



# ART OF THE OCEAN

As cruise ship art collections grow in both scale and scope, curators are seeking new ways to develop journeys of discovery whilst staying true to brand values and interior schemes.

Words Kristofer Thomas

**W**here art curators working within hotel spaces have an abundance of inspiration in a property's geography, an established codex of local cultural touchstones, and the know-how of creative communities with longstanding links to the area, those programming aboard cruise ships on the high seas are provided with few of these luxuries. With passenger ships taking increasingly prominent cues from their landlocked cousins in terms of both form and function – and the overlap between those designing ships and those designing hotels becoming more common – it makes sense that operators would turn to art curation firms with experience in hotel environments to translate their efforts. However, for firms with marine projects already under their belts and counterparts new to the medium, the process of programming onboard can result in vastly different approaches and altogether different results.

“When we curate for a hotel, especially an urban hotel, we assume that a guest's attention to art will be very short,” explains Tal Danai, founder of Artlink, a curation and provision service with clients including Seabourn and Marriott International. “On a ship, where guests are on board for a minimum of a few days, their attention in terms of the art is potentially much longer. We therefore curate to a different pace of view and try to deliver lingering impact.

Working with designer Adam Tihany and Seabourn President Richard Meadows, Artlink worked to create schemes for the American cruise line's Encore and Ovation vessels, sourcing and installing over 2,600 unique pieces with the help of over 240 artists from five continents. From handblown glasswork to textural ceramic art to space-defining installations to a two-deck-tall wall constructed from glass bricks filled with spices welcoming guests to Thomas Keller's The Grill restaurant, the programme's function is to at once complement the interior design scheme with intriguing visuals and generate an experience in itself.

“When visiting a destination on land, one would expect to sample the local culture, but when sailing a ship between lands one may have the leisure of reflection and the luxury



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The Artlink sourced collection onboard Holland America Line's Nieuw Statendam orbits themes of music and sound from a melting pot of cultures, including Kiki Xue's photographic portraits of traditional Peking Opera costumes

of a slow approach and departure," Danai continues. "The world becomes the locale, and as such, it becomes our source. We curate a ship's collections to provoke cultural thinking and for personal reflection."

This approach sees Ovation and Encore draw from a wide variety of cultures, as opposed to hotel schemes that can often find themselves limited to a specific area's inherent cultural aesthetic, and work to generate journeys of discovery through the ship's winding corridors and vast spaces in place of guests being able to explore a neighbourhood of street art, or take in a local gallery. Vases exploring the theme of travel and cross-cultural pollination by Korean artist Yoo Eui Jeong are set alongside glasswork by Americans Rick Eggert, Danielle Blade and Stephen Gartnerand, taking sailors around the world culturally as the ship does geographically. A pair of specially created collections for corridors meanwhile – wherein functional transitory passageways are transformed into a key element of the ship's narrative – bring together 400 pieces chosen to encourage engagement with what are often overlooked portions of the layout, keeping guests in the essential mode of discovery and curiosity.

Following this dual project, Artlink reunited with Tihany to create a similarly considered programme for Holland America Line's Nieuw Statendam ship, with the firm embracing a music-oriented narrative to supply pieces including

deconstructed instruments, Peter Gentenaar's sound wave-like Purple Swirl sculpture – made from reinforced paper in the main dining room – and Harps, a 7.5-tonne stainless-steel installation spanning the height of four decks. From minute details to unmissable grand statements, the collection sees the theme considered but never too closely defined, allowing guests to gradually peel back the layers of art to find their own organic interpretation of the cruise experience.

If anything happens to catch the eye of a sailor, all pieces are available to purchase, and taking the immersive quality a step further, guests can also meet the artists involved and participate in onboard workshops to create their own work, and a physical memory of the journey.

"Ever since the early cave drawings, art has been a prominent presence in our world, both indoors and outdoors." Danai muses. "While it may have some decorative qualities, its strongest attributes are those of thought and emotional provocations, communicating ideas and commenting about our inner and outer realities."

Hospitality art specialist Kalisher took a similarly cerebral approach when sourcing work for Royal Caribbean's Oasis of the Seas, curating a varied collection wherein the pieces function as shorthand for brand values and the quality of the product, but also as a standalone vision with its own narrative. With moments of wonder including the hand-



Vases by Korean artist Yoo Eui Jeong depicting ideas of travel and cultural pollination are joined by pieces from around the world aboard Seabourn Ovation and Encore, taking guests on an artistic tour of the world

Painted silver leaf mural of a mountainous road looming over the dining room, paired with conventional portraits and depictions of marine life, the programme at once satisfies guest desires for the spectacular and memorable whilst simultaneously appealing to the subconscious; the aesthetic choices and selections guided by the interior design whilst instilling the scheme with the emotional substance key to the formation of memories – a currency perhaps far more valuable than the initial ticket price in the long run.

Whilst guests can partake in a ship's programme of activities and entertainment and largely come away with the same interpretation, art collections of this type can produce an infinite number of responses, different for each individual.

“Our cruise partners develop incredible, life changing spaces that define the ideals of leisure,” explains David Winton, President, Kalisher. “Art furthers those experiences, allowing the passengers to feel moments of joy and wonder throughout the ship. Texture, light, shadow, colour; all of these can morph into an array and arrangement of visual conversations throughout the myriad spaces and experiences available on the ship.”

For those yet to find themselves aboard a ship with these kinds of expansive collections, the increasing presence and importance of art within the context of the industry's interiors can be seen purely in the numbers. Launching in 2020, P&O

Cruises' multi-million pound art collection aboard Iona – taking inspiration from the wonders of nature as much as it does the brand's British heritage – brings together some 4,665 pieces across the mediums of pottery, sculpture, ceramics, jewellery and paintings, with the in-house interiors team overseeing both the design of the ship and the art programme, creating visual threads that work in tandem to keep guests intrigued, and alleviate any sense that they may have missed out on their cultural quota whilst at sea.

Much like the workshops on-board Nieuw Statendam, an open photography competition run by P&O will seek to take the immersive element a step further, with the line seeking submissions from guests past, present and future, with nine to be selected and incorporated into two large pieces to be hung in public areas. Having guests check in under their own artistic contribution to the ship could form a key moment in the experience; the kind of connection between product and person all hospitality brands, water-based or otherwise, should be striving towards.

“Cruise guests go to sleep in one culture and wake up in another, and along their journey, they may visit the world's most fascinating cultures and artistic treasures,” Danai concludes. “The art on a ship must be equally intriguing, fresh and exciting for their return. It can't just fade away in the shadows.”