



PHOTO BY JESSE HARRIS

PREGNANT PAUSE

Damien Hirst's 35-foot-high bronze *Virgin Mother* (2005) welcomes visitors to the plaza outside of Lever House in New York City.

Buying Art For Art's Sake

In the 1980s, corporations invested in blue-chip art; today they are doing something riskier, supporting contemporary artists **BY CAROL KINO**

During the last art-market boom, in the 1980s, businesses that wanted in on the action tended to build corporate collections. Companies like Alcoa and IBM were buying up Picassos and Frida Kahlos, the better to decorate their headquarters. The 1990s were marked by the rapid dispersal of many of those collections as the art market slumped.

The hopping art market these days has big business moving to a different beat. Even when there's a corporate collection involved, companies seem to be putting their money into commissions, collaborations and large-scale public projects. And the emphasis, just as with the art market itself, is on contemporary—usually a far riskier enterprise than collecting blue-chip Impressionism.

That is certainly true of the corporations behind Art Basel. Since UBS became a single brand in 2003, its collection has been focused on contemporary work. And then there's BMW, which revved up its occasional art program last year by commissioning Olafur Eliasson to create its 16th Art Car (Alexander Calder produced the first in 1975).

Often, when a company hitches its star to art, it means someone at the top is an aficionado. Take the real estate tycoon Aby Rosen, the president of RFR Holding LLC in New York. He is a leading contemporary collector and the motivating force behind the celebrated installations at Lever House on Park Avenue—a modernist gem by Gordon Bunshaft, one of many in Rosen's portfolio. (RFR also owns Mies van de Rohe's Seagram Building.)

Since December 2003, Lever House has commissioned four artists a year—including Jeff Koons and Jorge Pardo—to create site-specific works for the building lobby. Though the eventual aim is to build a collection that can be sent on tour, Rosen said his overriding desire is to make art publicly available. His initial impetus, he said, was the 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center.

"We were all a little bit dreary in those days and the idea was to use the art to pull you away from what we have experienced," he said. "Art is a healer."

After mounting a few group shows in other RFR properties, Rosen eventually held several loan shows at Lever House. The commissions program, run by the curator Richard Marshall, began with a neon sculpture by Keith Sonnier. More recently, visitors to Lever House could view a geometric abstraction painted on the ceiling by Sarah Morris. Damien Hirst's *Virgin Mother*, a 35-foot-



GROUP EFFORT

Aby Rosen and David Edelstein, partners on the W South Beach, seen here with Sam Keller, center.



NOT ASKING 'IS IT BLUE CHIP?' ASKING 'IS IT FUN?'

Folkert de Jong, who carves giant soldiers out of styrofoam, is represented by Peres Project in Booth N50 in the convention center. His piece *In God We Trust* opens on December 12 in Lever House.



JURGEN TELLER FOR DORNBRACHT

The bathroom fixtures company hired Teller for its first *Statements* in 1995. Not all showrooms were pleased.

The hopping art market these days has big business moving to a different beat. And the emphasis is on contemporary.

high painted bronze sculpture of a pregnant anatomical toy, stands on the plaza outside.

On Dec. 12, Lever House opens *In God We Trust*, an installation by the Belgian artist Folkert de Jong, which will fill the lobby with huge soldiers carved from Styrofoam. (A similar de Jong project will be on view during Art Basel; information is available at the Peres Projects booth.) "You are doing it for yourself, because you love the art," Mr. Rosen explained. "And you are doing it to give back."

Recently, RFR has also been involved with another interesting contemporary art project—the annual W South Beach Commission, which has sponsored Art Positions since last year. This year, as well, a panel of judges (including the curators Tom Eccles and Lisa Phillips) will award a prize to one artist in the Containers—a commission of up to \$75,000 to create an installation for the W South Beach Hotel. Other panel members include the hotel developers—Rosen and David Edelstein of Tristar Properties—as well as Ross Klein, president of W Hotels Worldwide.

"We really try to think of the properties as cultural centers and spaces," Klein said. Most W Hotels hold occasional exhibitions, which often show work by fashion photographers and emerging artists. The reaction from guests has always been positive. "We get ongoing letters and e-mails about it," Klein said.

Last year, the W South Beach Commission prize went to a sculptural installation by the Mexican artist Daniel Guzmán that required viewers to move through a dark labyrinth to see the work. Guzmán is designing a similar

work for the hotel gardens; his drawings will be on view at the W hospitality booth and this year's winner will be announced on December 9 at Collins Park.

Sometimes, a company's involvement with art arises organically, as with the private aviation company NetJets, a longtime Art Basel sponsor. As Richard Santulli, chairman and CEO, put it, "If you had to pick any kind of event that most mirrors the kind of customers we have, it's really art."

