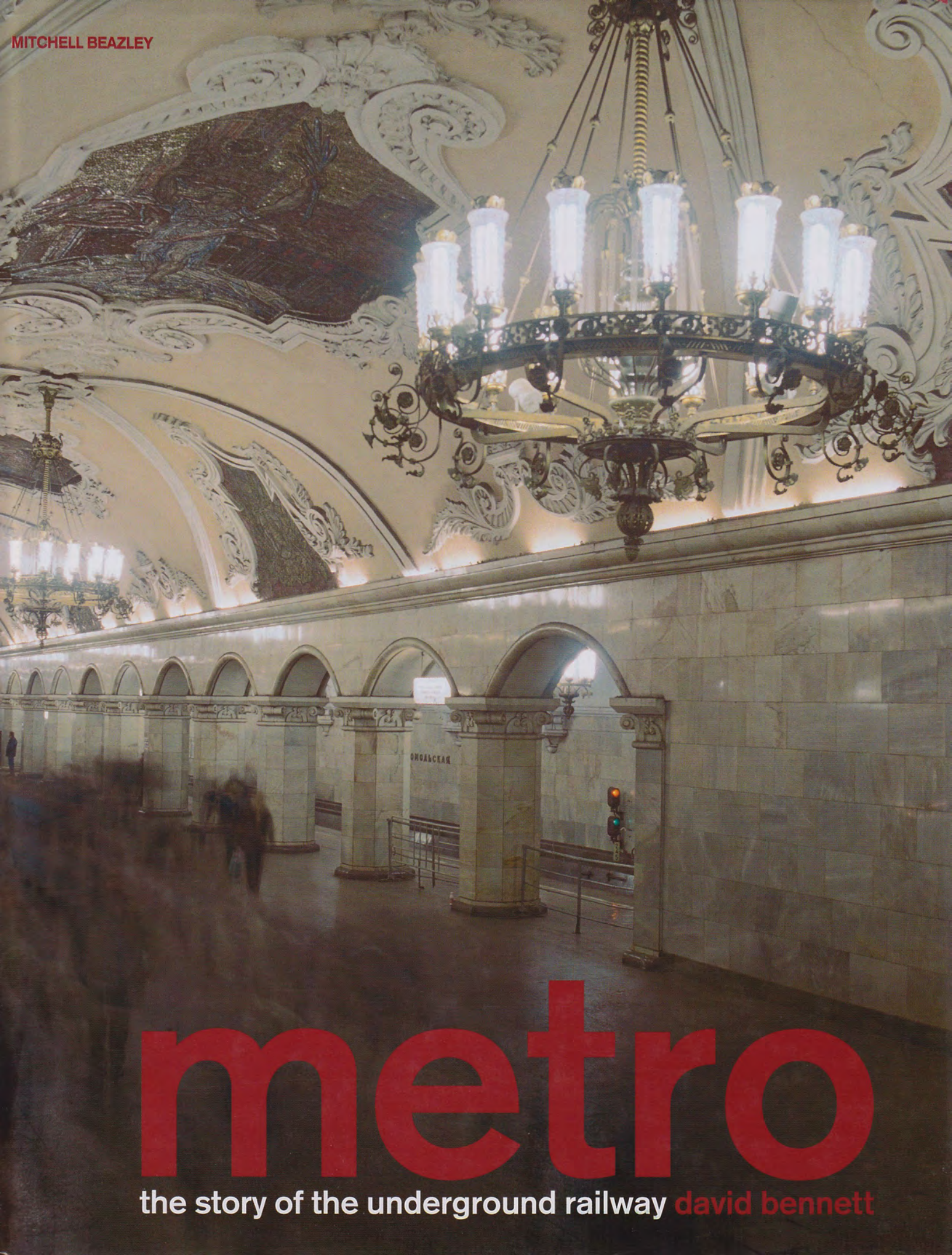
MITCHELL BEAZLEY



metro

the story of the underground railway

david bennett

right **The mural at Sheppard-Yonge station is the work of Stacey Spiegel. Close-up (top right), the image is abstract, but as you distance yourself (top right and bottom) it resolves into a panoramic landscape of the southern Ontario countryside.**

sheppard subway, toronto

Despite the many remarkable engineering feats involved in the construction of Toronto's Sheppard Subway – it used enough concrete to construct six CN Towers, for example – the public acclaim that greeted its opening on 22 November 2002 was mostly generated by the rich and stimulating art work that covers the walls, ceilings, and platforms of all five stations.

