

THE REAL DEAL

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Tapping a new art vibe

By Abby Luby

Brokers use works by local, contemporary artists to stage homes



An original work by Andy Warhol was used to market an East Side townhouse.

Brokers know that staging a home with works of art helps sell it faster. Now, more real estate agents are reaching out beyond established artists to connect with the current art scene.

These brokers said they have seen sluggish properties that lingered on the market for months sell in a few weeks after being staged with original art or quality prints.

Exhibiting paintings and sculpture by local artists has been helping sales for broker Sandy Edry of Citi Habitats, who is selling renovated condos at 812 Riverside Drive at 157th Street. He reached out to artists in Washington Heights for original paintings to display in two of the apartments.

"I thought, rather than using generic art to put on the walls, why not tap into the thriving arts community here?" said Edry. "It was important to incorporate ties to the community for people who might live in the building."

In one apartment, Edry used painter Tony Serio's local landscapes and vistas of the George Washington Bridge. Pop-abstract works by Leandro De La Cruz were hung in the

other unit. Edry printed flyers with information about the paintings, the artists and a price list (works for sale ranged from \$800 to \$2,000).

The apartments were sold within a week of staging the units with art.

"People walk in, see the art, and it enhances the experience," said Edry, who pledged to donate 5 percent of his commission from the sale of the units to arts groups.

According to Kristine Jegi of NY Home Staging Solutions, a \$1.4 million property near the Flatiron District was staged with abstract art by Sybille Hassinger called "Box 1," and got an offer at the first open house after being on the market for a month with no activity.

Commissioned works have been placed in developer Jeremiah O'Connor's Manhattan House, and contemporary art by artists such as Carlos Vega, Bob Knox and Ian Teh is used by marketer Michael Shvo in the White Space Building at 650 Sixth Avenue in Chelsea.

Staging with iconic art is typical of high-priced properties. Rae Gilson of Classic Marketing, an arm of Classic Realty, hung an original work by Andy Warhol over a fireplace when marketing a townhouse at 3 East 94th Street.

"The painting was on loan from a private collector for just two hours," said Gilson, who used the Warhol painting to take pictures for a marketing brochure. "It was guarded by an art mover standing nearby."

Work by celebrity artists enhances the value of luxury properties, added Gilson. "I think if a recognizable artist like Warhol, Milton Avery or Picasso is on the wall, all of a sudden, buyers see the whole house as more substantial."

Gilson finds that art also distracts buyers from a home's flaws. "If there's a bad view or if there's no bathroom window, it's nice to have a painting for a deeper perspective, giving the eye a place to go."

Maureen Footer, an art curator and designer, used an eclectic mix of commissioned work and copies of classic art when she decorated a high-profile, \$2.5 million apartment at the Manhattan House. The approach was to create a home in the spirit of Grace Kelly, who lived in the building in the 1950s.

Footer was challenged by the small size of the apartment, a 1,100-square-foot condo-conversion unit. She wanted to evoke a space both romantic and sophisticated, so she commissioned two abstract paintings by Garrett Chingery, an American contemporary artist, for the living room and bedroom. In the hallway, Footer hung two architectural drawings by Jansen, the French design firm. In the living room she placed a 1920s-era plaster bust of the Duke of Burgundy, a copy of the 18th-century original.

"Art subliminally reinforces a space," said Footer. "It doesn't just fill in the space and

decorate the wall; it becomes a character that somebody might want to relate to."

For Footer, art defines transitional spaces like a small hallway between the living room and bathroom and kitchen. "If there's art in the hallway, you're not going to just walk through the space. It makes you slow down while taking it into account. It adds to the graciousness."

Displaying art was Michael Shvo's marketing theme for the 67-unit conversion at 650 Sixth Avenue. Shvo teamed up with the Jack Shainman Gallery, which provided large works by Vega, Knox and Teh for the building's lobby, sales office and even Web site, where prospective buyers can click and drag the artwork to see how it looks on different walls.

Richard Grossman, an executive director of sales for Halstead Property who is familiar with the Chelsea building, said it attracted people who collected and appreciated art. "In terms of marketing today, art is one of the new status symbols. Developments in West Chelsea are designed with criteria important to an art collector, such as lighting and wall height. Developers are seeing success, especially on an individual resale basis," he said.

Grossman said the connection between Shvo and the Jack Shainman Gallery is paying off, and many units are now in contract.

Local photography was used to attract buyers to a new condo building in the northern Manhattan section of Inwood. Marketers Sabrina Seidner and Susan Davis Eley of Nest Seekers International hosted an art show in January at the neighborhood's Two07 Gallery. They wanted to draw attention to the 12-unit building on Payson Avenue called NOMA 175.

A steady stream of people flowed in to see photographs of the neighborhood taken by Ghila Krajzman, a professional photographer hired by Seidner and Eley. Next to pictures of restaurants and park scenes with children were signs that read, "Own your peace of Manhattan," "eclectic," "arrive," "it's NOMA motion," and "the vibe of the new."

"It was a natural way to meet people without doing a hard sell," said Eley. "It generated interest and a connection in the community."

The show was covered by the local press and helped Seidner find her target market. Almost 50 percent of the building has sold since January, with one- and two-bedroom units selling from \$390,000 to \$405,000.

Jegi of NY Home Staging Solutions, which stages properties in the five boroughs, Westchester and Long Island, said she selects art that doesn't detract from the home. "Art always needs to be relatively neutral. We're not trying to make a major statement because that will take away from the focus, which is to sell the homes," she said.

Jegi spends about a tenth of her staging budget on art and finds the funds are well spent.

"We find [unstaged] properties that have been on the market without any movement suddenly get multiple offers after the first open house."

Jegi staged a Park Slope apartment that had been on the market for 10 months with an asking price of \$475,000 by adding early 20th-century modern art. There were two offers 10 days later.

Jegi used an untitled print by Han Mes and another by Mike Klung called "Motion 1."

"We didn't want to use art that was too modern so the property would appeal to families. Ultra-modern art would have been too cold, and traditional art limits your viewers," she said.

A new broker recently hired Jegi to stage a loft space on Fulton Street in downtown Manhattan. The loft had been on the market for six months with no offers, she said. "Even though it's a tough market, it was sold in two weeks."