

The Art Works

CityCenter's well-curated collection has public value

By William L. Fox

CityCenter is the only project in Las Vegas that measures up to what's happening around the world at the forefront of architecture and commercial development, whether it's retail, entertainment or gambling—as if there were much of a difference anymore. And art is a requisite component. Not the stale plop art of the shopping malls and office complexes of middle America, where large metal abstractions are interchangeable from site to site. CityCenter's architecture is a collection of works by stellar designers assembled into a cohesive ensemble, and the art is likewise smartly curated. This "fine art collection" isn't public, per se—it's a privately owned \$40 million investment installed on private land—but it does read as a public amenity.

If you enter CityCenter from the west on Harmon Avenue, you're greeted by the maniacal mash-up of aluminum canoes by Nancy Rubins. "Big Edge" rises above the circular drive and manages to be simultaneously lyrical, funny and threatening, which is a hat trick far more interesting than, say, the volcano at The Mirage. On the other side of the complex and off the circular drive of Aria you can walk right up to Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen's "Typewriter Eraser, Scale X." Las Vegas who know their "Flashlight" on the UNLV campus will recognize the signature enlargement of a common object, in this case their 1999 version of circular eraser. The curator, Michele Quinn, who also put together the Mandalay Bay's stellar collection at TheHotel, gives a nod to other public art in the town while capturing an iconic American sculpture at the pedestrian level. That's a lovely touch of curatorial intelligence.

But the best indication of how well Quinn worked with the architects is in the juxtaposition of Maya Lin's "Silver River," Henry Moore's "Reclining Connected Forms" (which dates from 1969-74) and the two fountains in the Aria resort entrance, all four of which are within sight of one another and form a nice dialogue. Moore's sculpture is a formidable travertine abstraction of

a female form balanced within biomorphic rectangle, a metaphor for how the human body is attached to the world. The 84-foot-long representation of the Colorado River by Lin inside the Aria lobby traces a body of water and its connection to the Earth by showing us the underwater contour lines of the river as shaped by the canyon bed. The human and riverine bodies reflect upon one another, while to the south the laminar water jets of a fountain and a water curtain run through patterned choreographies. The grouping provokes consideration of water as nature and culture, the organic and the geometric, and you'll find little resonant touches throughout the complex.

You have to wince as tourists saunter by the Moore, missing its almost mystical sense of poise, only to hear them ooh and ahh over the fountain, but most Americans aren't educated to look at art, much less value it. And Quinn, working with the various architects to situate the art seamlessly into the experience of CityCenter, has done such a good job that she runs the risk of you taking the works for granted. CityCenter raises questions, as do all architectural achievements of magnitude. Signage is an issue, for example. But the integration of the buildings and art isn't one of them. Now the rest of the properties on the Strip have to figure out how to measure up. If the economy allows, it could be an enlightening competition to lure the jet-set of the 21st century.



"Typewriter Eraser, Scale X"



The hanging light sculpture in Vdara's concierge lounge was designed by Peter Wegner to encourage dialogue between his "Day for Night, Night for Day" artworks.