

How One of the World's Best Hotel Brands Is Funding Emerging Artists

By Hannah Walhout | March 29, 2019



Left: *Alizarin* by Timothy Paul Myers at The Peninsula Hong Kong, photo Simon J. Nicol; Right: *HOME* by Iván Navarro, part of the Art In Resonance program at The Peninsula Hong Kong, photo by Simon J. Nicol

These days, a thoughtful art collection is de rigueur for hotels of a certain caliber. Works are commissioned expressly for hotels, works by mega-artists grace lobbies and atria, and guests can often purchase canvases right off the walls.

But the Peninsula Hotels, the brand behind some of the best hotels in the world, is taking it one step further, directly commissioning artists for a new traveling exhibition called Art in Resonance. [this link opens in a new tab.](#)

Launching this weekend in partnership with Art Basel Hong, the program's first iteration features pieces by Janet Echelman, Iván Navarro. [this link opens in a new tab](#), Timothy Paul, and Zhi-Gang Lu, of the Shanghai-based architecture firm MINAX. The traveling show will visit all ten of Peninsula's current properties in Asia, Europe, and the U.S. (plus the three that are soon to open), metamorphosing along the way as it absorbs new pieces from local artists in each destination.

Needless to say, this is fairly new territory. "In today's world, it's not enough to simply display artwork for the sake of decorating walls and lobbies," Carson Glover, Vice President of Brand Marketing & Communications, told *Travel + Leisure*.

"This new program shows a deeper commitment from the Peninsula Hotels to engage with the artistic sphere," said Glover, who helped spearhead the project, "not just as a venue, but as an originator of culture and a true supporter of mid-career and emerging artists."

To make it happen, Peninsula approached two leading figures in the art world: Bettina Prentice, an art consultant who has worked with clients as wide-ranging as Google, Bulgari, and the Museum of Arts and Design, and Isolde Brielmaier, a noted curator and scholar whose resume includes the Guggenheim and the Bronx Museum of Art. "We knew the two of them together would be able to help us produce an exciting program for our guests and visitors alike," said Glover. "And we believe that's exactly what they've achieved."



Left: Curators Bettina Prentice and Isolde Brielmaier, photo by Weston Wells; Right: Timothy Paul Myers with *Alizarin* at The Peninsula Hong Kong, photo by Simon J. Nicol

Prentice explained that her decision to participate was a no-brainer, speaking with T+L alongside participating artist Myers, whose installation, "Alizarin," currently occupies a space in the Peninsula Hong Kong's lobby. "This was, of course, a *yes* — it's the Peninsula, which is just an absolute honor, and they have a long history of involvement with the art world. But also, they made it clear early on that they wanted to do something a little bit different. They wanted to be an originator of culture, rather than just a venue. They wanted to go deeper."

Both Prentice and Myers agreed that the direct participation with artists was paramount. "Any hotel can have a partnership with a gallery and rifle through their inventory," said Prentice. By commissioning directly from artists, a dynamic that is gaining traction in the hospitality world, "Peninsula actually ensures that working artists are able to continue their practice, and that they have the necessary financial, logistical, and communications support. Rather than the artists having to split 50% with their gallery, the fee is going to directly them."

"That's an incredibly powerful thing," said Myers. "It feels so supportive. It's a very different process. I'm not sure I could have built a piece like this [without Art in Resonance]." Myers sees exhibiting in a hotel, with its particular dynamics and social codes, as a thought-provoking challenge. "In the last 20 years of my art career, I've shown in traditional spaces. This is an opportunity to take my work to a dynamically different place."

"Alizarin" is a continuation of his previous work, which is predicated on an almost-obsessive use of a single material "until its potential is exhausted." For the past five years, Myers has been working with felt — in this case, using it to wrap an entire tableau in the lobby, a fuzzy still life of various objects that might be present at the Peninsula.

"Objects have a life, based on their interaction with human beings — they have a physical history," he said. "They actually collect DNA." The same, of course, could be said of a hotel, with its porous borders and constant flow of people. Here, "the felt memorializes the object and archives its history."



Left: Gong master located within MINAX's *The Wonder Room*; Right: The Peninsula Hong Kong featuring Janet Echelman's *Earthtime 1.26*; photos by Simon J. Nicol

In addition to the impressive roster of international artists, Peninsula intends to spotlight local talent at each stop on the exhibition. For the Hong Kong show, Prentice and Brielmaier tapped MINAX, a Chinese architecture collective known for incorporating ancient motifs and craftsmanship into modern works. The installation, "The Wonder Room," by Zhi-Gang Lu, uses heritage woodworking techniques to create an undulating capsule; viewers wander inside to find a setting for a traditional tea ceremony, complete with gong master.

"Art is increasingly important in modern lives, and we're all looking for more authentic cultural experiences through travel," said Glover. "Hotels can offer a public space where guests and visitors can access artwork at no cost." It's indicative of a growing trend in the hospitality industry: hotels and travelers alike are recognizing the harm that comes from not engaging with the neighborhoods and citizens around them. With more and more properties offering co-working spaces, performance venues, and community programming to welcome the outside world *in*, this hotel-as-patron-of-the-arts move feels like a logical next step.

"In one of my first meetings with the CEO," said Prentice, "he was very clear that you do not have to buy something [to see the art]. You don't have to have tea, you don't have to go to the gift shop, you don't have to be staying there. They really want the community to feel welcome to come inside."

For her, this attitude is a breath of fresh air. "Everyone should be able to experience art and have more beauty and meaning in their lives," she said. "Having a brand like Peninsula putting their money where their mouth is is really incredible."

Art in Resonance will be on view at The Peninsula Hong Kong through June 23, and will travel to The Peninsula Paris in the fall.