenbergs, "The piece is finished in browns, golds, greens, and of course silver and bluish silver of the aluminum birds."¹⁰

According to Art Price's son, Rene, "[t]here were three copies of *Birds of Welcome* pieces commissioned at the same time. A second copy is in the Pepsico collection, Purchase, NY, and I'm not sure where the third copy ended up."¹¹ The piece that Rene referred to is currently on view in the Donald M. Kendall Sculpture Garden at the Pepsico world headquarters.¹² It is interesting to notice that the version at the Pepsico headquarters is arranged slightly differently than the version at Sunnylands. The piece at Gander also looks slightly different than the other two.

¹ "History of Gander International Airport." *Gander Airport Historical Society*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Sept. 2015. http://www.ganderairporthistoricalsociety.org/history_cyqx_intl.htm

² Rowe, Anne. *Carved Narrative: Los Hermanos Chávez Morado*. Rancho Mirage: The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, 2017. Print.

³ Price, Art. *A Cross Section of Work by Art Price*. Ottawa: Price, 1968. Print.

⁴ Burshtein, Karen. "Aviation Preservation." *Dwell*. Dwell Media LLC., 25 Feb. 2013. Web. 29 Sept. 2015. <http://www.dwell.com/rewind/article/aviation-preservation>

⁵ Scott, Tim, Erica Westeroff, and Sheena Hammond. "A Homage To Modern Design - XTC Design." *XTC Design*. N.p., 08 Sept. 2014. Web. 29 Sept. 2015. <http://www.xtcdesign.com/blog/a-homage-to-modern-design/>

⁶ Comerford, Michael. "Questions for Michael Comerford 9/23/15." Personal interview and written statement. 25 Sept. 2015.

⁷ Annenberg, Walter. Letter to Ambassador Schmidt. 23 Feb. 1971. MS. Winfield House, London, England. The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, 2009.1.100.

⁸ Annenberg, Walter. Letter to Art Price. 4 Feb. 1971. MS. Winfield House, London, England. The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, 2009.1.100.

⁹ Annenberg, Walter. Letter to Rufus Smith. 18 Mar. 1971. MS. Winfield House, London, England. The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, 2009.1.100.

¹⁰ Price, Art. Letter to Walter Annenberg. 30 Jun. 1971. MS. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, 2009.1.100.

¹¹ Price, Rene. Letter to the Annenberg Foundation. 27 Mar. 2008. MS. Cornwall, Ontario, Canada. The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, 2009.1.100.

¹² "Who We Are." *Our History*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Sept. 2015. <http://www.pepsico.com/company/Our-History>

