

Art Decade

HOTEL ART

From guestroom photography to lobby-defining installations, hotel art has the power to convey ideas linked to place, history and brand identity.

Words: Kristofer Thomas

When Banksy's Walled Off Hotel opened by the controversial barrier enclosing Palestine, its subversive art programme turned heads worldwide. Featuring work by both Palestinian and Israeli artists alongside a water installation made from a bullet-riddled tanker and a permanently out-of-service elevator, the collection speaks of the history, social context and political landscape surrounding the hotel, whilst simultaneously contributing to the wider design scheme, acting as a subconscious bridge between guest and hotel.

When thoughtfully approached, art has the power to educate and inform as well as complement interior design, and a focus on the medium has seen projects developed with art at their core. Nordic Choice Hotels' At Six and The Thief for example, enlisted Sune Nordgren – Founding Director of Norway's National Museum of Art – to curate its expressive collections, whilst guests at Amsterdam's Hotel Pulitzer are greeted by a mural that playfully reimagines the Dutch Golden Age for a new audience, hinting at the wider project's design ambitions.

Elsewhere, Art'otel's six properties each focus on one specific post-1940 artist in both style and content, with Art'otel Berlin Kudamm featuring Andy Warhol's most famous pieces alongside pop-art inspired interiors. 21c Museum Hotels meanwhile incorporate dedicated gallery spaces that run a schedule of rotating exhibitions throughout the year. Collectors and collections have also become vital elements of the movement, with items from Dakis Joannon's renowned assemblage appearing throughout Yes! Hotels' five properties, and work by David Hockney, Frank Stella and Henry Moore, amongst others, forming part of The Ritz Carlton Singapore's 4,200-strong programme.

"At the heart of every hotel is guest experience, and an expertly-curated art collection has the power to reflect a hotel's narrative,

brand and service offer to guests," comments Patrick McCrae, CEO of art consultancy Artiq. "Integrating art into the fabric of the hotel through sourcing local artists, commissioning bespoke works and holding art events are all fantastic ways to create unique moments and experiences that can embed with guests far past the duration of their stay."

Hotel restaurants too, now feature art that channels notions of identity, particularly if the venue functions as a separate entity to the property it operates within. "Every successful restaurant has a story and our job is to tell that story visually, through art," explains David Winton, President, Kalisher. "This is always true in luxury hotels where the hotel has one story and the restaurant another. We need to stay true to the restaurant's narrative while being sure that ownership and the hotel brand will love and approve the art."

Where once hotel art was dominated by production lines churning out indiscriminate pieces with few references to property or location, these ideas now form much of the concept's basis. Be it through the incorporation of work by locals, pieces inspired by the surrounding culture, or installations in a style tied to a project's underlying theme, the art that graces hotel walls has become increasingly specific and unique, with boutiques and branded properties alike commissioning work that conveys their identity and theirs alone.

At London's forthcoming Vintry & Mercer, a hotel channelling South Kensington's historic trading guilds, art specialist Artefact has assembled a programme tied to several key ideas that define the wider project. "The art collection at Vintry & Mercer is incredibly reflective of the area it's a part of, there's a major narrative running right through," explains Minda Dowling, Artefact's founder. "For this project we've embraced the guilds, the city, and everything the city stands for, for better or worse. We also wanted to incorporate travel, in the sense of both getting on a plane and going somewhere, and



Above: 21c Museum Hotels' gallery spaces exhibit rotating schedules of art and site-specific installations within a boutique-style environment

the concept of trade, which was a cornerstone of London's history."

Featuring a collage of watch parts by Anna Masters, a sculpture by Dan Rawlins comprising old repurposed trade tools, and a series of dresses made from folded maps by Elizabeth Lecourt, the collection has been assembled to connect directly to the area it resides within, as well as enhance the project's design. For the guestrooms, Artefact has supplied engravings of the guild crests, a historical nod contrasting with Dexter Moren Associates' contemporary interiors.

"There's a juxtaposition between the modern interiors and the 18th century guild elements," Dowling adds. "It's a reminder that everything is constantly moving and changing. When you look out of the window when driving through London there's a contrast between architecture – the totally modern right next to St. Pauls – and that's the kind of essence we wanted to bring to the art collection."

Employing similar tactics – those that create links between the physical hotel and the less tangible ideas of history, culture and experience – Canvas Art Consultancy's collection for Raffles Istanbul is built around the central theme of "Dream of Istanbul" and takes into consideration both its locale and Raffles Hotels & Resorts' exotic and storied identity.

"In the lobby, there are two large-scale commissions," explains Matthew Whitaker, Director, Canvas. "The first, a rich and fantastical photographic composition, was created by an internationally known

hyper-realist photographer as a way to introduce hotel guests to the Dream of Istanbul."

The second, a colossal bronze sculpture of a reclining female figure titled *Lavina*, takes its name from a local love poem by Ozdemir Asaf, again greeting guests with an introduction to the culture the hotel represents.

"With reference to brand identity, I think both content and quality of the brand's artwork collections are simultaneously critical to setting oneself apart, and intrinsic to making the necessary bold statement about who you are from the outset," Whitaker continues. "We encourage guests to engage with the artworks, to talk about the collection and tell their own stories. We hope that some part of the collection will leave a lasting imprint on their experience."

This considered process, factoring in both visual and emotional aspects, can further be observed in Muzeo's curation process at Radisson Blu Astrid Hotel Antwerpen, where bronze wallcoverings above beds depict elements of the city's skyline, and also throughout Kalisher's work at Thompson Playa Del Carmen, Mexico, wherein its programme balances homages to nearby harbour scenery with colourful clusters of modernist paintings, complementary of the wider aesthetic.

Similarly, at the expansive Faena Hotel Miami Beach, Jean Gatti's gold-leaf floor-to-ceiling murals immediately suggest the scale and



Above: Damian Hirst's *Gone but Not Forgotten* – a gilded mammoth skeleton encased in glass – sits outside Faena Hotel Miami Beach

opulence of the property, whilst a 24-karat mammoth sculpture outside by Damian Hirst hints at the expected clientele.

Within The Great Northern Hotel in London's King's Cross, meanwhile, Artiq has commissioned a staircase installation by Shoreditch-based artist Debbie Smyth that comprises an intricate series of hammered nails and embroidery pins connected by threads. The piece, titled *A Tying of Knots*, references motifs including ordinance surveys, and is inspired by the building's past as a railway hotel as well as its contemporary metropolis setting, ultimately working to depict a city in transition.

The presence of work by local artists like Smyth's has also become a staple inclusion in collections of this kind, gifting an added layer of insight to the project and its environment through the eyes of those who know it best. The entry hallway at Chicago's Hotel Versey exemplifies this idea, with a curated art-walk welcoming guests with a corridor of pieces by locals including Joe Miller and Barton DeGraaf, concerning the stories of both hotel and neighbourhood.

"We believe that art for hotels should reach further than the aesthetic," McCrae offers. "Through thoughtful curation and art strategy, hotels have the power to utilise art to not only enhance guest experience and reflect brand, but to also showcase patronage, taste and reflect the history and identity of the area local to the hotel."

Ranging from blink-and-you'll-miss-them details to lobby-

dominating centrepieces, this new wave of hotel art demonstrates the level of consideration and conceptual complexity that designers and operators now demand, expressing emotive notions whilst still functioning, vitally, as part of a scheme. And though these concepts perhaps remain two separate objectives for art consultancies to regard, the line is becoming increasingly blurred.

Atop a wing of The Beaumont, London, sits Anthony Gormley's Room, a sculptural, human-shaped architectural feature housing a mysterious suite within. "I take the body as our primary habitat," Gormley explains. "Room contrasts a visible exterior of a body formed from large rectangular masses with an inner experience. My ambition for this work is that it should confront the monumental with the most personal, intimate experience."

Combining the two aforementioned functions – to enhance a hotel visually and connect emotionally with guests – Room speaks at once of the The Beaumont's distinguished character as well as the very concept of temporary inhabitation, drawing the disparate mediums of hotel and art together in one stirring act.

Like art, hotels have the power to excite the senses whilst simultaneously speaking to guests on a personal level. Good art leaves those who view it with powerful new memories and changed perspectives, connecting with them through aesthetics and substance to convey an idea. Good hotels should always do the same.