

# CULTURE INDEX

A COMPENDIUM OF WHAT'S IN PLAY NOW

## TREASURE HUNT

### Artful advice

*Hotels across the globe are not merely doubling as reputable galleries – they now also boast knowledgeable, full-service art concierges, as Julian Allason reports*

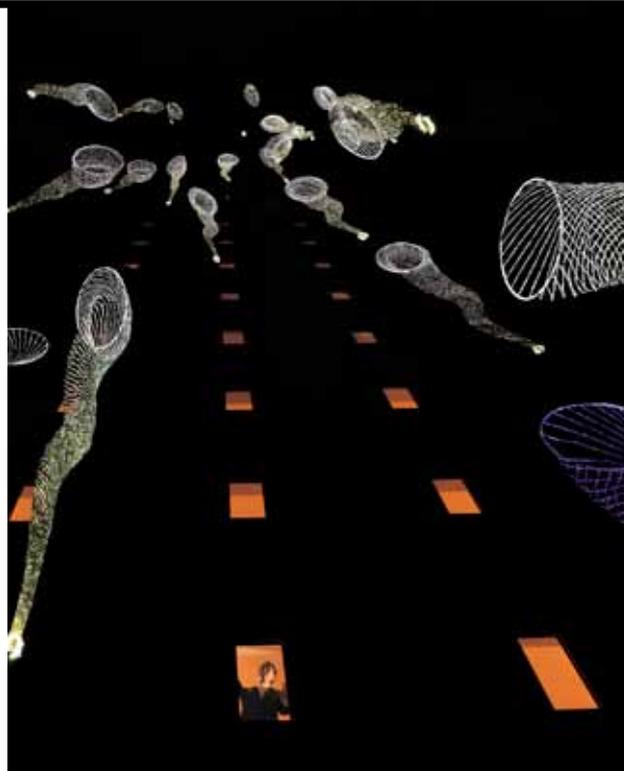
The appointment of Paris's first Art Concierge at Le Royal Monceau – Raffles was initially greeted with Gallic shrugs in the boho cafés of the Rive Gauche. "Just the hotel being funkier than thou," was the wry observation of Genevieve Manderstam of Paris Art Studies. "Or so we thought." It is an opinion that has been rapidly revised as the glamorous Domoína de Brantes has conducted hotel guests to gallery openings and exhibitions across the City of Lights. With a background in the Louvre, she is impeccably placed to arrange studio visits and acquisition advice from museum curators.

Since its opening in 1928 the 149-room hotel on Avenue Hoche has been a hangout of artists and, following its imaginative reinvention by Philippe Starck in 2010, has displayed a collection of intriguing contemporary works including Nikolay Polissky's handcrafted reindeer and a giant wrought iron teapot by Joana

Vasconcelos that decorates the garden. In place of the usual shopping arcade is a gallery and art bookstore. Unusual, but not quite unique, for it turns out that hotels in leading art centres have quietly been forging expert links to provide guests with privileged access.

In London, still the epicentre of the international art market, interested guests at the Four Seasons Park Lane are assisted by Sally Perry of Go Figurative, who arranges meetings with the curatorial staff at the National Gallery and studio visits to artists like Anita Klein and Keren Luchenstein. Brown's Hotel in nearby Albermarle Street is almost surrounded by galleries, with the doyen of Old Master dealers, Agnew's, right next door. Under the auspices of Rocco Forte Hotels' design director Olga Polizzi the hotel has recently acquired a Tracey Emin neon and photographs by Rankin, risking apoplexy on the part of older guests. Happily Christopher Kingzett, Agnew's old masters specialist, has

*Hong Kyoung Tack's kaleidoscopic rendering of coloured pencils and pens at the Le Méridien Chambers in Minneapolis*



Left: Nikolay Polissky's hand-crafted reindeer at Le Royal Monceau

Right: Ben Jakober and Yannick Vu's colossal *The Void* showcased at the Peninsula Tokyo

been on hand to advise those with more traditional tastes. As the art historian James McDonough remarks, "With financial turmoil come wonderful buying opportunities but the necessity of avoiding fashionable art."

Art concierges offer more than introductions and advice, though. In Rio de Janeiro, naive painter Fabio Sombra escorted me on an exhilarating tram tour of galleries of the Santa Teresa quarter arranged by Latin America travel specialists Cazenove & Loyd. "The secret is to buy what you fall in love with – and let the hotel handle the boring details," he suggests. The Copacabana Palace are duly happy to oblige with packing and dispatch. There is fun to be had too in Hong Kong, hub of the Asian market, on special art tours arranged by the Mandarin Oriental hotel: serious interest is escalated to the Art Basel team for special access and more. This being Hong Kong, negotiations are conducted with discretion befitting a Swiss banker.

Certainly dealers and salerooms are getting by, with suites at Cologne's landmark Hotel im Wassterturm (Hotel in the Water Tower) booked up years in advance for the annual six-day art

fair. For hoteliers, art is becoming big business too. Puzzling over works by Frank Stella and Andy Warhol displayed at Singapore's Ritz-Carlton Millennia, I find myself wondering how the value of the 4,200-piece collection compares with that of the hotel itself.

"There is a notable overlap between collectors and guests," notes Attilio Marro, director of operations for Bulgari Hotels & Resorts, a keen corporate patron of the arts. Hence the unlikely partnerships between grande dame hotels and hipster art advisors in the leading centres. In New York the hotels' go-to advisor is Leila Heller on West 25th Street. For Asian art one can do no better than book into the Peninsula Tokyo where the Art Front consultancy curates a sublime 1,000-piece collection now on permanent display.

It is a trend that is reaching into the most improbable outreaches of the hotel world, as the appointment of Jennifer Phelps as Art Director of Le Méridien Chambers in Minneapolis suggests. The result? A provocative collection of contemporary paintings and sculptures, regular exhibitions and programmes to foster guest interest in the arts. All coming to a hotel near you. Soon. ■

## ARTFUL ACQUISITIONS

What great collectors have in common is sound advice, as the Renaissance art historian Bernard Berenson never tired of observing. It is a lesson taken to heart by hotels in selecting advisors to shape their own collections and to guide clients. Such partnerships have the potential to lead to well judged purchases at fair prices, particularly in "difficult" fields like ceramics and tribal art. Now a pattern is starting to emerge that combines what connoisseurs refer to as education of the eye with discreet guidance, a process that begins within the hotel itself.

So taken was a client of Paris's Le Royal Monceau with a Donald Laborie sculpture displayed there that, with the assistance of the hotel's Art Concierge, he purchased a work by the same artist. Some requests are a little less mainstream, as with the guest who enquired about performance art and was rewarded with a human installation by sculptor and painter Jean Faucheur and choreographer-dancer Sandra Moens. An ephemeral experience? Not at all: it is preserved on video.