

Art Hits The Walls

A new exhibition brings artworks to street level at London Terrace

BY ANDY SECCOMBE

Emerging artists have always struggled to gain exposure (let alone commercial success) but one Chelsea resident is doing his best to lend a hand. Rodney Durso, founder of the new outdoor art exhibition *ArtBridge 2009: First Exposure*, opening March 5, says that the project's premise is simple: to showcase the work of emerging artists on the exterior of a building. And not just any building, but a classic local landmark, London Terrace Gardens.

The residential behemoth—which fills an entire city block between West 23rd and 24th streets and Ninth and Tenth avenues—was once known as the largest apartment complex in the world. Built in 1928, it periodically undergoes maintenance to its exterior walls, necessitating scaffolding for yearlong stretches. As a local artist, designer and entrepreneur, Durso recognized the potential of the situation and the ArtBridge project was born.

Durso says he approached the management at London Terrace Gardens with the idea of attaching original artworks to the temporary scaffolding and explains that, thankfully, there were relatively few issues in seeing the project come to fruition.

"I said, 'You've got these pan-



els circling your building for a full year and they're quite unsightly—do something beautiful with them!" says Durso. "It was two or three meetings, a couple of phone calls and they were on board."

Approximately 100 artists submitted works to the exhibition, which were then rated by a panel of industry professionals—including gallery owners, art consultants, an architecture professor and an art historian—with a selection of 30 works ultimately

chosen for display.

"I would say about 80 percent of the artists did a special piece for this project—which is really surprising and exciting to me," says Durso, explaining that contributors were required to follow a specific format when submitting photographs of their artworks, which spanned paintings, photography, collage and digital art.

An ArtBridge photographer, who used a variety of special lenses for quality purposes,

then individually photographed the chosen pieces with a high-resolution camera. The images were subsequently printed on weather-proof panels that will be attached to the sidewalk bridging around the building for the exhibition's March opening.

"Each panel is going to be 4-feet high by 25-feet long, which is enormous," Durso says. "So I really had to be careful about the quality of the photographs."

The 30 selected pieces offer an array of imagery likely to be appreciated by art enthusiasts as well as local passersby. One work features a solitary arm protruding from the ocean, another is reminiscent of the abstractions of Rorschach inkblots and a third depicts brightly colored tanks, missiles and warfare.

Durso is no stranger to creativity himself, owning the design

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company, Stormhouse Partners, which he's run for the last 15 years. In fact, London Terrace Gardens is one of Stormhouse's clients and Durso has known the building's management team for years, having based his office there and lived in the building.

He explains that three years ago he downsized Stormhouse to a single-man operation and took up painting. He later rented a studio in Chelsea, and it was then that he became immersed in the city's art scene.

Along with his own personal creativity, Durso admits he has an entrepreneurial streak and that the ArtBridge project has proved satisfying on a number of levels.

"I felt this was an interesting way to combine a lot of my interests," he says. "I like doing things that are for public good."

Having been exposed to the politics of

the art world for the last three years as a painter, he's also encountered first hand the difficulties that artists face when starting out.

"I've had some shows but the gallery world is essentially impenetrable," he says, explaining that any exposure that his own art may gain from the ArtBridge project would be a welcome offshoot. He also says that his background working in design, dealing with clients and developing projects has also bolstered his resourcefulness for the exhibition.

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the last couple of years can be extremely talented, but if you ask them to produce a show, or to organize an event, they're all burns," he says.

Thankfully, there hasn't been a lot of



A rendering of the "Art Bridge" exhibit at London Terrace

red tape to wade through for the exhibition since its initial inception in March last year. Advertising on a building's scaffolding, for instance, became illegal in 2005, but Durso says he's not aware of any possible infringements regarding public art installations.

"I think it's going to be OK," he says. "There's a first time for everything. I'm

pretty sure I'm allowed to do this."

And the art itself? Durso says that it's always personal determining what he likes.

"To me, I feel like you have to see some effort—that this person had a real emotional connection or a physical connection," he says. "I like to see that something went into the piece, and they didn't just paint a canvas red." ☒