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CITY NEWS

URBAN GARDNER | By Ralph Gardner Jr.

An Artist-in-Construction



Bulldozers, jackhammers, cranes and cement mixers are common sights—and sounds—at New York City construction sites.

But an artist-in-residence may be a first.

That's the role Noa Charuvi, an Israeli artist, is playing at 50 West St., a 64-story luxury residential skyscraper going up in lower Manhattan.

"We're two weeks away from completing the foundation," reported Francis Greenburger, the founder, chairman and chief executive of Time Equities Inc., the building's developer. "It took 10 months to build the foundation."

And Ms. Charuvi has been documenting the project's progress for the last three of those months.

"It's been remarkable to see people build this skyscraper with their bare hands, and in any weather," said the artist. "I'm humbled."

Ms. Charuvi, whose previous work has been focused more on ruins and destruction than on building things from scratch, comes and goes as she pleases from the construction site, wedged between Rector and Joseph P. Ward streets.

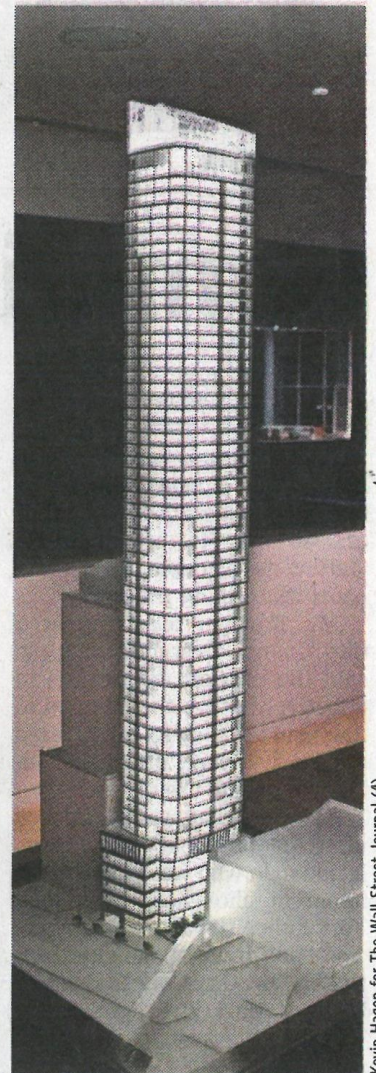
"I have a hard hat with my name on it," she said proudly.

I was curious about the sort of reception she receives from New York City's famously hard-boiled construction workers.

As amazing, even Whitmanesque as the process of building a skyscraper—at 780 feet,



Noa Charuvi, above, is the artist-in-residence at 50 West St., a model of which is seen at right. She has been documenting the building process in paintings, like the one seen below. Bottom, the artist's tools.



Kevin Hagen for The Wall Street Journal (4)

bulldozers, rubble buckets, piles of rebar, and mud—lots of mud.

"You do see that in photography," Ms. Charuvi said of construction photos, such as those of the emerging Empire State Building, by the likes of Lewis Hine and Berenice Ab-

50 West will be one of the taller towers in town—they might not be charmed by an artist toting an easel in a demolition zone.

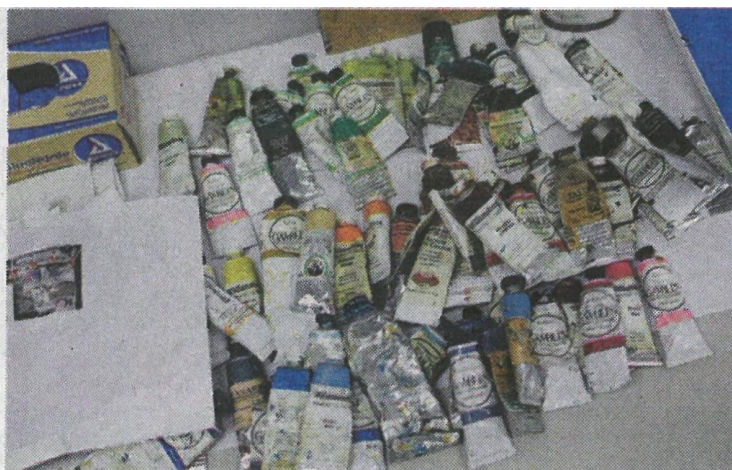
"I think they were really excited to see me go in and see the work," said Ms. Charuvi who doesn't actually paint in the pit. She takes photographs, then returns to 40 Rector St., where the project's sales and construction offices, and her studio are located. It's there that she translates her vision onto canvas.

"They were really happy to see somebody who appreciates what they do."

Ms. Charuvi is the first of three emerging artists who will document the building's progress. Next will be Paul Anthony Smith and then Hugo Bastidas. All are alumni of Art Omi, an artist residency program in the Hudson Valley founded by Mr. Greenburger.

"I thought it would be an interesting environment for an artist to work, to be in dialogue with the construction of the building and how that inspires them," Mr. Greenburger explained. "And we also thought we would install some of this work in the building—'before' and 'after' pictures."

Ms. Charuvi didn't seem disappointed that her resi-



dency will end well before the building is completed.

"It's been a tremendous gift to be here," she said. "For an artist in New York to get a space to work in itself is incredible."

'For an artist in New York to get a space...in itself is incredible.'

The residency includes an honorarium, and Ms. Charuvi also seems to be enjoying the respite from the solitude that is the typical artist's lot.

"I know everybody in the

office," she said. "I feel kind of part of the team, in a very small way."

"Not so small," Mr. Greenburger assured her as we made our way from the 50 West sales office, dominated by a gleaming model of the Helmut Jahn-designed glass curtain skyscraper, to the construction office across the hall.

There, the creative chaos of Ms. Charuvi's studio stood in contrast to the surrounding offices, filled with blueprints and dedicated to the exacting mechanics of building a high-rise.

"I never heard of an artist becoming part of a skyscraper," Ms. Charuvi observed, as we examined paintings whose subjects included

bott. "But it's not common to see paintings of it."

Time Equities also will be documenting the construction process using time-lapse videos. But technology "will not capture how the sunlight hits the rubble bucket just so" as Jennie Lamensdorf, the curator of Art-in-Buildings at Time Equities, pointed out.

So will Ms. Charuvi's work be featured in the lobby of the completed skyscraper?

"We are going to put our heads together and some paintings that will come out of that will belong to 50 West," Mr. Greenburger said. "Exactly which of these paintings is a question mark."

The developer has to think not only of his taste, or those of us who find majesty in a hardscrabble construction site, but also of residents who might not consider renderings of bulldozers—no matter how artistic—in keeping with their high-end real estate investment.

Mr. Greenburger sounded unconcerned.

"The lobby will be a changing work," he explained. "If some residents don't like it, in six months it will be something different."

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