When you enter a station on the Sheppard Subway you walk into a total art experience. Artists have created imaginative environments in each of the stations, expressing themes of community, location, and heritage. The work of 300 artists from across the state of Ontario was reviewed during an open competition and then this number was whittled down to six. The winning artists were selected for their experience with public commissions, their understanding of the materials and process of their art, and for their ability to work with architects and engineers as part of the design team. The art that was transferred to the station fabric is made of durable, low-maintenance materials that are resistant to vandalism, generally ceramic wall tiles and terrazzo-type floor screeds.

Public art was seen by the Toronto Transit Commission as playing a significant role in the design of the new line, giving each station a meaningful identity within the local community. They have succeeded magnificently in their aim.

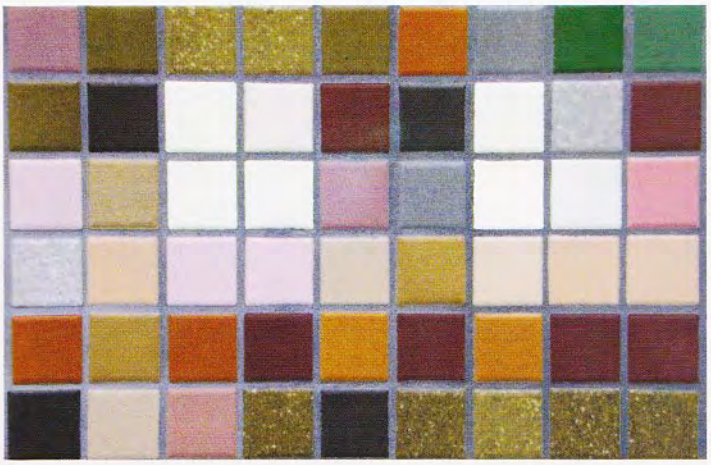
On the interior walls of Sheppard-Yonge station is the work of artist Stacey Spiegel. It is a panoramic landscape that expresses the rocks, fields, trees, water, and buildings you might see from the road on a compressed journey through southern Ontario. The images run continuously along the walls from one platform to the other. One hundred and fifty separate photographic images were taken, digitized, and blended using computer technology to create the 1.5 million mosaic tiles that cover the walls.

