

BROKERS WEEKLY

September 15, 2010

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October 6, 2010 - 8:00 am - 11:00 am
Association of the Bar of the City of New York
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COVER STORY

ART HOUSES

BY ROLAND LI

Ekstein Development, the developer of a new Chelsea residential building, +aRt, was looking to attract tenants, and decided to strengthen the theme of the building by bringing in its namesake.

"About two months ago, we started thinking about it," said Erik Ekstein, president and CEO of the company. "We really wanted to embrace the artistic nature of the area."

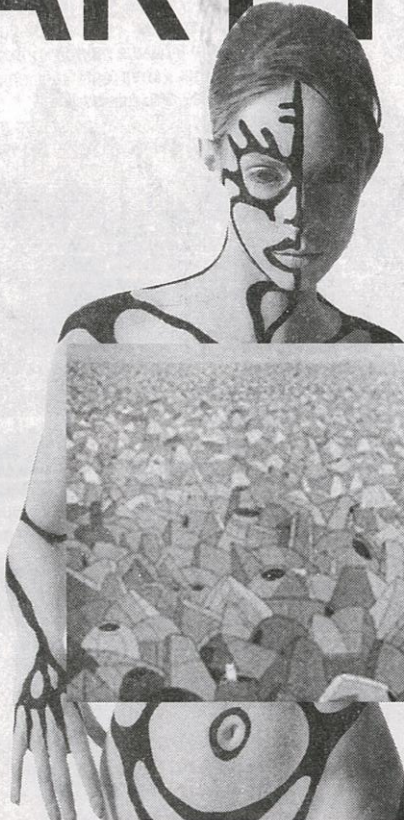
The 91-unit condo building at 540 West 28th Street will host a two-part exhibit curated by Chashama and Cannery Works, two non-profit art groups. The first exhibit, Carnivora, is a mixed-media exhibit inspired by the myths of a Greenland Eskimo culture. It will open on Sept. 16 on 1,800 s/f of ground-floor retail space.

Unlike the recession-fueled trend of empty commercial storefronts becoming havens for art groups, residential buildings have long used art as a marketing tool, in order to differentiate a development from nearby stock.

In Chelsea, embracing art is a logical process, but residential buildings throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn have also adopted the practice.

Stephen Kliegerman, executive director of Halstead Property Development Marketing, which is marketing +aRt, said the collaboration epitomized the artistic branding. He emphasized that the choice to donate space for the art gallery wasn't because of a un-rentable space, but was rather chosen to coincide with the residential opening, and other galleries had expressed interest in the future use of the space, with its around 7,000 s/f. Asking rent is around \$85 per s/f.

"The building is just being completed," said Kliegerman. "The landlord is talking to a number of tenants."





Another new development in Chelsea, 456 West 19th Street, has art influences that infuse the building's renderings, its lobby and even its apartment units. Developer and architect Cary Tamarkin installed five framed photographs in the lobby from Dutch photographer Bart Michiels, whose ethereal pictures recall the expansive landscape art of the Flemish masters.

"The whole concept of the lobby is lobby as art gallery," said Tamarkin.

Tamarkin and Michiels first worked together when Michiels was commissioned to take black and white pictures of the High Line, which is right next to both +aRt and 456 West 19th.

"There were architectural elements to the photographs. It was as if architecture was his muse," said Tamarkin.

Apartment units also have Noguchi-designed Akari light sculptures suspended from the ceilings — white spheres that bounce and extend light. Even the renderings of the building were done artistically. One rendering favors a moody, rainy shot of the exterior, with incandescent lights set amidst a hazy sky.

"It doesn't feel like that headachy, over-lit rendering," said Tamarkin. "They're art pieces in themselves."

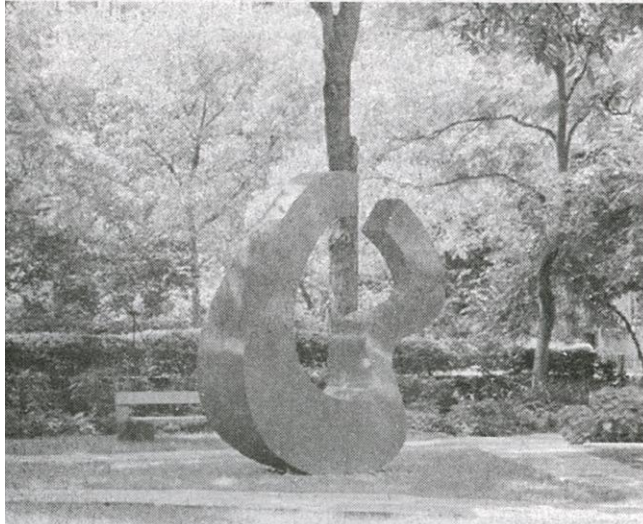
But Tamarkin is careful not to do art merely for the sake of selling more condos.

"There's a difference between a marketing ploy and doing something cool," said Tamarkin. "We try to follow our own path and hold true to our values."

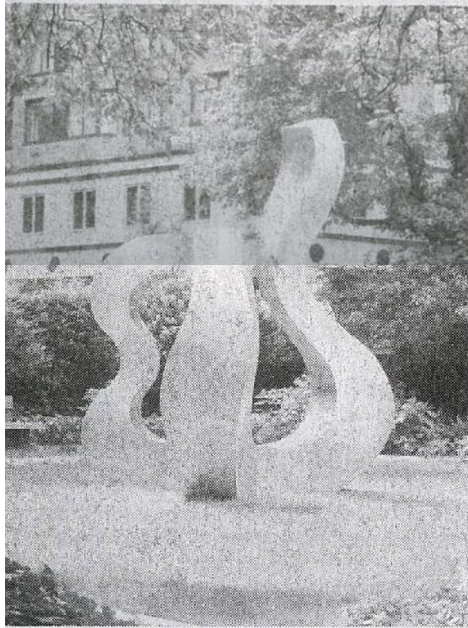
The building is 59% sold, with the penthouse units coming to market shortly.

A few dozen blocks north, at 800 Tenth Avenue, Griffin Court Condominium hosted a year-long mural design contest for its facade. Developer Alchemy Properties eventually chose Brooklyn artist Corinne Ulmann to paint one of the city's largest murals on the two-building development, a dual image evoking trees, with one side shadows, the other with a brilliant orange foliage.

"Not only does the mural enhance the courtyard for our residents, but it also adds a



Top to bottom: "Holy Container" from +aRt's Carnivora, 349 Metropolitan's courtyard mural, "Modern Prayer Atomos" from Carnivora, "The Time of Men: Forest Glen" from Carnivora, "Red Gateway" in Manhattan House, Bottom: "Trinity" in Manhattan House.



wonderful aesthetic for the whole neighborhood to enjoy,” said Kenneth Horn, president of Alchemy Properties, in a statement.

Ulmann didn’t just paint the mural, she will get an art show opening on Sept. 30 inside the building and her works will eventually be on display in the lobby, creating a

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— CARY TAMARKIN.

mutualistic relationship with the building.

Art isn’t limited to two dimensions. The landmarked Manhattan House at 200 East 66th Street on the Upper East Side has two sculptures, Trinity and Red Gateway, by Dutchman Hans Van de Bovenjamp, which reflect the modernist aesthetic of the building. Unveiled in June 2009, the sculptures are set in the development’s private gardens.

Its neighbor, Miraval Living at 515 East 72nd Street has a few sculptures in its huge outdoor space, which create an urban oasis for residents, said Loretta Shanahan-Bradbury, director of sales at the Miraval.

“This is a lifestyle that people buy into. It’s about tranquility as well,” she added. “I think the pieces themselves just blend so nicely. They’re very unique, as is our building.”

Brooklyn’s artistic nature has been well-documented, and commercial landlords have donated space in DUMBO to arts groups. Now, residential buildings in the borough have also become venues for art.

At 349 Metropolitan, a rental in Williamsburg, a four-story mural by local artist R. Nicholas Kuszyk is in the interior courtyard. Geometric, multicolored shapes are depicted, seeming to pile up into a vanishing point on the horizon.

Further south, One Grand Army Plaza, across the street from Brooklyn Library, is

an all-glass building designed by Richard Meier and is hosting local artists’ work on the ground floor.

“We have a very monumental, and rather iconic first-floor space,” said Cheryl Nielsen-Saaf, senior vice president at the Corcoran Group and head of sales. “It’s furnished in a very minimalist way.”

Built around two years ago, the building began sales in 2007 and is 60% sold. Asking prices are around \$1,000 per s/f, with penthouses with views of Prospect Park going for up to \$5.1 million.

Although the galleries are only open to residents and guests and not the public, the artwork remains visible.

“Because we’re all glass, everyone can see it from the street,” said Nielsen-Saaf. “It gives an overall quality to the building that is not readily available.”

Although the development is boosted by a great location and high-end amenities, the presence of art gives it another edge. And in a competitive residential world, such a feature is crucial in securing tenants — as well giving a building artistic merit that transcends architecture.

“I think it’s imperative in this market,” said Nielsen-Saaf, “to rise above the crowd.”



CARY TAMARKIN