

THE Art OF TRAVEL

As increasing numbers of hotels and cruise lines commit to displaying original art, our writer wonders: will we finally see the end of dismal mass-produced pictures in our hotel rooms?

BY THERESA GAWLAS MEDOFF

I spotted the massive abstract painting the first time I entered AC3 Restaurant + Bar at Hotel Paseo in Palm Desert, California. At 3.5 feet tall and 32 feet long, the original artwork stretches nearly the length of one wall, brightening the entire area with its cheery splashes of color. Every time I went into the restaurant or bar during my three-night stay at the hotel, I made sure I sat facing that wall so that I could enjoy the painting.

Created by artist Nicholas Kontaxis, *Just One More Time* is among many striking contemporary works adorning the lobby, restaurant, hallways and spa at Hotel Paseo, part of the Marriott Bonvoy Autograph Collection. Numbering more than 180 independently owned boutique hotels around the world, Autograph Collection properties emphasize craft, design and sense of place. For Hotel Paseo, that means integrating with the greater Palm Springs region and its emphasis on art.

"Hotel Paseo is committed to the celebration of art and artisans and to the rich variety of art mediums and styles that make the city of Palm Desert a worldwide destination for art," says Hotel Paseo's General Manager Joe Alegre. "The artwork we display invites visitors to explore and discover what the hotel and the destination have to offer."

The prominence of original artwork in hotels is not an entirely new phenomenon. *The New York Times* reported on the trend a decade ago, noting, "Art has become a fundamental, rather than ornamental, element of hotel design." What's noteworthy today, however, is the prevalence of that commitment to art. Suddenly, art is virtually everywhere, from the stand-alone hotel showcasing the owner's private collection to the growing number of art-focused 21c Museum Hotels in Midwest states to cruise lines such as Cunard and Uniworld Boutique River Cruise Collection that display art on board.

Artist Nicholas Kontaxis is shown by the large-scale work he painted for Hotel Paseo in Palm Desert, California.

PHOTO BY TAILI SONG ROTH



COURTESY OF UNIWORLD BOUTIQUE RIVER CRUISE COLLECTION

Among the artworks on Uniworld's S.S. *Beatrice* is Alexander Calder's *Spiders Nest*, *Pyramids II* in Wolfgang's bar and lounge.



Artist Ronald Beverly (inset) photographed D.C.'s famous cherry blossoms for several site-specific works at MGM National Harbor, including the wallpaper in the lobby bar shown here.

PHOTOS BY RONALD BEVERLY

ROOMS WITH A VIEW

In keeping with the concept of its ships being "floating boutique hotels," Uniworld designs each of its 16 ships (with 4 more to debut in 2020) to be one of a kind, with every ship highlighting original works by some of the art world's biggest names. The S.S. *Beatrice* sailing the Danube River in Eastern Europe, for example, features artwork by Pablo Picasso throughout the ship, including the artist's only 24-color lithograph, *Le Picador II*. In addition to a commissioned Murano glass chandelier and a life-size glass horse in the two-story foyer, the France-based S.S. *Catherine* has lithographs by Joan Miro, Donald Brun and Marc Chagall.

"No two Uniworld ships are the same, as each is designed to reflect the destinations where they sail, boasting original artwork from iconic artists and distinctive décor that isn't found anywhere else in the world," says Uniworld President and CEO Ellen Bettridge.

On every Cunard ship, guests are surrounded by a staggering art collection. Flagship *Queen Mary 2* alone boasts more than 5,000 works of art, including 565 original commissioned works, 190 works of graphic art and 4,000 limited-edition prints in cabins and companionways. One wall of the ship's Britannia Restaurant, for example, is graced with a 20-foot-by-15-foot handwoven wall carpet designed by contemporary Dutch artist Barbara Broekman and featuring the *Queen Mary 2* interwoven

with the Brooklyn Bridge and the New York City skyline. British sculptor John McKenna's stylized bronze relief of the ship hangs in the Grand Lobby, while American artist Matthew Wurr's painted resin sculptures of constellations and planets can be seen outside Illuminations planetarium on decks 2 and 3.

NURTURING TODAY'S ARTISTS

For several years before MGM National Harbor opened in 2016, artists from Prince George's County in Maryland were busy creating commissioned works to bring local flavor to the hotel located on the Potomac River, just outside Washington, D.C. Out on the construction site, ceramist and sculptor Margaret Boozer was scooping up soil and rocks to incorporate into her 34-foot-by-24-foot wall sculpture *Harbor*, a topographical map that hangs behind the hotel's front desk. Fine art photographer Ronald Beverly was photographing D.C.'s famous cherry blossoms and using Photoshop to hand-manipulate the images into patterns later used to create sepia-toned wallpaper for the lobby bar, glass panels that serve as backdrop to a casino bar, and another large-scale image for elevator interiors.

"Kudos to MGM for taking that kind of interest in collecting art and for recognizing that art is both vital and necessary," says Beverly.

The artworks by Boozer and Beverly are part of the MGM National Harbor Heritage Collection, which, along with several other MGM Resorts collections, is overseen by MGM Resorts



Artist Victoria Heald is among those who have been hosted by the Maker-in-Residence program at London's Bankside Hotel.



For the 21c Museum Hotel in Louisville, Kentucky, artists Jonah Freeman and Justin Lowe created *Asleep in the Cyclone*, a multi-sensory immersive work that is also a functional hotel room.

