

STARN'S GO UNDERGROUND

THE **STARN TWINS**—47-year-old Doug and Mike—have spent the past two decades documenting the natural world. So a subway station is an odd location for their first public art project. But Lower Manhattan's new South Ferry station, which opened last month, is clean and bright, and *See It Split, See It Change*, the Starns' sprawling installation, feels surprisingly at home below ground. Conceptually, the project is not such a departure for the duo, who often work with layered, digitally altered photographic material. The South Ferry installation includes mostly arboreal imagery, a theme recurrent

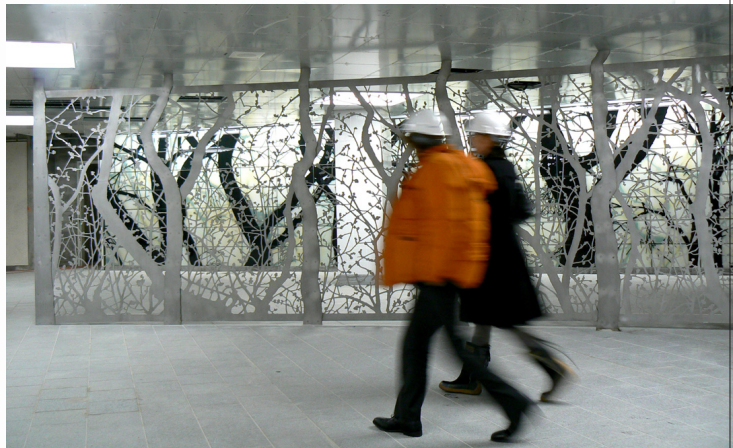
throughout their career. Plus, the analogy between tree branches, or the veins of a leaf, and the interconnecting lines of the New York City subway was not lost on the artists.

Commissioned by the **Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Arts for Transit** program, *See It Split, See It Change* was four years in the making. The centerpiece of the permanent, \$1-million installation is a curving, 250-foot-long wall covered with over 400 glass tiles. Each 14-by-28-inch tile is made from five layers of fused glass, a complicated process developed by the artists with a German manufacturer. Close-ups of tangled tree branches and limbs are "printed" with liquid ceramic pigment on different layers of glass and fired, creating a blue-black silhouette fuzzily outlined with turquoise. The effect is like looking through a generous picture window into a dense forest. Small but noticeable imperfections—tiny air bubbles, splotches of discoloration—make the Starns' trees seem like living, breathing organisms. A cutout stainless-steel fence extends from the row of turnstiles and creates another screen through which to view the tree mosaic.

Other components of the project include a large-scale map of Manhattan and a giant leaf, both positioned on walls above the staircase leading down to the platform. The former is a traditional hand-cut mosaic based on a 1640 topographic map and overlaid with a contemporary street grid. It's 20 feet wide and dramatically foreshortened so that Lower Manhattan is most prominent. To the left of the map is a 12-by-24-foot image of a decaying leaf printed on the same type of fused-glass tiles used in the curving wall piece.

The Starns were apparently inspired by the challenges of working on such an expansive, complicated installation: their current project, *Big Bambú*, is a seemingly never-ending jungle gym of lashed and interlocking bamboo poles. It will be open by appointment this spring at the Starns' new studio in Beacon, N.Y., and will tour to the Detroit Art Museum in 2010, among other venues.

—Leigh Anne Miller



Mike and Doug Starn's installation at the South Ferry station in New York, showing the stainless-steel fence and glass-tile wall.