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You won't believe the famous art hanging in these guys' offices

By Heidi Mitchell



DDG Chairman and CEO Joe McMillan displays a plywood rose from graffiti artist Ben Eine (originally painted on a DDG construction fence) and a piece of the “Yellow Trees” DDG building scrim by Japanese pop artist Yayoi Kusama in his Tribeca office.

Joe McMillan, head of real estate and development firm DDG – whose 345Meatpacking construction site was famously cloaked in a black-and-yellow-dotted scrim by Japanese pop artist Yayoi Kusama in 2012 – keeps a chunk of that “Yellow Trees” wrap in the receiving room of his 14,000-square-foot Tribeca office.

“I see it from my desk all day, and I think it’s tremendous,” says McMillan, a 44-year-old reformed hedgeie and former Army man.

Around the bend, half a dozen scale-model buildings stand in the shadow of an 8-by-16-foot spray-painted rose by Ben Eine. The British graffiti artist tagged DDG’s construction fence at XOCO 325 West Broadway, and McMillan displays a piece of that plywood in the office. “We loved it for the great pop of color,” he tells Alexa.

In the last decade, New York’s real estate and art worlds have collided like never before, with developers commissioning site-specific work and architects designing entire buildings around major pieces. Meanwhile, the executives behind all those art-mad condominiums have become regulars at Basel and Frieze. These art-enthused developers are now transforming their offices

into bold galleries, hoping to excite and inspire their creative teams — and anyone else who walks through the door.

McMillan's mostly commissioned collection is rather gonzo, and designed to generate an emotional response, much like the company's 14 or so condominiums (consider 12 Warren Street, whose exterior mixes an unevenly hand-clad bluestone facade with scattered terraces cantilevering out into space). In a DDG lounge, artist Shawn Martinbrough's noir comic-strip drawings, inspired by DDG's XOCO 325 building in Soho, hang between grand windows facing uptown; in the conference room, a large-format print of a quarry, by Dutch art-photographer Jacqueline Hassink, creates another opening to the world outside.

"Art and architecture can give you something unexpected and beautiful to talk about," McMillan says. Plus, he adds, "you spend so much time together at the office, you want it to be an environment that you enjoy being in."

At real estate investment and development firm HFZ Capital Group's Midtown headquarters, a light installation proclaiming "If These Walls Could Talk," by Rinaldo Frattolillo, sparks conversation in the boardroom, while a compressed Honda motorcycle, by the late French sculptor César, sits on a pedestal in founder and chairman Ziel Feldman's office suite.

"Whenever we are about to install a new piece, everyone has an opinion," he jokes. "They either say, 'Wow,' or, 'Thank God I work on the other side of the office.'" Feldman, 57, has been collecting art with his wife, Helene, for a lifetime; his attention-grabbing taste is on full display on his office terrace, where a 3 ½-foot-long balloonlike dog occupies prime real estate.

"I have had many offers from the bankers across the street for my 'Koons' out there," he laughs, since the piece, "Canine Construction," is actually by Korean artist Gimhongsok and "made out of stuffed garbage bags cast in bronze." (To be fair, a tiny Jeff Koons "Balloon Dog" replica, which retails for \$27, sits just inside.)

Feldman's office art tends to be highly tactile, like Deborah Butterfield's horse sculpture honed from old army tanks, or — impossible to ignore — the eyes of Alan Rath's "Optical Cylinder III" robotic video sculpture following you around the conference room. "They stimulate thought and conversation, but they also make people smile," Feldman says, just as his buildings One Madison and 11 Beach Street might. "Sometimes a piece becomes a punch-line for me in meetings. Like the photograph by Gerard Rancinan of a staged car crash between Marilyn Monroe, James Dean and Elvis Presley with a Goofy head in the conference room — I point to it and say, 'Look what happened to the last people I negotiated with!'"



A crushed motorcycle by French sculptor César is parked in HFZ Capital Group ZEO Ziel Feldman's office.



Time Equities CEO Francis Greenburger is a major art collector and patron – he employs a full-time curator to rotate works throughout his office, including this “James Baldwin” installation (an acrylic-and-spray-paint mirror portrait and accompanying books) by artist Brett Cook-Dizney.

Jennie Lamensdorf, the full-time curator for Time Equities CEO Francis Greenburger, sifts through her boss’ 1,000-plus-piece art collection to choose about 400 rotating works for his real estate firm’s office at 55th Fifth Ave.

“With office space, you have three choices,” Lamensdorf says. “Either you keep the walls blank and depressing, you put up weird inspirational posters, or you share your art with your employees and bring them some joy – and contribute to a feeling that, even in a traditional workplace, new ideas are welcome here.”

Greenburger (who sponsors the biennial Francis J. Greenburger Prize, a lifetime achievement award for under-recognized artists, and who founded the Omi International Arts Center in Ghent, NY, in 1992) believes that sharing his favorites infuses his office with excitement. The pieces on show are as diverse and eclectic as his portfolio of buildings (which range from garages and retail spaces to well-loved walk-ups and high-design condominiums, like Helmut Jahn’s 50 West, which opens this fall).



Feldman also keeps “Canine Construction” – created by Korean artist Gimhongsok with bronzed trash bags – on his Midtown office terrace. Bankers nearby often mistake it for a Jeff Koons sculpture.

Many are materially interesting: a woven-paper piece by Rakuko Naito, a 20-year-old Sol LeWitt sculpture in his C-suite, an installation titled “Let Down Your Hair,” by South African feminist artist Frances Goodman – a sort of medusa head with tentacles, all made entirely out of fake fingernails.

Greenburger, 67, rotates what’s on view every few months: “I find when you move things, they take on new meaning.”

Real estate, all three developers agree, is often as abstract as the artworks they collect. Any cues or references they offer to employees or visitors can help give shape to feelings that sometimes elude words. “Real estate is emotional, but it’s also about imagination,” says Greenburger. “So I like to fill my office with colorful, playful pieces with positive imagery.”

With any luck, one of those pieces just might inspire the next great New York building.