

# HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

With luxury residences vying to stand out, developers are adding in-house curators and artists-in-residence in the hope of attracting a discerning new audience.

STORY **SOPHIE KALKREUTH**

As the artist-in-residence at 50 West, a luxury tower being built in midtown Manhattan, painter Noa Charuvi was given a studio space, an honorarium and access to the project construction dig. Her task: to create work in response to the construction of the 64-storey building.

At the time, seven months into building the foundation, the site was just a hole in the ground. But since Charuvi's work often explores ruins and the destruction of architecture, she was deemed a fitting choice as the project's first artist-in-residence. "Noa has made paintings dealing with destruction and I thought that was interesting," says Jennie Lamensdorf, in-house curator at Time Equities, the developer of the tower. "Destruction and construction look the same at that stage."

The visual discord of a construction site, the sunken silt and mud, the unfinished slabs of concrete, the prongs of rebar sticking up like loose teeth from the sediment; these all provided an intriguing visual landscape for Charuvi. During her residency she took photos of the site and brought them back to her studio. There, she created a series of semi-abstract oil

paintings in which buckets, hoses, rebar and wooden planks appear in shimmering slabs of colour.

As the tower construction has progressed, there have been several subsequent artists-in-residence, including painters Hugo Bastidas and Paul Anthony Smith, who both created portraits of the workers. When 50 West is completed this autumn, their works will be hung in the building's common areas.

## BUILDING HISTORY

In Manhattan, the tradition of documenting skyscraper construction can be traced back to the building boom of the 1920s and 1930s when photographers snapped shots of workers at building sites, often in precarious positions. The most iconic of these, *Lunch atop a Skyscraper*, was taken in 1932 during the construction of the RCA Building at 30 Rockefeller Centre and shows workers eating lunch on a crossbeam, their legs dangling at 840 feet. Lamensdorf says Time Equities wanted to engage in this history, "not through photography, but through something that hasn't been done before".



COURTESY 50 WEST

Double-height apartments at 50 West in lower Manhattan; the exterior of 50 West luxury condominiums



50 West’s artist-in-residence programme is the first of its kind at a luxury tower in Manhattan, but it is part of a growing international trend in which developers are incorporating art programmes into their real estate offerings.

Some, like 50 West, incorporate the artistic chronicling of the building itself. In London, Galliard Homes commissioned photographer David Bailey to take a series of photos of the luxury residential scheme The Chilterns in Marylebone. When the project launched, a private gallery in the grand lobby displayed the photos and buyers of the residences, priced upwards of £3m (HK\$30m), received one of the original framed photos – worth around £20,000 each.

At One Tower Bridge, developers Berkeley Homes gave the painter Chris Orr exclusive use of a penthouse while it was still under construction, from where he painted an animated river scene entitled *From the Talkie to Tower Bridge*, which captures the old and new landmark architecture – from the City to Tower Bridge. Harry Lewis, managing director of Berkeley Homes, was present at the unveiling of the painting. “Chris’ piece highlights the scheme’s prestigious location and captures the truly spectacular views that will become part of everyday life for residents,” he says.

At other projects, art pieces are being integrated into the architectural scheme, either in public areas or in building lobbies. Oceana Bal Harbour, a large condominium building currently under construction in Miami, will feature *Pluto and Proserpina* and *Ballerina*, two original sculptures by American artist Jeff Koons that will be displayed in a central ‘breezeway’ – a gap in the architecture that frames the Atlantic Ocean.



**“GOOD ART SELLS A PROPERTY. IT GIVES A WOW FACTOR AND ADDS VALUE”**  
— Giles Hannah, Christie’s International Real Estate



COURTESY BERKELEY HOMES

COURTESY OCEANA BAL HARBOUR

“I wanted to give the project an identity through its art, and Jeff Koons was my first choice,” explains Eduardo Costantini, founder of the Argentine-based development company Consultatio Real Estate who is building the project on the northern tip of Miami Beach. Jeff Koons is best known for his shiny replicas of banal objects and has sold works for substantial sums. In 2013, Koons’ *Balloon Dog (Orange)* sold at a Christie’s Art Auction in New York for US\$58.4m (HK\$453m), the most expensive work by a living artist to be sold at auction.

