

In New Buildings, Buying Into Cool

By JOSH BARBANEL

WHAT do the soaring prices of works by Gauguin and Warhol have to do with the ever-rising price of condominiums in New York?

Perhaps nothing at all. After all, a picture hook does not make a home. But that hasn't stopped developers and their sales teams from aggressively seizing the cachet of the art world and using it to promote their latest and greatest buildings, in an effort to imbue them with that special sense of value and sophistication.

Developers, especially those who are also collectors and connoisseurs, are incorporating more and more art into their residential buildings. Some, like Jules Demchick, the builder of two new condominium projects, Morton Square and the Cielo, are designing lobbies around an artist's visions in glass and wax. They are becoming, like the Medicis and the Rockefellers, patrons of the arts.

Others are turning their sales offices into galleries in which the works of artists ranging from unknown locals to international stars are shown. What better way to showcase the cool of Dumbo or Williamsburg than through a display of local Brooklyn art?

"You need a great home to have great art," said Lou-

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Real, or Not

Art is being placed in new buildings, and it is also being used in marketing programs to sell them. In some cases, developers with their own collections, or a passion for art, are recruiting the artists who create custom works for their lobbies. At left, Philip Koether, left, the interior architect for One Morton Square, with Jules Demchick, the president of the company that developed it, in front of the glass sculpture by Tom Patti in the lobby. Above, a computer-generated model of a condo for sale at 205 East 59th Street that includes images of works by Frank Stella, on the right, and Andy Warhol. The art being used in the marketing program will not be used in the building, but is simply designed to suggest the furnishings and way of life that might be appropriate in the new building.

In New Buildings, Art As the Cool New Perk



Annie Marie Musielman for The New York Times

Left, Betsy Eby in her Seattle studio. Her work will hang in the Cielo. Right, Tom Patti in his studio, working on his Morton Square project. One of his glass sculptures, below left. Elizabeth Unger, sales director for 205 East 59th Street, with a customer in front of a painting by Frank Stella, whose work is used in the virtual models.



Ben Garver for The New York Times

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ise M. Sunshine, the chairwoman of the Sunshine Group, marketers of some of the most expensive apartments in New York, whose principal sales office is in a former gallery on East 57th Street.

In short, art has become the latest building amenity, beyond the stainless-steel kitchens, granite and marble, and beyond the brand-name architects, like Cesar Pelli or Richard Meier, and is being used to coax buyers to spend just a little bit more for that little something extra. "Location, location, location" still rules the real estate market, but a little panache can help bring in an extra few hundred dollars per square foot, marketers say.

Ms. Sunshine is doing more, or perhaps more with less, than others. In her promotional material showing renderings of model apartments, she has electronically inserted images of contemporary art borrowed from galleries and collectors. The idea, she said, is to show people "how to use the space," filling the large loftlike expanses and evoking a life of luxury and taste.

Her renderings, for instance, show the "Maria Callas #2" by Julian Schnabel in the living room of a \$12 million town house for sale at the Hubert in TriBeCa. On the (virtual) walls of a double-height living room in a new condominium going up at 205 East 59th Street, she has hung the sweeping arcs of an 18-foot-wide, 8-foot-tall Frank Stella painting, from his minimalist protractor series. Prices in that building range from about \$1.5 million to more than \$3 million.

But, alas, for those seduced by the grandeur of the art, the apartments will be delivered with bare walls, empty and echoing: the art is simply conceptual. The Schnabel is being offered for sale for \$400,000 by Robert Mnuchin of C & M Arts at the Art Basel Miami Beach show later this week. And the Stella art is not available to fill that huge blank 20-foot-high wall. It is part of the private collection of Donald Zucker, the developer of 205 East 59th Street.

Art dealers and consultants say this new emphasis reflects a widening interest in art, especially contemporary art, particularly among a younger affluent crowd that is also a prime market for high-end condos. It was reflected in high prices at fall art auctions in New York, where there were more than \$500 million in sales, including \$39.2 million for a Gauguin from his Tahitian period, and \$15.1 million for a Warhol painting, "Mustard Race Riot."

"Art is becoming so fashionable, so much in demand," said Isabella del Frate Rayburn, an art consultant and dealer, who is putting together works to be shown in a sales office. "I have never seen so many people, including young people involved in art, spending from \$500 to millions."

Of course, art has always dressed up great homes, with murals and mosaics dating back to the remains of Pompeii and beyond, but during most of the postwar period, apartment buildings were often banal and functional. A nice print or even a painting might be hung in a lobby, but art was usually associated with public spaces, or grand office buildings.

This changed briefly in the 1980's, during an earlier real estate boom. The lobby of the Museum Tower on West 53rd Street showcased \$200,000 in sculptures, paintings and prints, including lithographs by Picasso and Matisse. In this period the developer David Walentas, in converting the Alwyn Court, a 1920s 12-story 1909 building at the corner of West 58th Street and Seventh Avenue, into condominiums, commissioned Richard Haas, the trompe l'oeil muralist, to create a full-height mural in an inner courtyard that echoes the ornate exterior facade, and covered it with a skylight to create an atrium.



Phil Mansfield for The New York Times

Adrienne Albert, president of the Marketing Directors, which specializes in marketing new buildings, said her office pioneered the art concept during the 1980's in marketing a new condominium, the Pierpont on East 30th Street. Artwork was placed in the lobby and on each floor, including two lithographs by Mr. Stella, the artist of choice then for new office buildings. The art, known as the Pierpont Collection, belonged to the condominium. But when the competitive frenzy of the 80's gave way to a tumble in prices, the interest in art faltered. Eventually, Ms. Albert said, the condominium board sold off the Pierpont Collection to raise money for the building.

Mr. Demchick, the president of JD Carlisle Development, has been weaving art into his projects in part because he is surrounded by the arts in his life. His wife, Barbara Nessim, is an artist and illustrator, his two daughters work in the arts or have an interest in them, and he has a private art collection at home that includes a glass collection and paintings from Monet to Hock-



Ting-Li Wang/The New York Times

ney.

At a 14-story condominium at the large Morton Square development in the West Village, he turned the lobby over to Tom Patti, a glass artist whose work he has collected, to design a series of glass sculptures, windows and fixtures composed of flat and curved laminated glass panels throughout the lobby and hallways. The work is even used in the transom windows of several town houses that are part of the development.

At the center of it all is a huge set of five hanging glass panels in the lobby, illuminated during the day by a skylight cut through a garage above the lobby. Working with Mr. Patti, the developer hired Philip Koether, an architect with experience working with artists, to design the lobby interior to complete the vision. The glass is offset by a veneer of Mozambique wood with undulating grain cut in the 1930's that Mr. Koether found in a warehouse.

The project cost \$1.5 million out of a budget of more than \$190 million, and not incidentally, the sales office stocked a handsome color booklet outlining Mr. Patti's work at Morton Square. Mr. Demchick said the building has all but sold out at an average price of about \$1,065 a square foot, or \$1.5 million for a two-bedroom, two-bath apartment.

"I try very hard not to impose my personal aesthetic on others, but on this one I couldn't miss," Mr. Demchick said.

JD Carlisle is also putting up the Cielo on the somewhat less-glamorous eastern reaches of the Upper East Side, on York Avenue at 83rd Street. To link it to the far more expensive apartments on Fifth and Park Avenues, Mr. Demchick is turning the building into something of an art theme park.

Buyers at the 28-story Cielo will have access to an "arts concierge" who will have the latest museum and exhibition schedules.

They will also be able to sign up for arts programs for children, and all buyers will receive a one-year family membership at the Whitney Museum of American Art, at Madison Avenue and East 75th Street.

For the lobby, Mr. Demchick commissioned Betsy Eby, who uses an ancient technique based on beeswax and pigment, to produce two wax and resin paintings. They are translucent abstract works that Ms. Eby said were inspired by the blue skies and open views suggested by the name Cielo.

"The work to me talks about reducing nature to its gestural essence, while I am working with line and falls and drops and drips of wax," she said.

Mr. Koether is also the interior architect for the Cielo, and he found Ms. Eby's work at a group show in a gallery that included some of her pieces. He knew at once, he said, that her naturalistic but abstract work matched his vision for the building. His design for the lobby includes veneer panels to frame each work, one large eight-by-six-foot painting, and a smaller one behind the concierge desk.

Mr. Demchick is hoping to sell his units at an average price of \$1,300 a square foot, with prices ranging from \$700,000 for studios to \$5 million for a 3,200-square-foot apartment, about 20 percent higher than previous sales in the area, but far lower than prices in prime sections of the neighborhood. The building is scheduled to open at the end of next year.

Other developers are also merging their work with art. Roy Stillman, a partner in Sherwood Properties, said art "is just my passion." In a collaboration with the artist Donald Sultan, he created an intimate lobby for the Metropolitan, a 32-story building with 94 condominiums that opened earlier this year on East 90th Street at Third Avenue. It was designed by Philip Johnson.

Mr. Stillman said he had seen images in a

book of flower paintings by Mr. Sultan and thought they would make a perfect centerpiece for the lobby — with just a few changes. So he approached the artist, and they came to agreement on a new work. The color of the flowers would be changed from red to purple. The size would be different. Rather than oil on canvas, the work would be silk-screened oil onto bronze panels to match the finish in the lobby, bronze and amber silk panels. And the new work would be large, six by eight feet.

"I asked him to recrop, reorient and recolor, and he was willing," Mr. Stillman said. "The image was still his. It still had his fingerprints."

He said the work cost "several hundred thousand dollars," took 18 months to complete, and according to the doorman, is the talk of the building.

"Many lobbies are banal because it is safe," Mr. Stillman said. "To be different you have to step out of the safe harbor and expose yourself, whether it is compliments or criticism, to a healthy dialogue."

The greater presence of art isn't just a Manhattan phenomenon. In Dumbo, on the waterfront in Brooklyn, Jane Walentas has worked with Brooklyn artists to bring art into the neighborhood. At the Sweeney Building at 30 Main Street, Ms. Walentas hired Roger Stevens, a sculptor who works in steel wire, to create huge numerals in a variety of styles for each floor. The building was developed by her husband, David Walentas, who said that "Quality in any medium sells. We treat our apartments as works of art."

In Williamsburg, when the developers and marketers of Schaefer Landing, a high-rise condominium on the waterfront, were set-

Buyers at the Cielo will get museum memberships and an 'arts concierge.'

ting up a sales office last summer, they didn't like the generic artwork selected by a design consultant and decided to go native instead, bringing in local artists and galleries by word of mouth.

"We thought we could do better and promote local artists in Williamsburg at the same time," said Andrew J. Gerringer, the managing director of the development marketing group at Douglas Elliman.

In downtown Brooklyn, Mario Prociada, the developer of Boulevard East, an 11-story condominium, has commissioned the not-for-profit Rotunda Gallery to buy the work of local artists and show them on each floor of the building. He plans on doing the same for other Brooklyn projects, he said.

Sometimes, though, original artwork is an afterthought. Paul Davis, the executive in charge of the Trump Place development on the West Side, thought the finished lobby of wood veneer and marble in the rental building at 160 Riverside Boulevard needed something more. He commissioned Jeffrey Brosk, a sculptor and wood artist whose work he admired, to create two bronze tubular sculptures to capture the late afternoon light from across the river in each corner of the lobby.

The idea was to make the lobby a cross between a grand hotel entrance and a living room, and make it fun and "even a little bit whimsical," Mr. Davis said. But when the sun isn't glowing through the windows, the sculptures are upstaged a bit by other grand objects in the lobby, like large hanging light fixtures and oversized oriental vases on tall pedestals near each sculpture.

For the artists, the exposure can be beneficial, even if the artwork never leaves the sales office. The Paul Kasmin Gallery lent artwork to show in a sales office for the building at 205 East 59th Street, and its 62 condominiums. A scale model of the 27-story tower is surrounded by Stella paintings. Brokers showing the model apartment say that the gallery has already rung up at least one sale from a condo shopper who liked the work there. "I have done this several times," Mr. Kasmin said, "and invariably had sales."