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Photos: Daniel E. Slotnik for The New York Times

“Meditation on Life in a Crowd.” Laurence Groux’s contribution to the Artbridge art installation

Most residents of the London Terrace Gardens apartment complex in Chelsea view the scaffolding around their Anglo-Italianate landmark as a blemish. Rodney Durso, 44, an artist who lives in the building, saw the blue plywood as an opportunity to enliven his community with art. “I very quickly thought, this is a blank space, this is a canvas for something,” Mr. Durso said. Last September Mr. Durso founded an organization, called Artbridge, to use the scaffolding to showcase art publicly and give emerging artists a site for their work.



GJ Lee created “Giants in the Clouds” for the installation.

The management at London Terrace Gardens proved receptive to the idea, and Mr. Durso persuaded Spring Scaffolding to let him use their scaffolding. Mr. Durso found contributors by placing an application on Web sites like that of the New York Foundation for the Arts. The application asked emerging artists for mostly abstract works to be photographed, blown up and possibly cropped, printed on weather-proof vinyl, and exhibited on the scaffolding for six months or more. Mr. Durso received around 100 entries and presented them to a panel of judges using a private Web site. The judges picked 26 artists. (Mr. Durso was not a judge, and his own art was not considered.) Winning artists had to contribute \$195 to participate. The total cost, \$50,000 to \$60,000, was split among London Terrace Gardens, Spring Scaffolding and the artists. The installation opened March 14 on 23rd Street, between Ninth and 10th Avenues. It covers most of the block, and pieces range from a collage of photographs from High Line platforms, to an elegant black and white image of a woman and ants, to a colorful, organic abstract that suggests objects hidden in plain sight.

Mr. Durso thinks the exhibition in Chelsea is a great opportunity for the artists. “It’s big, it’s bold, it’s in a great neighborhood, people are going to see it,” he said. Many hurried pedestrians on 23rd Street on Monday ignored the art. But once passers-by noticed the exhibition, they usually appreciated it. Rosa Naparstek, a co-founder and co-director of Artists Unite, a nonprofit artists’ organization based in Washington Heights, missed the art at first because she was rushing to a meeting. “I think it’s great,” Ms. Naparstek said. “You go to the audience; they don’t have to come to you. Using spaces like that, that are usually commercial, integrates the art into your life.” Laurence Groux, an artist whose “Meditation on Life in a Crowd” is in the installation, said her painting was intended to make people recognize beauty around them. “A lot of people don’t pay attention, but artists scrutinize things and get inspired by them,” Ms. Groux said. She said she hoped her painting would shake New Yorkers from their customary somnolence. Ms. Groux is thrilled by the installation, regardless of public reaction. “I thought it was a very great concept all around,” she said. “It really is an art bridge, you know it’s the street that leads to the mecca of art,” meaning Chelsea. Mr. Durso is satisfied with the installation. He said he was unsure what is next for Artbridge, but his ideas go beyond art on scaffolding. “I would like to look at ways to place art in public spaces that makes walking through the neighborhood more interesting,” Mr. Durso said. “A friend of mine, Robert Hammond, is a co-founder of Friends of the High Line. Maybe there’s something I can do with that — they certainly have an interesting venue for art.”