Costantini bought the pieces for Oceana Bal Harbour in 2012 after his curator visited the Gagosian Gallery in New York, where Koons was working on a new solo exhibition. The developer paid US\$14m for the two mirror-

polished stainless steel sculptures, though he had to wait nearly two years to see them. His first glimpse was the Koons exhibition at the Whitney Museum in June 2014.

At Oceana Bal Harbour, residents will be able to enjoy the sculptures any time they wish. They will also become fractional owners – a property purchase includes a stake in the art pieces, as well as 10 other pieces, still to be determined, which will be on display in the lobby.

The project’s 240 flow-through apartments, which are currently over 70 per cent sold, range from US\$3 to US\$30 million and feature wide ocean views and large balconies accessed via floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors. Contemporary interiors are designed by Piero Lissoni and include Dada kitchens

with Gaggenau appliances and expansive spaces for living and entertaining. The Koons pieces will be displayed in an open breezeway on the building’s ground floor; visible from the building entrance, the amenity and pool areas and from the apartment balconies.

### THE VALUE OF ART

New luxury buildings often push the envelope with novelty amenities and extravagant services, but Costantini believes art is equally important to discerning buyers. “Today’s affluent homeowners are well travelled, cultured, and appreciate fine art more than ever,” he says. “Many of them are art collectors in their own right.” 50 West’s Lamensdorf agrees: “Art is already an expectation of high-end buyers. People expect their lobbies to be beautiful.”

**ABOVE** Jeff Koon’s *Ballerina*, purchased by Oceana Bal Harbour in Miami

**OPPOSITE FORM TOP** Noa Charuvi’s *Deck with Cylinders*, 2014, oil on canvas; **V***From the Talkie to Tower Bridge* by English artist and printmaker Chris Orr;





**LEFT**  
The art lounge of Miami's Park Grove luxury development

**BELOW**  
Anish Kapoor's proposed sculpture at the base of the 57-storey tower

COURTESY ONE PARK GROVE

COURTESY HERZOG & DE MEURON

Real estate and art also top the list of preferred investments among many high net worth individuals, who now spend upwards of US\$100 million on the purchase of both properties and paintings. In 2015 Picasso's *Women of Algiers* notched up a new record for a painting sold at auction after making over US\$179 million, while *Reclining Nude* by Amedeo Modigliani was not far behind, going under the hammer for US\$170 million to a buyer from Shanghai.

"The two greatest stores of wealth internationally today are contemporary art ... and apartments in Manhattan, Vancouver [and] London," BlackRock CEO Laurence Fink said at a Credit Suisse Megatrends conference in Singapore last year. Fink believes art and real estate are replacing gold as preferred asset classes among the world's wealthy. And though not all buyers of property are interested in art, developers around the world are taking note of a desire for trophy properties and trophy paintings.

"Increasingly, developers are using art as a major feature

in their projects as good art sells a property," says Giles Hannah, former senior vice president of Christie's International Real Estate in London. "It gives it a wow factor and adds value."

Exactly how much value is difficult to gauge, however. Most developers claim it is impossible to put a price tag on the value art brings their projects, but Hannah estimates developers can add four to five per cent to the sale price by having good artworks. "There are very wealthy buyers who circulate the globe following the art world," he adds. "Property developers in Miami, Dubai and London will often launch developments to coincide with the biggest shows and auctions as it's a way of accessing 'qualified wealth' at those times."

