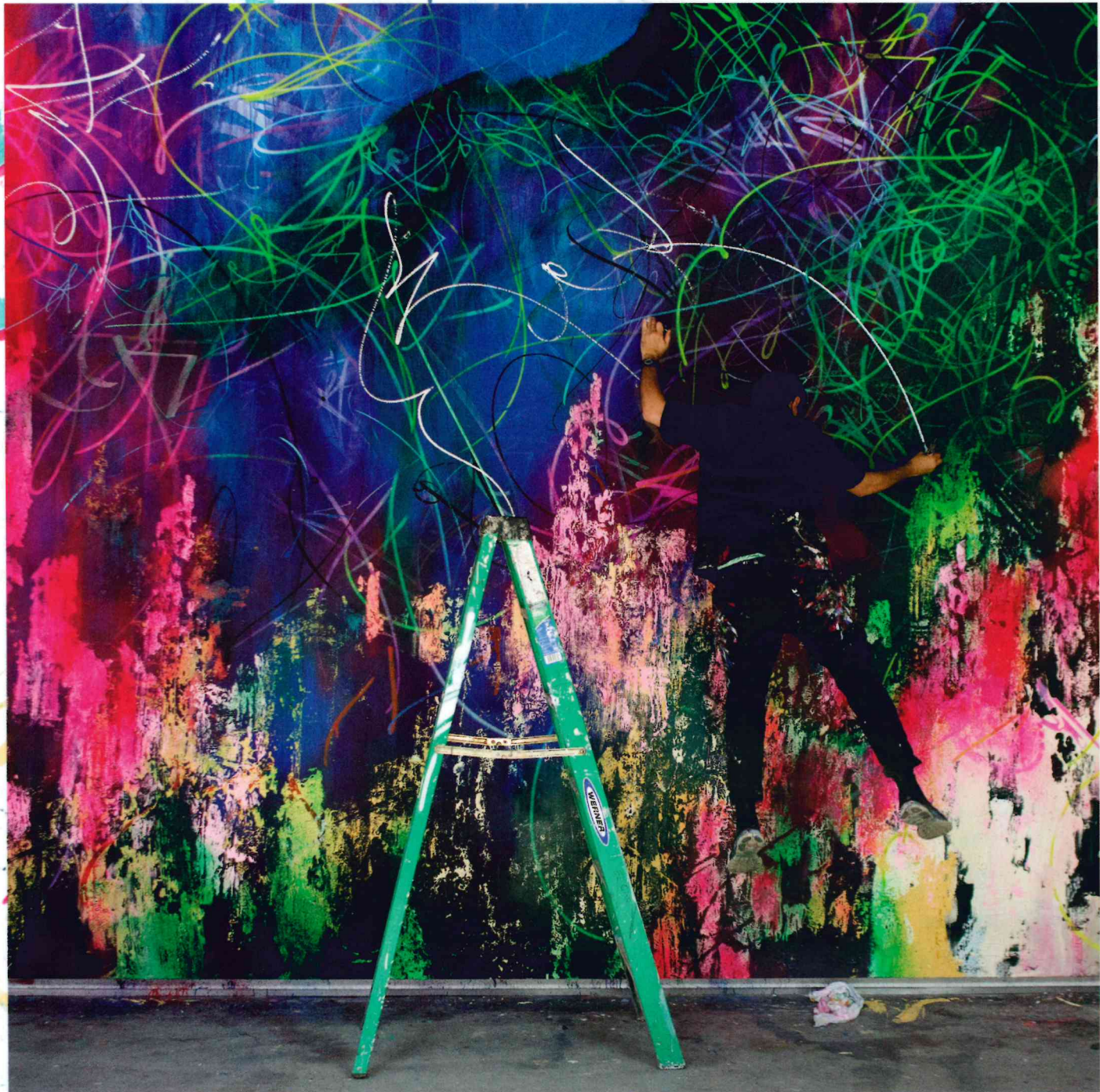


# whitewall

CONTEMPORARY ART AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

SPRING 2015



THE ART ISSUE

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## THE SUITE LIFE OF ART

BY WHITEWALL, PHOTOGRAPHS BY JACK JEFFRIES

One of the top suites in one of the top hotels of New York underwent a complete renovation in 2013. The Suite 5000 at the Mandarin Oriental New York was given a new layout, a new look, and a new way to look at contemporary art. Starting in the summer of 2013, each year a new exhibition is installed throughout the suite, giving guests a unique opportunity to live with and learn about artists from the city that never sleeps. Last year, the exhibition was curated by *Whitewall's* very own Katy Donoghue, who selected art from the likes of Kenny Scharf, James Nares, Shelter Serra, Ray Geary, the Campanas, Forrest Myers, Sze Tsung Leong, and Jonah Freeman and Justin Lowe.