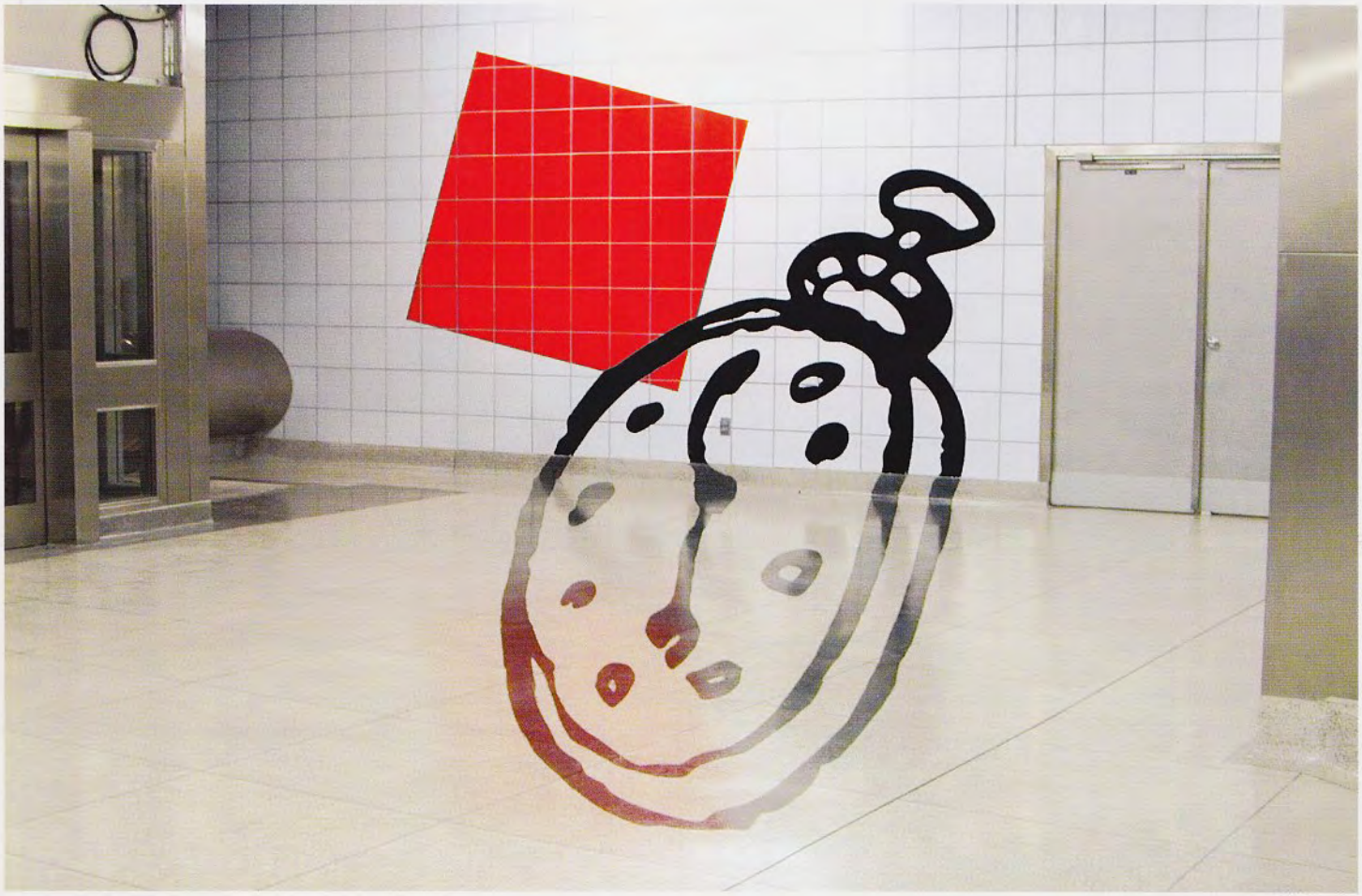
The walls of Bayview station are splashed with bold, playful doodles by Panya Clark Espinal. They depict everyday objects and simple recognizable geometric shapes on an uncommonly large scale. When seen from a distance the shapes are identifiable, but as you pass close by them they deconstruct to become an abstract design.

Sylvie Belanger, on the other hand, has taken photographic images of people who travel on the subway and has reconstructed them as large tile friezes on the walls of Bessarion station. Some images emphasize folded hands, others a collection of feet, or the backs of people's heads. Her work forms an essay on the different ages, genders, races, and social groups that use the subway.

At Leslie station, artist Micah Lexier has sampled the handwriting of 3,400 different people, including local residents, school children, subway passengers, and metro employees. The title of the work, "Ampersand", is derived from the symbol that links the same two handwritten words that appear on every tile.

The wall tiles by Stephen Cruise at Don Mills station record the actual fossils and other objects uncovered during the excavation of the line. Other walls feature images of local flora and fauna, and the terrazzo floor tiles are embellished with the outline of terrapin shells.



left and below **Artist Sylvie Belanger has used photographs of people using the subway at Bessarion station to create a vivid and personalized montage of heads, hands, and feet imprinted on ceramic wall tiles.**

right, top and bottom **One of the most imaginative and interactive works of art on the Sheppard Subway is at Bayview station. Panya Clark Espinal's bold, whimsical, larger-than-life images of familiar objects are stretched and distorted to flow from the walls onto the platform floors.**