Entering the platform of Rick Araluce’s newest installation, *The Final Stop*, visitors find themselves transported to an anonymous subway station, an eerie subterranean world nestled within the gallery, where flickering lights and distant rumblings suggest the passage of trains and cavernous tunnels seemingly stretch for miles.

A Seattle-based artist and scenic designer, Araluce is celebrated for his miniature environments but has recently broadened his practice to include large-scale immersive installations that have close connections to his work for the stage. Regardless of scale, Araluce’s art has long had an affinity with scenic design. His moody, abandoned scenes, filled with human detritus, have a strong narrative quality, as if some quiet drama has already played out or is about to unfold.

Araluce is fascinated by the transitory, neglected, and forgotten spaces that punctuate our lives. His works expose the richness in these environments we often take for granted, encouraging curious observation. In his hands, empty spaces become changed emotional landscapes; nostalgic, expectant, and often melancholy, they reveal a wealth of information.

As he describes: “Barren chambers, ill-lit crawl spaces. Places where the dust settles, the paint peels, the plaster falls from the lath to scatter upon aged floorboards. Places where something has happened. Or where nothing has happened for years. There are stories here. If you look, if you listen, you will hear them.”

A hallmark of Araluce’s work is his obsessive attention to detail. He meticulously constructs by hand even the most innocuous details—from aging brick and mortar to rusted pipe fittings—to draw his audience in. He uses theater tricks like forced perspective in both his signature “peephole” miniature environments and his larger works, hinting at spaces far beyond the bounds of the gallery. Light, sound, and trompe-l’œil elements enhance the feeling that viewers have entered a new, unnerving reality. While he provokes an equal sense of wonder in this installation, Araluce also allows visitors to “go behind the curtain” to explore his own normally hidden spaces, revealing the technical magic behind the illusion and showcasing his craftsmanship as well as his artistry.

This exhibit is organized by the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.
Artist Bio:

Rick Araluce is a visual artist based in Seattle, Washington. Born in Encino, California, his early love of model making led him toward the meticulously detailed miniatures for which he is best known. His theatrical, large-scale installations are a recent addition to his artistic practice, and are largely influenced by his work as a scenic artist for the Seattle Opera.

Araluce’s miniatures have been acquired by prominent collectors, including Danny Elfman and Robin Williams. His work has been exhibited mainly at museums and galleries in the Northwestern United States, such as the Tacoma Art Museum and the Bellevue Arts Museum, where his work was the subject of a solo exhibition in 2013, but has also been shown in such venues as Tourcoing, France, and the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. Araluce received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2015, and was the 2015–16 artist-in-residence at MadArt in Seattle.