For the 2014 to '15 group of work, *Whitewall* asked Art Beyond's Eiman Aziz (no stranger to these pages) to use her knowledgeable eye and diverse network to cull pieces from Steven Naifeh, Rachel Lee Hovnanian, Tseng Kwong Chi, Mia Fonnagrives-Solow, Dustin Yellin, Evie Falci, Andrew Levitas, and Richard Hudson. The second exhibition in the suite will be on view until October of this year, alongside an interactive iPad app to give guests of the Mandarin Oriental an opportunity to learn more about the artists, their work, and representative galleries like Leila Heller, Gallery Valentine, Eric Firestone, and Allouche Gallery.

After the new year, we sat down with Aziz to talk about her curatorial process and her interest in moving art beyond white box gallery walls.

**WHITEWALL:** How would you describe your role as curator?

**EIMAN AZIZ:** With Art Beyond Advisory, I focus on taking art into new platforms, beyond the conventional. The project at Mandarin Oriental interested me from that perspective. I wanted

to create an engaging and memorable experience with art. The philosophy that guided me here was thinking of the guests. They are an extremely plugged-in, discerning, and well-traveled group. They appreciate a range of subject matter, varied forms of art, and inspiration today. So the idea was to present the pulse of the contemporary art world to them in an intimate way, where the guests feel at home, feel that they have access to something that they normally wouldn't have access to. I wanted to treat them with a range of experiences and emotions in a premium space.

It ended up being so exciting to work with so many different mediums; Rachel Lee Hovnanian's *Fruity Delight in Every Bite*, Mia's beautiful *Lucite Bone Form II*, Richard Hudson's *Egg* in bronze, Andrew Levitas' metalwork photography, Dustin Yellin's whimsical sculptures, the nostalgic old New York photograph of Keith Haring at Fifth Avenue by Tseng Kwong Chi, Evie Falci's rhinestones on denim . . .

**WW:** There is such a range of mediums in the suite, that really defies the expectations of art in a hotel setting. But I think it also can offer guests an example of how to live with art beyond the confines of the framed work.

**EA:** That's exactly right. And it was a key objective in my overall approach. In collaborating with the galleries, I was looking for commanding statement pieces across mediums, not just framed paintings. As one example, when you first walk in, you now see Steven Naifeh's *Saida XXXIV* in chrome. This large, sculptural wall piece is so reflective, so surprising. When curating work for that long entry wall, I realized it didn't have to be, say, a suite of ten photographs, or ten paintings. This striking work in chrome shows that what you need to do to make a statement is to engage the viewer on another level.