In 2002, the first year of Art Basel Miami Beach, NetJets decided to take a small sponsorship as an experiment. To their surprise, "we saw so many of our owners there," said Sandra Gibson, the company's vice president of events. One of the people she saw there was Mark Booth, chairman and CEO of NetJets Europe and a collector himself. The next year, the company took on a larger sponsorship role. Currently, NetJets supports both Art Basel fairs, Maastricht and Frieze, as well as museum events throughout the year. NetJets is also host to the Art Basel Miami Beach annual VIP cocktail party; this year's event, held on December 5, honors the artist Richard Prince. "It's a great opportunity for our owners to network with each other and to get to know our company," Gibson said.

For the retail industry, becoming involved with art is a time-honored way to attract new clients. In January, Louis Vuitton opened a contemporary art gallery on the top floor of its new Paris flagship store, which also includes permanent installations by James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson and others. In September, Macy's Herald Square flagship store used its Broadway windows—some of the most valuable real estate in retail—to showcase contemporary artworks,



ANDREAS DORNBRACHT

His luxury fixtures company commissions projects related to "bathroom culture" and passionately supports art.

including Matthew Weinstein's video of a goldfish singing torch songs and a thread-and-steel sculpture by Brigitte Nahon.

The project, curated by the private dealer Gabrielle Bryers, was the brainchild of Nicole Fischelis, the store's fashion director and a contemporary art lover. "Macy's is a store that works on giving back," she said, "and I

PHOTO (OF ANDREAS DORNBRACHT) BY ROBERT FISCHER

GOING ALL OUT

Companies seem to be putting their money into commissions, collaborations and large-scale public projects.



SOME COMPANIES ARE PATRONS OF THE ARTS
César Manrique's 1990 art car for BMW



WINDOW SHOPPING
Matthew Weinstein's *Art Under Glass* display for Macy's in New York.

thought it was a natural for us to support the artist community by showing them in the window." While the work was up, she noted, it was seen by some half a million people—and Fischelis intends to make shows a regular event. It turns out it was important for Macy's, too. "We need to differentiate ourselves," she said.

Coach has also collaborated with artists, including Laurie Simmons, Marilyn Minter and Kenneth Noland, to make one-of-a-kind and limited-edition bags. The most recent creation, a canvas tote silk-screened with a Kiki Smith drawing of butterflies, birds and stars, is being sold at the Whitney Museum in conjunction with Smith's retrospective.

Though Coach also sponsors gallery and museum shows, Reed Krakoff, president and executive creative director, said his interest is not publicity. "I find a lot of inspiration in the art world," he said. "What it does for me is it just keeps my eyes fresh; it keeps me moving in terms of what looks right, what looks new. It's the fuel that keeps me excited about design."

A similar spirit motivates the accessories company Kate Spade, which has hired artists to make window installations in its flagship SoHo store, and contemporary photographers, like Larry Sultan and Jessica Craig-Martin, for its ad campaigns. "We're a creatively driven company," said Julia Leach, Spade's creative director for advertising, "so it makes sense to give texture to the company through people who inspire us."

Recently, the company has also collaborated with the Wolfsonian-FIU to design two events celebrating Art Basel: one heralded the 2004 opening of Richard Tuttle's "Beauty-in-Advertising" project, and the other will inaugurate this year's Lawrence Weiner text installation.

But among design companies, top marks for the innovative use of contemporary art must go to Dornbracht



STRONG SUPPORT
Reed and Delphine Krakoff (he's the design director of Coach) at the Whitney American Art Awards

GmbH, a leading German luxury plumbing fixtures manufacturer. Since 1996, the family-run firm has commissioned artists to make projects related to "the theme of bathroom culture," as their company handouts put it. Managing director Andreas Dornbracht, explained that the company's art program helps "figure out in which direction our brand should develop." In other words, it's not a public relations effort, but an R&D project.

"Artists have a very strong feeling about trends within society," he said. "They are maybe the antennae for the Zeitgeist."

So far, the artists—Rosemarie Trockel and Marc Quinn among them—have been given an unrestricted brief and the company has not shied away from controversy. They unveiled the first project, which included Jürgen Teller's photographs of naked people in bathtubs, at a plumbing trade show, and photographs of their commissions are now included in Dornbracht's fixtures catalog.

Dornbracht says that the company's first product inspired by the art program will be unveiled this spring. "Most companies support art for public relations or a sense of responsibility," Andreas Dornbracht said. "I think we are one of the rare companies who see this art program as strategic for developing the evolution of the company." ■



IT'S IN THE BAG
Coach has collaborated with several artists on a series of limited-edition bags, including this python clutch by Marilyn Minter.