

# Larger Than Life

Designing and Fabricating  
the United Airlines Hangar Mural

by Ann Makowski

**DESIGN FIRM:** Pentagram

**DESIGN TEAM:** Michael Bierut (principal in charge), Brett Traylor

**CLIENT:** United Airlines

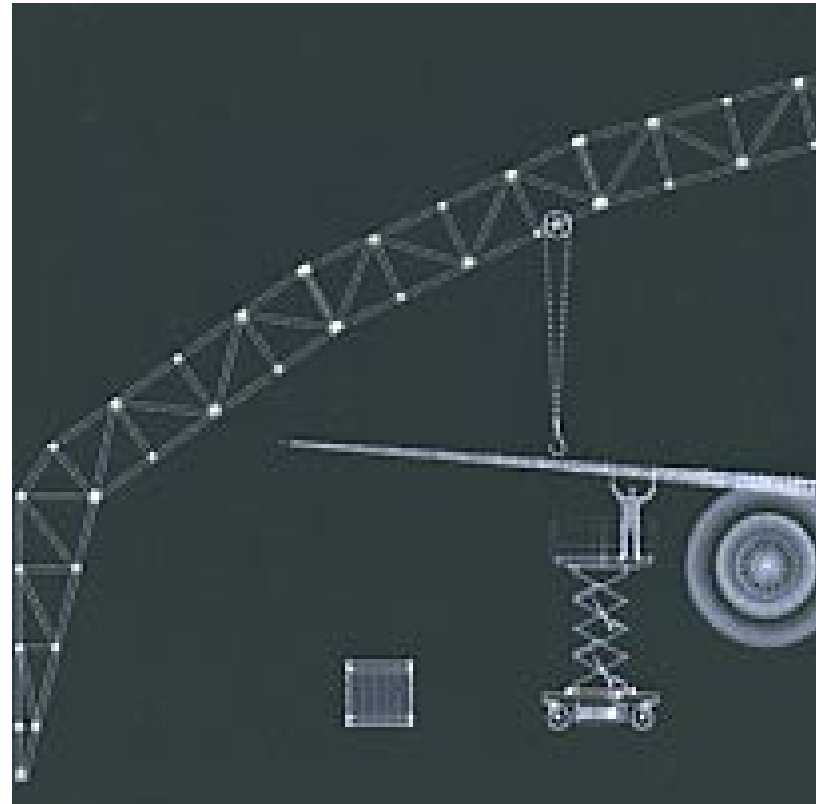
**FABRICATOR:** Mega Media Concepts, Ltd.

**DATE OF INSTALLATION:** August 2001

Wrapping the United Airlines hangar at Boston's Logan Airport was a project of superlatives. When Pentagram approached Mega Media to wrap an airline hangar for United Airlines, it had never been done before. The final product was the single largest 3M installation in the country at that time. "From initial production concept to completion, the project took almost 10 months," says Anthony Senatore from Mega Media, "and was definitely one of our most challenging projects."

The size of the installation area drove the decision to use a wrap rather than paint or other materials. Mega Media Concepts, Ltd. provides graphic solutions, installation, and project management in such large projects. They, along with the design team and 3M, produced something so far out of the ordinary that special installation methods and one-time warranties were created.

The x-ray image of an airplane is the element that makes this project so spectacular. Brett Traylor, with Pentagram in New York City, worked with a photographer who specializes in x-ray photography to produce an actual x-ray photograph of a



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real Boeing 777. Some parts of the image, such as the wing and the engine, would have shown up in very little detail due to the density of the metal and so were produced by taking x-ray photographs of scale-model airplane parts.

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## Challenges

The face of the airplane hanger was made of Dupont Tedlar®. There was no track record on how this material would perform with a self-adhesive graphic attached to it and how self-adhesive material would respond to this material. Working very closely with the manufacturer of the hangar (Rubb Construction) and 3M, Mega Media determined the proper material and laminate. Extensive testing was done on the materials by 3M, followed by a series of tests on the hangar itself to confirm the results of those tests. After these on-site tests, Mega Media came to an agreement with 3M on the proper materials; a custom one-time warranty was created just for this application.

Installing the wrap on the Tedlar® surface was a huge challenge. Most self-adhesive installations are mounted on walls or other hard surfaces, important because installers use pressure to install the material. Tedlar® has a certain amount of give to it when pressure is applied against it, so a standard installation was not possible. Again Mega Media worked with 3M, the

installation team, and Rubb Construction on a solution. They eventually developed a proprietary installation method for hangars that was approved by 3M and included in the written warranty.

## File Preparation

Accurate file preparation was crucial. Because of the nature of the art and the hangar, a file off by just a few inches at the top of the hangar would translate into the entire wrap being off by a number of feet by the time it reached the logo strip on the bottom section of the wall. Where the bottom section of the hangar transitions from Tedlar® to metal, there was a three inch lip between the Tedlar® and the metal. It was absolutely critical to make this transition smoothly, and so the file preparation had to be perfect.

The final product was an 80' by 250' print, divided in 4-foot wide sections. Maintaining a consistent color over the entire 20,000 square-foot area was critical. Any shift in color would have been very visible. To accomplish this, Mega Media modified the 3M equipment and software and carefully managed the ink settings.

Finally, the image and material had to fit into the real frame of the hangar. The frame was not a true curve but included many small bends and juts in the structure. The frame of the x-ray hangar reflects the frame of the physical hangar.

In the end, the image is compelling and true-to-life. "United received several phone calls from people who work facing the hangar—they wanted United to know that the hangar had been left open by mistake!" says Brett Traylor.

