

TRIBECA **TRIB** ONLINE

Developer of Towering 50 West Street Provides Inspiring Site for Artists



Bahar Behbahani, an artist in Time Equities 50 West residency program, works on a piece that will combine elements of the tower's construction and surrounding area with an image of a Persian fountain. The studio, at 40 Rector Street, is next to the sales office for 50 West. Photo: Carl Glassman/Tribeca Trib

By **CARL GLASSMAN**

Posted Jan. 18, 2016

Something besides money is being churned out of Lower Manhattan's real estate boom.

It's art.

At 40 Rector Street, a block from the 64-story, 780-foot-high residential tower under construction at 50 West Street, are two roomy studios. There, next to the new building's high-tech sales office, artists are creating works inspired by the plans, people and structural innards of the nearby soaring tower.

"I always work all the time but this particular place gave me fire," said Bahar Behbahani, surrounded by her many drawings, photos and studies on the walls of the sprawling studio. "It's the space."

A native of Iran, Behbahani experiments with images inspired by the construction, by local history, or by the building's architecture, which she layers over the picture of a Persian garden. It could be the electrical grid of the penthouse, parts of the building's skeletal form, even the *Half Moon*, the boat that Henry Hudson sailed up the river.

The space where she and three other artists have worked is provided free, along with a stipend, by Time Equities, Inc., the developer of 50 West. In exchange, the artists' work will be hung in the new building. All the artists are alumni of OMI International Arts Center, the multi-disciplinary residency program in the Hudson Valley founded by Francis Greenburger, a collector of contemporary art and the founder and chairman of Time Equities. The 50 West residency grows out of the company's Art-in-Buildings program, in which art is rotated in the lobbies, atriums and other public spaces of Time Equities-owned properties.



50 West is expected to be ready for partial occupancy at the end of the year. Photo: Carl Glassman/Tribeca Trib



From left: "Jamaican Construction Worker"; "Bosnian Construction Worker"; and "Somali Construction Worker" by Hugo Bastidas.

(The residencies have a Downtown precedent. Silverstein Properties has provided studio space for artists in 7 World Trade Center, and later in 4 World Trade Center, primarily to document the development of the World Trade Center site.)

“The mission is to extend the audience for contemporary art, to give a platform to these artists that we’re working with,” said Jennie Lamensdorf, who curates the Time Equities programs. “But also to make the properties more enjoyable places to live, work or do business.”

Greenburger deemed the results “terrific.”



From left: "Deck with Cylinders," 2014 and "Transformers," 2014 by Noa Charuvi.

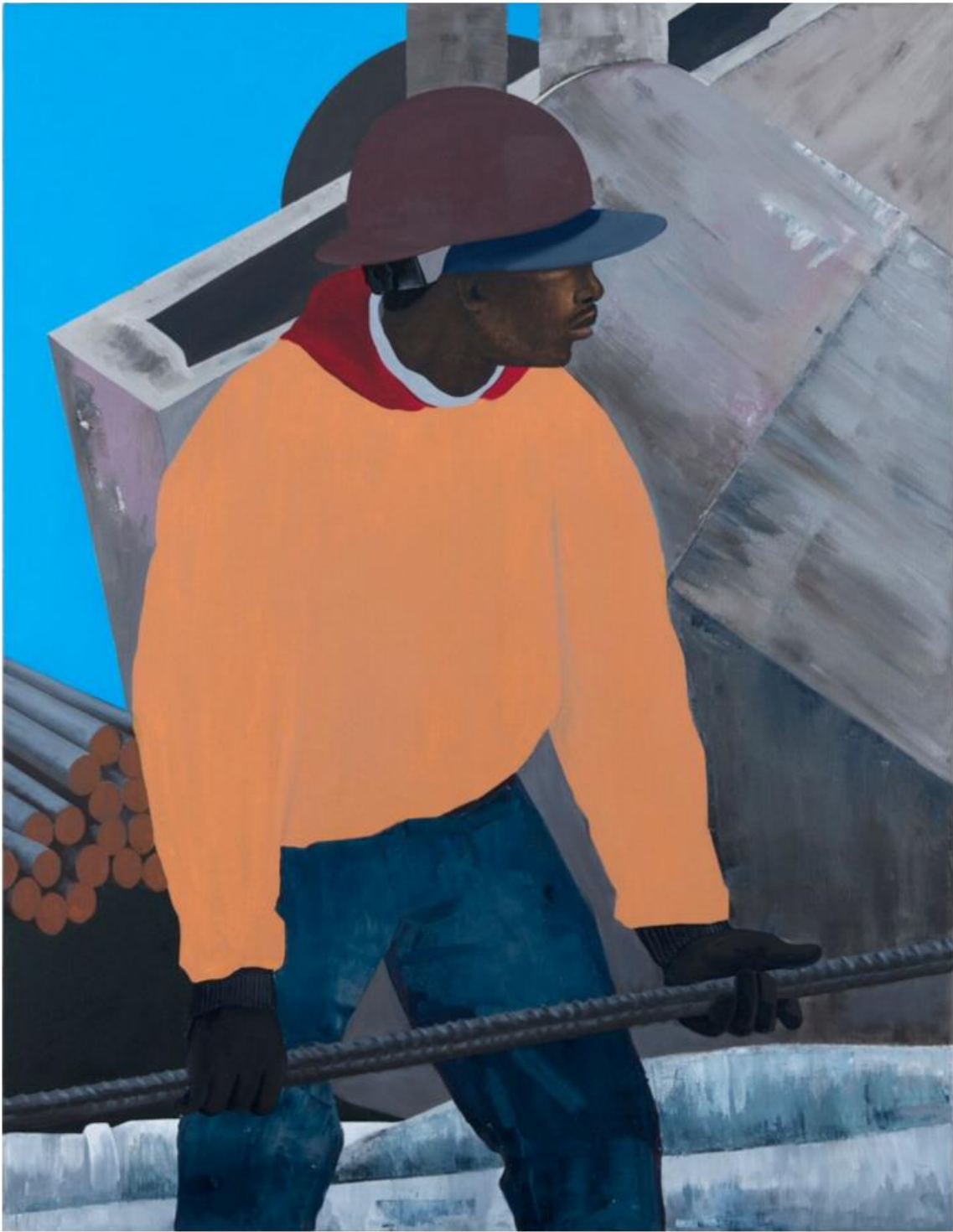
“The artists found the proximity to the site and the activity and the workmen to be very inspiring,” he said.