COURTESY OF 21C MUSEUM HOTELS



Art is all around at The Alexander in Indianapolis. (Above) The focal point of the lobby's living room is Sonya Clark's *Madam CJ Walker II*, made of 3,400 hair combs. (Top right) Mark Fox's artwork made of polished stainless steel hangs on the hotel's second floor. (Bottom right) A ground-level wall shimmers with Alyson Shotz' floor-to-ceiling installation made of acrylic with dichroic lamination.



PHOTOS THIS PAGE COURTESY OF THE ALEXANDER

Art & Culture. All told, the MGM collections number some 800 artworks valued at more than \$250 million, making it one of the largest corporate art collections in the world.

"We have long been and continue to be a leader in the development of vibrant art and cultural destinations. Each MGM Resorts Art & Culture project thoughtfully considers the artist, the environment and the overall experience, and aims to create special accessible experiences for audiences of every age and walk of life," says Tarissa Tiberti, executive director of MGM Resorts Art & Culture.

Since 1998, MGM Resorts has presented exhibitions of art from beyond the corporate catalog at the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art in the Bellagio Resort & Casino in Las Vegas, but those exhibitions come with an admission fee. In contrast, the artwork in the hotels and casinos is all free to see. Printed maps for self-guided art tours are available at MGM National Harbor as well as at the MGM Las Vegas properties Vdara Hotel & Spa and Aria. Park MGM, also in Vegas, offers guided tours every Wednesday of an art collection that features artists from around the world.

ART AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Just over a year ago, Bankside Hotel, also among Marriott Bonvoy's Autograph Collection Hotels, opened in southeast London, an area that's home to Tate Modern, Hayward Gallery, National Theatre, the British Film Institute and the complex

of performing arts venues known as Southbank Centre. How does a hotel fit in when it's surrounded by creative types? It does what Bankside Hotel did and emphasizes art, design and cultural events. The design vision for the boutique property was "art school without the dust," says Dayna Lee, a former film-set art director who is now a hotel designer.

"I wanted to create spaces that support makers and thinkers," Lee adds. "We have taken a keen interest in products made by local hands."

Bankside Hotel even has a Maker-in-Residence program through which emerging artists display their work and host interactive programs and workshops for hotel guests and the public.

When contemporary art collectors and preservationists Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson converted a series of 19th-century warehouses in downtown Louisville, Kentucky, into the first 21c Museum Hotel, they intended it to be a one-off. Their primary goal had been to take an active role in the preservation of their hometown.

Fast-forward 10 years, and the married couple has been integral in the opening of an additional seven 21c Museum Hotels, with three more in the works. Every 21c Museum Hotel occupies a repurposed building and combines a boutique hotel with a contemporary art museum and a chef-driven restaurant.

The multi-venue museums are dedicated to collecting and exhibiting 21st-century art, and the galleries are open free to

the public. Docent-led tours are offered regularly, and there's often cultural programming as well—much of it free. Think concerts, films, spoken word performances and conversations with artists.

Going a step further, The Alford Inn at Rollins, a boutique hotel in Winter Park, Florida, owned by Rollins College, was designed specifically to exhibit much of the work from The Alford Collection of Contemporary Art, which is part of the Cornell Fine Arts Museum at Rollins College. The collection comprises more than 300 paintings, photographs, sculptures and mixed media works from emerging artists around the world. Even more impressive, the hotel was created to endow scholarships, with all net profits going to the Alford Scholars Program. Since the hotel opened in 2013, more than 63 full scholarships have been funded.

INDY ART

Indianapolis, Indiana, has upped the cultural ante with not one but two art-focused hotels downtown: Conrad Indianapolis and The Alexander. Step outside the hotels, and you can embark on the city's Cultural Trail, an eight-mile bike and pedestrian path that connects six historic neighborhoods and cultural attractions such as the Indianapolis Central Library, Phoenix Theatre and its Culture Centre, and American Legion Mall, with its host of monuments and memorials. Along the way, trail-goers can take in more than a dozen works of public art such as the Glick Peace Walk comprising 12 sculptural gardens dedicated

to "individuals who made peaceful contributions to humanity." Completed in 2013, the Cultural Trail has become so popular that the city recently doubled—to nearly 600—the number of bicycles available through its Pacers Bikeshare program.

The two hotels are attractions in themselves. The Alexander, which boasts of being "the only hotel in the world to be curated from the ground up by an accredited art museum," assembled its collection with help from Veronica Roberts, former Adjunct Associate Curator of Contemporary Art at The Indianapolis Museum of Art. New installations are added regularly to the collection, which now numbers more than 275 works. Even the parking garages have commissioned art on display; British graffiti artist Nick Walker created large-scale murals throughout CityWay's two parking garages.

Public space on the second floor of the Conrad Indianapolis is devoted to the exhibition of works by local artists, while its main floor is the location of Long-Sharp Gallery, once named among the top 500 art galleries in the world by *Modern Painters* magazine. Employees trained as art ambassadors are available for guided tours of the hotel and gallery. And if you really want to immerse yourself in art, you can book one of the Conrad Indy's four Collection Suites, with art fitted to the themes of the Pop, Modernist, Contemporary and Surrealist movements.

Pablo Picasso famously said, "Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life." And isn't that one of the purposes of travel as well?