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Real Estate

DESIGN NOTEBOOK

In New Condos, Art Is Part of the Deal

It's all about the artists as developers try to create excitement for their projects.

By TIM McKEOUGH

At 50 Greenpoint, a new 44-unit condominium in Brooklyn, passers-by will find a surprise.

Wrapping two corners of the building, at ground level, are riotously colored works by the Brooklyn street artist JMikal Davis. Mr. Davis, who also goes by the name Hellbent, is perhaps best known for spray-painting entire buildings with vivid compositions that resemble overlapping layers of wallpaper.

The pieces at 50 Greenpoint, which are integrated into the facade, are made from stepped, backlit panels of aluminum composite material that have been laser-cut with intricate patterns. Each work measures about 7½ feet tall by 10 feet long.

"It's my first sculptural piece," Mr. Davis said. "I'm lucky to have done a few commissions with different realty companies, and they've always given me carte blanche to do my thing."

Brendan Aguayo, a managing director of Halstead Property Development Marketing, proposed the project. "It definitely stands out," he said. "I think it will become iconic."

As Oren Evenhar, chief executive of Evenhar Development and Pine Builders, which is developing the building, said: "It's a little something that reminds you you're in Greenpoint. This happens to be a very fun neighborhood that appreciates art, and we wanted to do something that reflects that."

Greenpoint isn't the only neighborhood getting a blast of developer-commissioned art. New residential developments across the city are installing significant works by artists both emerging and established in outdoor plazas, lobbies, common spaces and model units. Where developers previously battled over big-name architects and all-out amenity spaces, from pet spas to hamams, many are now turning their attention to outsize art projects.

At 56 Leonard, the condo building designed by Herzog & de Meuron that resembles a teetering stack of boxes, a 20-foot-tall, nearly 40-ton polished stainless steel blob by Anish Kapoor (who recently bought an apartment in the building) will be squished between the sidewalk and overhanging second floor this fall. When the project started, "10 years ago, I thought we were pioneers to incorporate an artist into the design," said Izak Senbahar, president of the Alexico Group, which is developing the building. "But since then, it has become a little more common."

Commissioning a major work of art doesn't come cheap, Mr. Senbahar said, admitting that the cost was in eight figures. But "I am in the business of creating a wow factor," he added. "Is there a commercial side to it? Yes. We're all in the business of designing a product that will resonate with buyers."

At Sky, a 1,175-unit rental building at 605 West 42nd Street, the Moinian Group opened Sky Art last month, a temporary gallery in a connected 10,000-square-foot street-level retail space at 555 11th Avenue. Programmed in partnership with the exhibition producers Nicolai and Michael Frahm, it is presenting a major component of "Ugo Rondinone: I ♡ John Giorno," a sprawling exhibition taking place in 13 locations across Manhattan, including the New Museum, High Line and Hunter College Art Galleries.

Sky also has a collection of works by blue-chip artists scattered throughout its public areas, including a bronze polka-dot pumpkin by Yayoi Kusama out front and works by Sol LeWitt and Günther Förg inside.

"We wanted to create more excitement for the project and the neighborhood," said Mitchell Moinian, whose family developed the building. "We will always, as a family and a company, be creating art spectacles and activations."

He continued: "We have several build-



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ALEXICO GROUP/HERZOG & DE MEURON



INGO LEONARD/ARCHIPHOTO



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ings under development right now in Manhattan. This is a foreshadowing of the great art initiatives to come."

Shaun Osher, the chief executive of the real estate company CORE, said he now routinely advises developers of new buildings to invest in art for their lobbies: "We've started recommending, more and more, to have really great pieces of art. It's the tone-setter and the first impression."

And compared with the cost of building in New York, showstopping art is a relatively minor expense. "They're spending hundreds of millions of dollars putting up a building," he said. "The lobby is the last place they should be value-engineering."

At 42 Crosby Street, a building designed by Selldorf Architects, where CORE is responsible for sales and marketing, the reason for bringing art into buildings is simple. "As we know from going to any museum, people like art—and they like to have it where they live," said Mr. Greenburger, a collector who founded an art awards program in 1986, the Omi International Arts Center in 1992 and an Art-in-Buildings program in 2000 for his company's properties.

Art installations also signal quality, said Jennie Lamensdorf, the director and curator of the Art-in-Buildings program. "If you see that the developer cares enough to put art in the lobby," she said, "you can reasonably assume that he's going to give the same amount of care to the rest of the building."

At 50 West, Time Equities' new 187-unit condo building, there is a glass-walled ex-

hibition space in the lobby viewable from an outdoor plaza, which will host rotating displays of art. The first piece on view is a 10-foot-tall twister sculpture of white powder-coated aluminum by the artist Alice Aycock.

The company also hosted an Artist-in-Construction Residency program that gave Noa Charuvit, Hugo Bastidas, Paul Anthony Smith and Bahar Behbahani access to the construction site and a neighboring studio to make site-specific pieces for the building between 2014 and 2016.

Beyond common spaces, some developers are turning model units into full-fledged art galleries as well. This past April, the curators Romain Dauriac and Jenny Muskin Goldman transformed the sales gallery of 53W53 into a temporary gallery for the exhibition "Singular Object."

And at the Printing House at 421 Hudson Street, the developer Myles Horn is hosting Muse in the Mews, a group exhibition organized with Salomon Contemporary. The show, which opened in April, takes over an entire townhouse for sale with works of art that are also for sale.

"It's a very effective cross-marketing tool to bring in a select group of people who might not normally come to an open house," Mr. Horn said. "A lot of people who came to see the art exhibition inquired about the townhouse, and a lot of people who came to look at the townhouse inquired about the art."

But attracting visitors isn't the only advantage to filling the townhouse with art, he said: "Mostly, it makes it look beautiful."