In Hong Kong, where Art Basel has flourished into one of the world's largest art fairs, drawing well-heeled collectors from around the region, developers are also turning to art and design as a means of differentiating their products. The Pavilia Hill, which recently launched in Tin Hau, is being marketed as "artisanal"

and features stones flown in from Japan, a traditional bathhouse, a teahouse and a meditation corner. "Instead of just hiring a big designer or a big architect, we treat every object, and the entire space like an exhibition, a museum that we curate," executive director of New World Development Adrian Cheng said in a recent interview with *The Wall Street Journal*. Cheng, who studied art and culture in Kyoto, is also the founder of K11 Art Foundation and has previously incorporated art in commercial projects in Hong Kong and Shanghai.

Indeed, the projects that integrate art most successfully reflect the personal tastes and interests of developers rather than simply a marketing strategy. Francis Greenburger, chairman and CEO at Time Equities, which is developing 50 West in Manhattan, has long been a supporter of the arts. Greenburger founded Omi International Arts Center, a 1.2 sq km arts centre in upstate New York, as well as an eponymous prize for under-recognised mid-career artists. "It

makes sense that [Greenburger's] business also supports the arts," says 50 West curator Lamensdorf. "He is deeply committed and integrated. He knows and understands art history."

Last year, Greenburger told *Art News* that he has never sold a single piece in his collection of around 1,000 pieces. "For me, art is not a financial object," he said. "It's something to appreciate, revere. It would be like selling a lover."

Today, 50 West has topped out and the tower residences, which range in price from US\$2m to US\$24.5m, are over 60 per cent sold. Lamensdorf believes the artist-in-residence programme has raised the profile of the building, but she says working with mid-career artists makes 50 West a little different from others. "We are not capitalising on the name of these artists," she says.

"We work with new artists and give them an opportunity to engage with audiences that they might not otherwise have the opportunity to engage with. This is when a programme moves from decoration to exhibition."

Consultatio's founder Costantini was born in Argentina and is also an avid art collector, who owns an impressive portfolio of paintings and other works from across Latin America. He founded the Eduardo F Costantini Foundation to promote cultural and educational events in Buenos Aires as well as the Latin American Art Museum of Buenos Aires. Consultatio's first residential project in the US, Oceana Key Biscayne, also featured an art programme with pieces by Beatriz Milhazes and Artur Lescher, among others.

For Costantini, art is both

a passion and an investment. "The value of the two pieces has undoubtedly appreciated since I purchased them," he says of the Koons sculptures at Oceana Bal Harbour. But he believes the draw for buyers goes beyond the bottom line. "Art transforms a space and owners end up loving their home more because of its ability to move them and enhance their quality of life," he says.

While some see a direct correlation between art and property sales, others believe the connection is tenuous at best. "I'd be shocked if a buyer said they'd invested in our project because of David Bailey," says Paul White, chief executive of Frogmore, a partner of The Chilterns development in London. "If only it were that easy. It's about doing something new and creating a sense of locality."





HARNESSING LOCAL TALENT

Art does play a vital role in place making. And at large-scale regeneration projects, where developers are tasked with creating new neighbourhoods from scratch, art programmes can also be a way of engaging the community. At Riverlight, a large mixed-use project in London’s rapidly transforming Battersea district, St James Group offered the Royal College of Art a five-year, rent-free artist space called StudioRCA. The developers also commissioned artists Simon and Tom Bloor, Kate Davis and Peter Newman to create sculptural works for the development’s public, outdoor spaces.

In Miami, much of the city’s renewed sense of identity is linked to a renaissance of art and design that accompanied the latest building boom. The city now hosts Art Basel and Design Miami, as well as America’s instalment of Maison & Objet, and has close to 100 galleries and a dozen art museums. Property developers have been active participants in the city’s cultural shift, sitting on the boards of art museums and enlisting prominent architects and artists for new projects.

“Over the last 10 years Miami has evolved into a strong art community,” says David Martin, president at Terra Group, a Miami-based developer currently building a large-scale condominium project in Coconut Grove. Designed by architects OMA and Rem Koolhaas, Park Grove features three curving glass towers and an art programme that includes a private on-site gallery featuring rotating and permanent artworks as well as educational lectures organised by an in-house curator.

