

No minimum stay required to rest your eyes on these hotels' fine art

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By Hilary Nangle, Globe Correspondent | November 8, 2009

It's possible to view works by artists ranging from Wyeth to Warhol without leaving Greater Boston or setting foot in the Museum of Fine Arts or the Institute of Contemporary Art. Sip a drink, savor a meal, or simply relax while pondering an installation at these hotels, where you needn't check in to check out the museum-quality artwork adorning the public spaces.

Wyeth awaits

Step into history through art at **The Langham Boston**, which began life in 1922 as the Federal Reserve Bank. It's a refined setting, where the treasures are no longer stashed in the vault but displayed on the walls.

Ask at the front desk if the second-floor Wyeth room is open (it doubles as a function space). Around 1920, the Federal Reserve Bank Building Committee commissioned illustrator N.C. Wyeth to paint, in his words, "two mural panels in the Junior Officers' room [that] should contain subjects commemorating two outstanding events in the history of American National Finance. That Alexander Hamilton must inevitably figure in one of these was a foregone conclusion."

After much research, Wyeth portrayed Hamilton, the country's first secretary of the Treasury, meeting with President Washington and Philadelphia banker Robert Morris, an important financial backer of the Revolutionary War and the nation's first secretary of finance. "In the dramatic grouping of the figures, there is more in the picture than actually greets the eye, to any who take the time to reflect," Wyeth wrote in the April 1922 edition of Federal Reserve Society News. "One can feel the sharply contrasted natures of these men facing one another." On the opposite wall, a somber President Lincoln is depicted with Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase reviewing finances at the outbreak of the Civil War.

These aren't the hotel's only riches. Selections from the Norman B. Leventhal collection of 16th-century maps, on loan from the Boston Public Library, are displayed in the Governor's Rooms, the small meeting rooms-lounge areas adjacent to the Wyeth Room. Also worth viewing are 15 historical photographs from the Federal Reserve Bank's archives, exhibited in the fifth-floor hallway. These include an image of Wyeth painting the murals and also provide a snapshot of the building's construction and day-to-day operations during the bank's heyday. *250 Franklin St., 617-451-1900, boston.langhamhotels.com*

Drink it all in

Walk in the front door of the **Mandarin Oriental**, and it's almost as if "Life Line #3," the striking mixed media on paper by Judith A. Brust, snags and reels you to the front desk. It's tempting to focus only on it, but glance up and around - yes, even at the ceiling. Museum-quality contemporary art is integrated throughout the hotel's decor, much of it commissioned for specific locations. The concierge can answer questions regarding the collection.

Highlights include "The Deux," a lithograph by David Hockney, one of Britain's most influential 20th-century artists. It hangs to the right of the front desk. Another lobby eye-grabber is David Mann's "The Given 2007," a special commission painting above the fireplace. Flanking the main entry are two works by minimalist painter, printmaker, and sculptor Frank Stella, "The Whale As a Dish" and "Moby Dick." Other highlights are ceramic pieces by third-generation potter Ben Owen and a multilayered painting from Herb Jackson's "Veronica's Veil"

series. The best way to absorb it all is with a drink in the lobby lounge.

Just as “Life Line #3” lures visitors inside, a dozen wood engravings by Terry Winters draw them up the grand stairway to the arcade level, where more original artwork is displayed in the hallway, function rooms, and even the restrooms.

Return to the first floor, and after viewing the works displayed in the hallways, head into the M Bar & Lounge, where you can drink in the details of two intriguing works along with your cocktail. Hanging on the wall near the entry is Jean Charles Spindler’s modern, abstract marquetry, which comprises exotic wood veneers. Topping the bar is Will Robinson’s “Reflexive Concept,” a Sanskrit-like metal sculpture. Next door, in Asana, the hotel’s restaurant, “Beyond Beyond,” a mixed-media triptych by Terry Rose, commands one wall. *776 Boylston St., 617-535-8888, www.mandarinoriental.com/boston*

Let the sun shine

Nikolas Weinstein’s blown glass installations at the **Fairmont Battery Wharf** in Boston shimmer in the sunlight and incorporate a sense of movement and place. The child of an architect and a sculptor, Weinstein’s internships at the American Museum of Natural History and the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, along with his interest in natural and organic forms, flow in his creations. What might be construed as a school of dolphins dances in the lobby windows.

Perhaps even more intriguing is a chandelier in the downstairs atrium, installed in the skylight dome that rises in the hotel’s entry drive. The skylight’s circular shape gives the chandelier the appearance of a herring weir, with schools of silvery fish swimming within it.

Other artists on view include Beth Donahue, a Cambridge-based abstract painter and printmaker; Peter Agrafiotis, a New Hampshire native and abstract painter; and Dorothy Arnold, whose abstract works are rooted in nature. Works by local artists including Miriam Fried, Robert Bart, and Helen Schulman decorate guest rooms. *3 Battery Wharf, 617-994-9000, www.fairmont.com/batterywharf*

Top art, bar none

The **Royal Sonesta, Boston**’s collection, numbering about 750 original works of museum-quality contemporary art, emphasizes artists who have lived or studied in the region. A brochure, available at the guest services desk, identifies nearly 100 works. These include examples of conceptual, minimal, and pop art by such artists as Andy Warhol, Sol LeWitt, Buckminster Fuller, Stella, Jan Dibbets, Jonathan Borofsky, and Stephen Mueller.

Art fills nearly every space on the first two floors. Paintings, photographs, and prints line hallways, sculptures fill spaces, even the fitness area doubles as a gallery. To truly appreciate Borofsky’s “Flying Man With Briefcase No. 2816955,” which floats in the entry foyer, one should lie on the floor and gaze up at the cutout. Such gymnastics aren’t necessary to view the Warhol works, seven out of a series of 10, near the business center.

Feast your eyes on three pieces by LeWitt in the restaurant Dante and works by Jason Salavon, Claes Oldenburg, Debra Weisberg, Christopher Osgood, Hamish Fulton, Katherine Bradford, Lois Lane, Mueller, and Leah De Prizio in ArtBar. Ponder Fuller’s schematic series “12 Around 11” in the hallway near the executive offices. Especially intriguing is Carl Palazzolo’s abstract take on John Singer Sargent’s “Three Sisters,” displayed near the guest services desk.

For a complete immersion, book either the Artist or New England suite, both decorated with original works such as Jasper Johns lithographs, Roy Lichtenstein china plates, and even a Campbell Soup paper dress by Warhol. *40 Edwin H. Land Boulevard, 617-806-4200, www.sonesta.com/boston*

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