

# SEANKELLY

Verdon, Joan. "Puzzled by a giant nail, melting drums at Garden State Plaza? Here's what's going on", *Northjersey.com*, October 18, 2018.

**northjersey.com**



*"Cyclic II" by Mariko Mori. Marko Georgiev/NorthJersey.com*

Robert Torres of Nutley didn't know he was taking a photograph of his 8-year-old daughter in front of a sculpture by an acclaimed artist. He just knew the picture would look good on Instagram.

Torres was at Westfield Garden State Plaza on Wednesday night as the owners of New Jersey's largest shopping center unveiled their new campaign to bring the kind of art normally found in private collections, gallery shows, and museums to the most public of spaces, a mall.

The mall, through its parent company, Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield, has purchased seven sculptures and four paintings and made them part of the mall's permanent collection, on display throughout the shopping center. The artworks were unveiled at the sort of event befitting a gallery show opening. Wealthy patrons mingled with artists from Brooklyn as they sipped signature cocktails and grazed at a caviar bar while a violin player and DJ set the mood.

Mall executives say their intent is two-fold: To add some design elements to the center, which has just received a facelift with new skylights and lighting, but also to trigger a discussion about the role of art in the modern marketplace.

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"Museums and galleries sometimes can be kind of intimidating. So when we think about art and public spaces, it's really an opportunity to engage a broader range of people," said Isolde Brielmaier, executive director for arts, culture and community for Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield.

Westfield, the owner of the Plaza since 1986, was acquired by French mall conglomerate Unibail-Rodamco last year, but the arts initiative dates to before the acquisition, and was born in the U.S.A. offices of Westfield.

Paramus, dubbed the mall capital of the world, has lived at the intersection of art and commerce before. The former Alexander's store at the crossroads of Routes 4 and 17, sported what then was the world's largest mural, a painting by Polish artist Stephan Knapp, from 1963 until the 1990s. The mural has since been searching for a new permanent home.

Westfield has been trying to bring more culture to the Plaza for several years, with events like the exhibit a year ago featuring life size photographs of the Sistine Chapel ceiling artwork by Michelangelo and a mural painting event in May 2017.

The new art collection aims to get shoppers thinking outside the big box store.



*"Trio" by Los Carpinteros. Marko Georgiev/NorthJersey.com*

## Head-scratching OK

"It sparks conversation even if it involves a little bit of head-scratching," Brielmaier said. "And some thinking. Maybe you're sitting next to somebody you don't even know and maybe there's a conversation that happens."

The sculptures — which include a large, spiky black structure made out of wood and covered in Lego bricks in front of Neiman Marcus, a trio of musical

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instruments "melting" into puddles of paint, the skeleton frame of a rowboat lined with photos from old 35 mm slides, and a large, bent nail — have been installed at the center over the past two weeks and draw double-takes from mall walkers and shoppers unsure if they were new-style mall decorations.

"The nail. I don't get the nail," said one early-morning mall walker.



*"Kosmaj Toy" by Los Carpinteros. Marko Georgiev/NorthJersey.com*

The nail, along with the melting instruments, and the Lego covered structure, are works by the most acclaimed artists in the collection, from an artist collective founded in Havana called Los Carpinteros, whose work has won major awards and been exhibited around the world.

"These guys are wonderful. Their work is stunning," said Timothy Paul Myers, an artist whose piece, *Adrift II*, is part of the collection, and who attended the opening reception. "To have it in a mall in New Jersey is kind of special."

*Adrift II* is a rowboat-shaped frame with images from old 35 mm slides, the kind taken on family vacations. It is generating the most attention from mall shoppers, many of whom stop to get a better look at the slide-size photos back-lit by LED lights.

Myers, who often works with found objects, purchased the slides at flea markets and estate sales and on eBay. He was drawn to them because of his memories of watching family vacation slide shows as a child. He said it bothered him to see abandoned slides being sold.

The piece was commissioned by the mall owners for the collection, and Myers said he chose materials that would stand up in a public setting. Still, he was a bit nervous about seeing his creation on display in New Jersey's busiest mall.

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"It's a bit of an adventurous program," Myers said. "Hopefully it enriches the shopping experience and it gives another avenue for artists to show their work."



*"Kosmaj Toy" by Los Carpinteros. Marko Georgiev/NorthJersey.com*

## **Good for artists**

Hugo McCloud, the artist who created four paintings using industrial materials and wood-block paint application, which hang near the concierge desk in the mall's luxury wing, agreed. Having his art in a mall is a different venue for him, "but at the end of the day you have to be grateful" for the support of artists and the decision to bring art to the public.

Paramus Mayor Richard LaBarbiera, who attended the reception, said he was proud that Paramus and the Plaza were chosen for Westfield's first permanent mall art collection. "Shopping centers don't just sell. They're a place where people come together," LaBarbiera said.

Most of the art has been placed in the high-end wing of the mall, between Neiman Marcus and Nordstrom. Brielmaier said plaques with the artists' names and information about the works will be added soon. Mall visitors also can pick up a brochure with a map and descriptions of the art pieces at the concierge desk near Tiffany & Co.

Westfield is not revealing what it paid for the works of art, but executives said the company's investment was "significant."

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*"Clavo Veintiuno" by Los Carpinteros. Marko Georgiev/NorthJersey.com*



*"Clavo Veintiuno" by Los Carpinteros. Marko Georgiev/NorthJersey.com*

## **Engage, but carefully**

Mall executives want the public to engage with the pieces in the collection, but not too much. They are looking at how to make the sculptures accessible, without getting damaged, or used inappropriately, as something to sit on.

Protective railings have been installed around some pieces, and more will be added.

Brielmaier said learning how to respect the mall art is part of this new experience. "When you display art in a non-traditional context, on the one hand you're making it accessible. You're bringing it to a broad range of people," she said. "And on the other hand there's some education that happens around how we engage around art."