“I think today the luxury angle is a little more about intelligent luxury. It’s about people being more rather than having more,”



LEFT  
A copper kitchen island concept from Design Haus Liberty

BELOW  
The centrepiece of the penthouse at the South Bank Tower in London is a lighting feature made with crystal sheets, by Design Haus Liberty

COURTESY DESIGN HAUS LIBERTY

Martin says. “We know individuals interested in these buildings want a certain amount of stimulation and art is a big part of that.”

One Park Grove, the most luxurious of the project’s three towers, recently launched sales with prices starting at US\$6m. There are just two residences per floor, each with a private elevator, around 4,000 sq ft of living space and views of the sea through curving floor-to-ceiling glass window walls. In addition to the art lounge on the lobby level, the property features a two-acre sculpture park designed by Enea Landscape Architecture.

Martin says his company considered art “a fundamental requirement of completing the design,” and will engage architects and designers in the discussion from the start of a new project. This dialogue is crucial if the project is going to succeed in creating more than a random depository of art pieces, according to Dara Huang, founder of Design Haus Liberty in London.



COURTESY SOUTH BANK TOWER

“ART IS ALREADY AN EXPECTATION OF HIGH-END BUYERS. PEOPLE EXPECT THEIR LOBBIES TO BE BEAUTIFUL”

— Jennie Lamensdorf, 50 West

“Developers often use art in such a blasé way,” says Huang. “They are like, ‘let’s put a sculpture in a garden.’ Or ‘we’ve got to answer to section 106 which says we have to give back to the community.’ Or, ‘maybe this rich person will want to buy this flat.’ But it needs to go beyond that. The project should unfold and tell a story.”

Huang, who was trained

in architecture at Florida University and later at Harvard, got her start working for Dutch architecture firm Herzog & de Meuron. The studio is known for its experimental approach to architecture and for manipulating materials like glass and steel into new forms, an approach Huang says is “almost like art”.

One project she worked on during her time at the firm was the newly completed 56 Leonard Street, a cantilevered glass tower in Manhattan, which will have a large, curving steel Anish Kapoor sculpture at its base. Huang says the sculptor was involved in discussions with the design team from early on. “We were able to ask [Kapoor]: ‘should this be a mailroom? Should it be part of the programme? Should we leave it alone?’ It’s nice to get together and talk about what the art is doing.”

Three years ago, Huang started her own practice in London, Design Haus Liberty, where she works on a variety of programmes and scales; from architecture to interiors to products, and incorporates some of the ideas from earlier practices, taking standard materials like brick and wood and find different ways of manipulating them to create new facades and sculptural forms. In her practice, the boundaries between art and design consistently blur.

One recent design is a copper island for the kitchen that looks more like a glossy geometric

sculpture than a worktop. “A kitchen island doesn’t need to look like the rest of the kitchen,” Huang says. “We started making this copper island and realised it could be a piece of art that is also very functional. So it’s an interesting question: Is it a piece of art? Is it furniture?”

Design Haus Liberty’s latest high profile commission is a £20m penthouse at London’s South Bank Tower. The luxury building from private equity investor CIT already features several site-specific art pieces, including a sculpture by Tobias Putrih, which has been installed in the residents’ lobby. Developed in collaboration with architects Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates and design practice Johnson Naylor, the sculpture is made almost entirely from aluminium with a deep purple exterior that takes its inspiration from part of an oyster shell discovered on the banks of the Thames River.

In the penthouse Huang’s team also took a sculptural approach and used materials like bamboo and travertine stone to bring touches of nature into luxurious living spaces that include 24-karat gold chandeliers, a curved kitchen and a monumental staircase coated in stone veneer. The penthouse centrepiece is a gigantic custom-designed lighting feature with brass edges and sheets of crystal that is inspired by the geometric forms of crystallised water. For Huang it seems that thinking about art in residential spaces is not a new trend; it is simply part of the design process. “I define architecture as art with public responsibility,” she says. “Art with constraint.”