

**ARTFUL LODGING**

# New Hilton hotel to become gallery for central Ohio talent

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By **Jeffrey Sheban**

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About 160 paintings, sculptures, photographs and other works — representing a veritable who’s who of central Ohio artists living and deceased — are expected to become a big draw at a new Downtown hotel.

Works are being purchased from artists and galleries for the \$140 million Hilton Columbus Downtown, opening in the fall on N. High Street in the Short North arts and entertainment district.

And, in a first for the Hilton chain domestically, all of the 532 guest rooms will feature artwork placed on the ceiling directly above the beds.

“People’s eyes light up when you talk about what’s going to be unique about the property,” said Julia Hansen, the hotel’s director of sales and marketing.

“We want to introduce people to Columbus and let them know that art is part of the whole vibe.”& amp; amp; amp; amp; amp; amp; amp; amp; amp; amp; amp; amp; lt; /p>

The hotel will be operated by the chain and owned by the Franklin County Convention Facilities Authority. With a skywalk over High Street connecting to the Greater Columbus Convention Center, the Hilton will target business travelers and convention-goers.

“I think it’s a very good public-relations move on the part of the Hilton,” said Sid Chafetz, 89, a former art professor at Ohio State University who will have two works displayed — one in the presidential suite, joining seven other prints or paintings and a sculpture.

Bill Jennison, executive director of the facilities authority, said traditional hotel art — bland prints of unknown or undistinguished origins — wasn’t good enough for a marquee property at the gateway to the Short North, home to several of the city’s best-known galleries.

“We didn’t want a bunch of pedestrian seascapes in rooms,” he said.

Jennison said the project’s art budget of about \$1 million is no more than would have been spent on more generic offerings. Half the money is going toward purchases, with the balance for framing, transportation, insurance and installation.

About 30 works are being commissioned, but most of the others will be purchased from 12 central Ohio galleries representing more than 100 individual artists. Prices paid for works in the collection range from \$125 to \$40,800.

Some of the better-known central Ohio artists whose work will be displayed include Queen Brooks, Susan Cavanaugh, Curtis Goldstein, Ann Hamilton, Stephen Pentak, Aminah Robinson and Lowell Tolstedt.

Also on the list are licensed prints from long-gone Columbus greats including George Bellows, Emerson Burkhart, Milton Caniff, Alice Schille and James Thurber. (Hansen said one of Thurber’s iconic dog illustrations was being sought to underscore the pet-friendly nature of the hotel.)

Familiar sites and landmarks around town are depicted in some, although that wasn’t a requirement.

Some notable examples:

- An impressionistic model of the Downtown skyline made of 30,000 crayon tips by Christian Faur of Granville, to be displayed behind the front desk.
- Historical photos of Broad and High streets taken by East Side resident Kojo Kamau, and destined for a public men’s room.
- A colorful rendering of the Smith Brothers Hardware building created by Goldstein, an Upper Arlington painter, and headed for the executive lounge.

“I was really surprised that they were putting original art in the hotel and were asking for Columbus artists,” said Brooks, a retired art instructor at

Ohio Dominican University who will have two wooden assemblages placed in the executive lounge.

“I was like ‘Oh, wow, this is really going to be something.’”

Jennison said he and his agency’s board pushed to include central Ohio art early on. An art committee was formed last year with members including Jennison; Gina Deary, whose Chicago company Simeone Deary Design Group is the project’s interior designer; Barbara R. Nicholson, former executive director of the King Arts Complex; and Nannette V. Maciejunes, executive director of the Columbus Museum of Art.

Deary worked with central Ohio art consultants and brothers Michael and Jim Reese, who took her to more than a dozen area galleries and recommended individual artists with whom they were familiar. With input from Nicholson and Maciejunes, they compiled an eclectic list that was reviewed and approved by Hilton, one of the world’s leading hospitality brands with 540 properties in 78 countries.

“We wanted to be sure they had a who’s who of Columbus artists,” said Michael Reese, who lives in the Short North and also sells commercial office furniture.

The added challenge was to build a provocative collection that wouldn’t be a turnoff for hotel guests.

“Art for a hotel is much more narrow in scope than art for a corporation or a government facility or your home,” he said. “Art is so subjective, and you have to be careful because some people might read into things they think they see in a painting.”

Other hotels in town have used art to impart local flavor. The Westin Columbus has about 10 Thurber prints in its bar and a dozen paintings of historic Columbus hotels on the mezzanine; the Sheraton Columbus at Capitol Square is undergoing a \$10 million renovation that will include photos in all 400 rooms of two boys selling newspapers in front of the Statehouse during the 1930s.

But what Hilton is doing with local art is unprecedented.

“It’s actually more common out west, but pretty much unheard of in Columbus and much of the Midwest,” said Caren Petersen, owner of Muse Gallery in German Village, which is providing works from 10 artists.

“A lot of people will be leaving town saying, ‘There’s this really cool hotel that used local art, and it’s really neat and you should see it.’”

Sherrie Gallerie owner Sherrie Riley Hawk — who represents eight artists selling works to the hotel — said Hilton’s nod to the local arts community is bound to enhance Columbus’ image with visitors.

“What a perfect way to tell the story of your city — through art,” she said. “It’s going to be great.”

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