For artist Hugo Bastidas, the inspiration came from both the men and the complexity of the site where they work.

“Here’s one where the carpenters are working,” said Bastidas, pointing to one of many large monochrome paintings resting on the studio floor. It is a view looking down at the tiny figures of men nearly lost among the massive backdrop of rebar and concrete. Next to it lay the portraits of workers, also in black and white, their facial features fully rendered, their bodies reduced to sketch-like simplicity.

“This guy’s from Jamaica,” he said of one worker who stares wearily at the viewer, his beard a tangle of dreadlocks. Then he shows others. “This guy’s from Ireland, that guy’s from Bosnia, and this guy,” he noted with a smile, “is from Jersey.”

Bastidas said he was motivated by watching the beehive of labor. “I didn’t think I would do so much work but there’s something about just the project and the immediacy of these people having a purpose, and I had the same. I said, I’m really going to crank these out.”



"Untitled," 2015 by Paul Anthony Smith

Unlike Bastidas's richly detailed, monochromatic works, Noa Charuvi's paintings are colorful and semi-abstract, featuring the mundane stuff of construction sites—electrical risers, orange cones, saw horses, two-by-fours—that would escape most people's notice, artists or otherwise. Going into her residency with the thought that it would be a brief "side project," Charuvi became so enamored of the site that she now continues to paint from photographs she took there, months after her residency ended.

"It was so fun because for me the image of the construction site is very painterly," said the artist, a native of Israel whose previous work includes images of destruction in the Middle East, painted in much the same style. "It's basically already abstract, there's nothing complete there. It's just piles of shapes. Lots of lines and lots of squares and triangles."

”The combination of colors,” she added, “the greys and blues, the glass and the concrete and the rebar in contrast to the oranges and yellows that mark where you aren’t supposed to step, I found that really beautiful.”

Paul Anthony Smith said his large output of work during a nine-month residency, including enough pieces to fill a solo show in Chelsea, was partly aided by the space.

“It was quiet,” he said. “It was a different atmosphere, which made me focus on what I was trying to accomplish.”

With so much room to work, he said, he could move from one project to the other. “I would go back and forth, look at one thing, come across the room and look at another.”

He hopes that his paintings of workers, which originated from photo collages, will one day remind the well-heeled residents that it was men like these who built their homes. (One-bedroom apartments start at \$2 million.)

“I hope they have some sort of gratitude toward the working class,” Smith said. “Because no matter how technologically sophisticated we’ve become we still need individuals who work on infrastructure for our daily lives.”

“Residents will always confront the men,” he added, “as long as the paintings are there.”

QUINN