

# Landmarks leads effort to save artwork on a Soho building

After receiving several complaints, the Landmarks Preservation Commission has ordered the owners of a Soho building to stop removing the artwork on the building's exterior until they apply for permits.

The large work, on the northern wall of 599 Broadway, at Houston St., was installed in 1972 as a part of Citywall Art Project, a privately funded program that tried to improve the look of the city by putting art outdoors. But the management company, River To River Properties, recently began removing it.

Sean Sweeney, executive director of the Soho Alliance, said he and the artist, Forrest Myers, contacted Landmarks, which reviewed the case and then determined the work could not be removed without permission.

"We did inform the managing agent that any work would require landmark permits because the building is part of the Soho Historic District," Katie McNabb, a spokesperson for the commission, said. "If they decide to move forward they will have to file applications. They haven't done so yet."

Sweeney said he suspects they want to use the building for advertising as several neighbors are already doing. A Donna Karan billboard, for example, is nearby.

"We're going to preserve this very historic piece of work from the developers," he said. "It's the gateway to Soho. It's very famous."

The work has been in national and international books, movies and magazines.

"It's a landmark in the truest sense of the word," Myers said. "People all over New York know about this wall."

The piece was installed in 1972 by Myers, who moved to Soho in 1961 and started one of its first art galleries, the Park Place Gallery. Originally, the four-foot aluminum extrusions on the building were blue and gray to mesh with what was then an industrial neighborhood. Myers said yesterday that the work is a minimalist abstract that is "hard to describe with words." But he said there are some interesting visual



Endangered artwork on Houston St.

effects. For example, the extrusions make shadows on the sidewalk that grow and move as the sun moves.

In 1981, when the building was converted to co-ops, there were plans to install a new work. But it was rejected by the Landmarks Commission, and Myers worked with the building and agreed to paint the extrusions in new, more upbeat colors. Again in 1987, according to Myers' wife, Debby, there were plans to remove the work and stucco the entire wall. But that was also rejected by the Landmarks Commission.

Debby Myers said they have had problems with the current managing agent, Gary Cannata of River to River Properties, since 1994 when he began allowing artists to paint on the lower portion of the wall because he did not consider it part of Myers' work.

Councilmember Kathryn Freed is also supporting Myers, and has sent a letter to Cannata. She said in addition to its Landmark status, the work is protected by the Visual Artists Rights Act.

"You must stop defacing this wall and this work of art immediately," she wrote.

Cannata did not return a call.



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