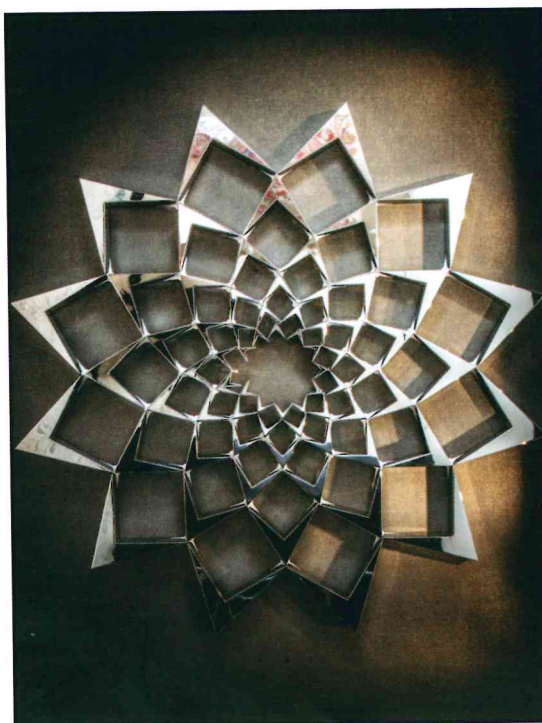
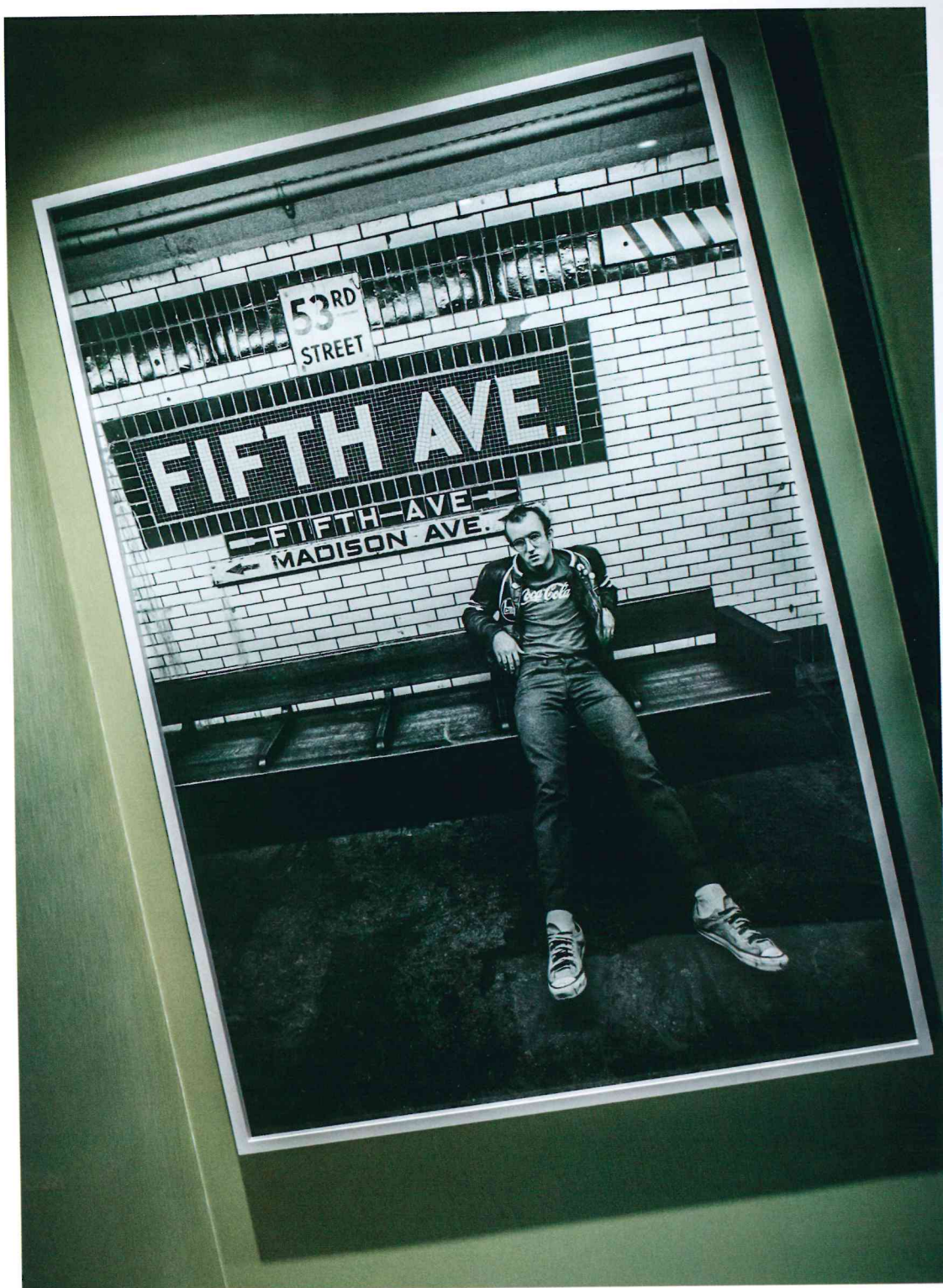
**WW:** But the works are approachable, too. They draw you in.

**EA:** Yes, and that was a challenge. It all had to fit in a cohesive art collection and there were some really terrific options and a lot of narrowing down to find that perfect combination. All the artists are amazing and I'm so pleased with the collection. It was important that the different artworks interact to create a connection throughout the suite.

**WW:** Were there any that surprised you once you had them in the space?

**EA:** The chrome piece was definitely an impressive piece when it went up. It had so many moving parts. When we installed it, I had to take a moment to just sit there and take it all in. It was a wow moment that I hope the guests have, too. Also Rachel Lee Hovnanian's *Fruity Delight in Every Bite* calls your attention to the left when you enter the suite. After that moment, you catch your first glimpse of the breathtaking Central Park views. And there we have Dustin Yellin's work, *Cochineal*. It's a painted tree in layers of resin; it's this stunning illusion of a red tree that plays with the nature of Central Park.

It's interesting, but I thought of Suite 5000 as having this feminine quality, in a way. I started to think about what "she" would want in the suite. I was trying to also think about living in a home. Many of the clients are loyal to the Mandarin Oriental and they stay for at least a week or two. And if you were in your home, you would have an eclectic mix of art. A big part of the suite is being able to have the intimate access to the contemporary collection. The art is right there and guests can interact with it, live with it, and be educated by it.



Opposite page: Andrew Levitas's *Paper Airplane (Music)*, *Paper (Music)*, and *Paper (Letter)*, courtesy of Gallery Valentine.

This page, clockwise from top left:

**Rachel Lee Hovnanian**  
*Fruity Delight in Every Bite*  
2014

Cereal boxes, acrylic, crushed glass, and wood  
67 x 59 x 4.5 inches  
Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery

**Tseng Kwong Chi**  
*Keith Haring (5th Avenue Subway, c. 1984)*

Printed 2012  
Chromogenic print  
60 x 40 inches  
Courtesy of Eric Firestone Gallery

**Steven Naifeh**  
*Saida XXXIV: Chrome*  
2014

Chrome-plated steel  
84 x 84 inches  
Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery