

# Real Estate

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## High Art Arrives at the Lobby

By RANDY KENNEDY

**T**HE sculptor Richard Serra, a stickler about the differences between art and architecture, once described most public sculpture in urban architectural settings as “displaced, homeless, overblown objects that say, ‘We represent modern art.’”

For most of the last century, residential and commercial developments in New York City tended to marry architecture and art with that kind of ambivalence, if they married them at all: lobbies with a few pretty, unremarkable paintings; courtyards with pleasant design pieces or pop art by sculptors whose work rarely showed up in the museums around town.

But the landscape is starting to change, leading to what will soon be an almost walkable itinerary of some serious art in and around Manhattan buildings. The phenomenon is propelled largely by the same factors that are making it more difficult for artists themselves to live and work in the city: a concentration of global wealth with its eyes trained on real estate and luxury developers trying to stand out to attract a piece of that wealth.

Recently, I arranged a meandering summer tour to visit a handful of such works that have only recently arrived in the liminal public space of private buildings; I also included my favorite

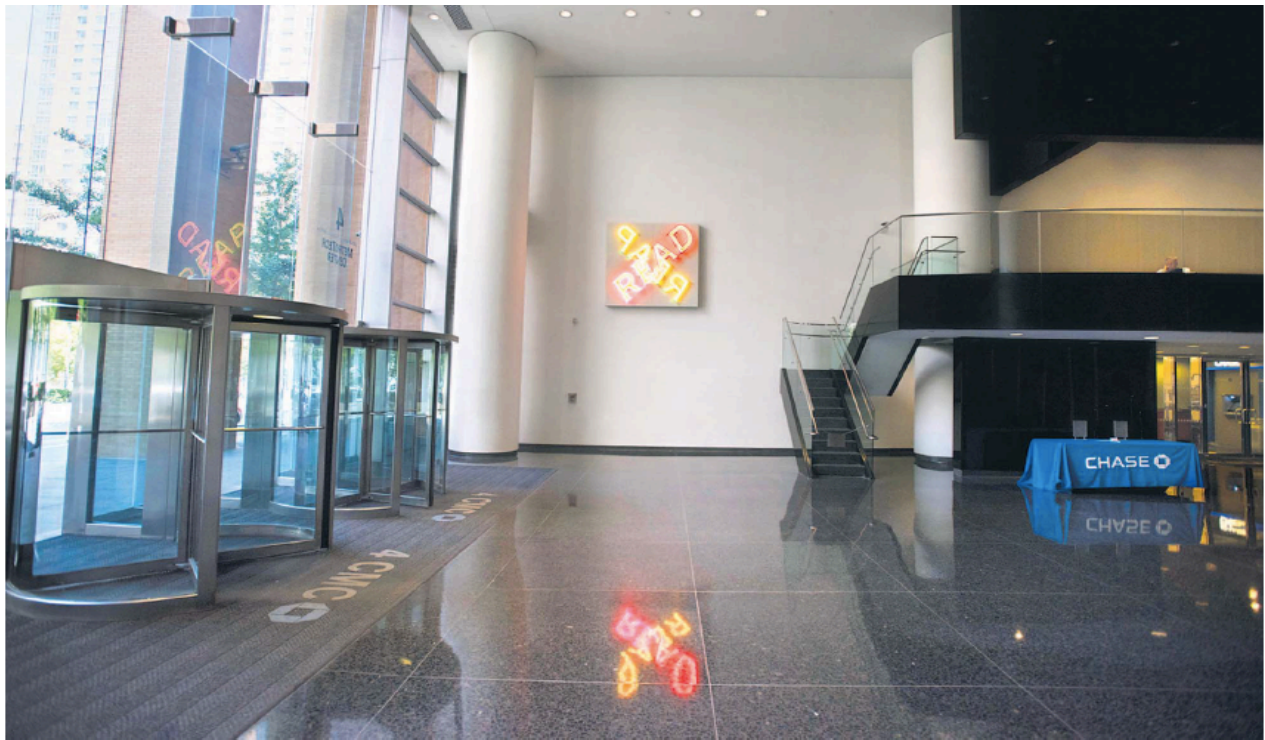
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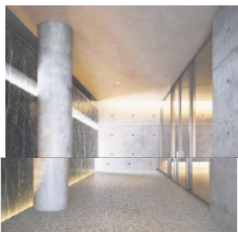
Yayoi Kusama's "Pumpkin (L)," in front of the Sky building at 605 West 42nd Street in Manhattan.





ABOVE, BRUCE NAUMAN/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK; PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP GREENBERG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

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exceptions to the bad art-and-architecture marriage, some of which have been around for years but are little known beyond the crowds that pass them every day, on the way to offices or apartments. My map was also marked with some prime examples of what's on the horizon. Chief among them are the condominium buildings under construction at 56 Leonard Street in TriBeCa, a Herzog & de Meuron creation that will feature a mirror-polished stainless steel Anish Kapoor sculpture nestled surreally at a corner of its base, this British artist's first permanent public piece here; and 152 Elizabeth Street in NoLiTa, the first residential building in New York by the Japanese architect Tadao Ando, into which he will incorporate an art environment of his own, a gossamer light-and-fog space in the entryway, visible from the sidewalk.

Simon Elias, a developer of the Herzog & de Meuron tower, said that the business calculus behind adding a marquee work of art had become more complex in recent years. While developers do not feel an absolute competitive imperative to have A-list art, he said, many like him and his partners believe that great art can help make an already distinctive building an enduring one (and, one assumes, a profitable one).

"To be honest, during the recession, there was a discussion about perhaps eliminating the sculpture," said Mr. Elias, who is Mr. Kapoor's cousin and had spoken with him for years about his desire to create a public work in the city. "We didn't think it would change the sales. But this started not with us trying to come up with a gimmick to improve sales. It was to create something special."

Amit Khurana, one of the two partners behind the Ando building, whose seven stories will be primarily glass and Mr. Ando's signature material, poured concrete, said that several artists had been considered for commissions but that Mr. Ando's ideas for a gauzy, light-filled transition between interior and exterior were more in keeping with the spirit of his architecture.

"Art and architecture are often seen as very different things," Mr. Khurana said. "I think Ando-san manages to consider both and not look at these things as separate pieces." He added: "We also wanted to think about how we could create something that could unite the idea of public art and private art."

The first stop on my tour took me to a luxury high rise that opened a year ago and will undoubtedly last a while, given that its 1,175 rental apartments are believed to be the most in a single tower in



the country. The building, Sky, on 11th Avenue between 42nd and 43rd Streets, has also distinguished itself by installing the first permanent public artwork here by Yayoi Kusama, 87, an art-world titan whose pieces are in almost every important contemporary art museum in the country, as well as Europe and Asia.

The work, an imposing bronze sculpture of an eerily polka-dotted pumpkin, an alter-ego motif that has become Ms. Kusama's calling card, was unveiled recently in the building's motor court, after workers from her London gallery, Victoria Miro, installed it, along with two lacy white "Infinity-Net" paintings by Ms. Kusama (versions of which were for sale at Art Basel last year for \$450,000 each) flanking the lobby.

"We've always loved Kusama and followed her," said Mitchell Moinian, whose family developed the building. "Her

work is a part of our own life."

He said he thought of the pieces by Ms. Kusama, who spent formative years in New York in the 1950s and '60s, as a homecoming of sorts. And, he said, as a way to distinguish the building with an artist whose work is not widely known in the United States but who carries significant critical heft.

"Every single box we needed to check, we asked ourselves, 'What's the best we can do here?'" he said, adding, "It's very easy if you have a lot of money to have a balloon dog, but we don't think that way."

He was referring, of course, to the impish stainless steel sculptures of Jeff Koons, which have become the 21st-century equivalent of Renaissance equestrian monuments, epitomizing wealth and power. And it's true that there are a fair number around, including a bright red balloon flower in the plaza in front of 7

World Trade Center. But the pieces are still something to behold in person, simultaneously sphinx-like and party-clown creepy, and so I went to find the newest one in Manhattan, "Balloon Rabbit (Red)," installed in 2014 at 51 Astor Place, a sleek new office building. At 14 feet, with a whimsical sky-gazing stance and joined ears that cannot but evoke female genitalia, the piece, owned by Edward J. Minskoff, the building's developer, jords it over the minimalist lobby and can be seen from two blocks away, reflecting its surroundings, shimmering through the building's glass walls.

Perhaps to help escape its aura, I headed uptown by subway and made my next stop another lobby artwork that suffuses its surroundings in a far different way. This one, at 505 Fifth Avenue, an office building near the corner of 42nd Street that opened in 2006, is by the Cali-

ornia artist James Turrell, a member of the so-called Light and Space movement of the 1960s, whose work took over the Guggenheim Museum in 2013. The lobby at 505 is striking because there's little in it but light, artificial (from seams in the floor, corners of the ceiling and the walls) and natural (from the street). A security guard came out from behind his desk and advised me — decent-like and rather proudly — in pay attention to the way the colors of Mr. Turrell's environment begin changing from the front of the lobby, where the daylight meets the interior light, and surge slowly back toward the elevators, where a wall panel bleeds from dark purples to blues to greens.

These colors put me in mind of one of my favorite, near-hidden lobby works in the city — in fact, one of my favorite public pieces anywhere — and I made my last stop in Brooklyn, on my way home, at 4 Metrotech Center downtown, the JP Morgan Chase building. For years, I've stopped by this lobby to see a small, blinking neon by Bruce Nauman, one of the most influential artists of the last half-century. Mr. Nauman's neons, which often juxtapose related words or phrases, can be funny, haunting and sometimes brutal ("Raw/War"; "Run From Fear/Fun From Fear").

From one, which blinks the crossed words "Read" and "Reap" in garish greens, pinks, reds and yellows, is mild by comparison but still provocative for a corporate bank lobby, evoking whole-some thoughts of knowledge alongside slightly sinister connotations of the consequences of knowing. The piece, bought in 1992 by the bank under the direction of the collector David Rockefeller from the dealer Leo Castelli, would be right at home in any contemporary museum. (The Museum of Modern Art is organizing a Nauman retrospective for 2018.)

Lisa Ert, the chief curator of the JP Morgan Chase Art Collection, one of the oldest corporate collections in New York, told me that the piece "makes those of us who care about it feel very good."

"We've always thought about the collection as a cultural investment, and there's never been any kind of easy-listening quality to it," she added. "That's the point of the collection — the importance of art as an extension of daily life."



ANISH KAPOOR/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK; ILLUSTRATION BY ALAN COOPER

A rendering of an Anish Kapoor sculpture planned for 56 Leonard Street in TriBeCa.

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