

**GREG SARGENT**

## In SoHo, Art Fights Commerce In a Battle Over the Wall

If you stand at the corner of Houston Street and Broadway, you can't miss it: 30 green girders protruding from a 12-story blue-violet wall. For 25 years, the girders

MANHATTAN  
COMMUNITY  
BOARDS

have registered the changing angles of the sun with shadows that creep slowly across the sculpture's backdrop. But now, *The Wall*, created by sculptor

Forrest Myers, is caught up in a controversy that reflects another kind of change: the gradual morphing of SoHo from an arts-centered neighborhood into a commercial zone whose most conspicuous artworks are garish advertising murals.

Mr. Myers told *The Observer* there are plans to—as they say in the art world—“deaccession” his work. Apparently, the condominium board for 599 Broadway, the building that hosts the sculpture, isn't a big fan of *The Wall*.

On Oct. 20, the condo board asked the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission for permission to remove some of the girders and the braces that bond them to the building, a commission spokesman said. The condo board cited fears of water damage—but also told the commission that it has no intention of reattaching the girders. (The commission will hold a public hearing in coming months.)

Mr. Myers can't help but notice that more and more ad murals are popping up on buildings along Houston Street. Despite vigorous opposition from Community Board 2, giant ads for Fila sportswear and Donna Karan have been masking Houston Street's downtown grittiness with a glossy commercial veneer akin to that of the new Times Square—a trend that reflects SoHo's growing reputation as the place for out-of-towners who want to squeeze in the occasional gallery visit on Le Grand Tour of Williams-Sonoma and J. Crew. Does the condominium want to replace *The Wall* with a giant Marlboro Man or a 12-story version of the latest cover art for *Jane* magazine?

Mr. Myers thinks so—and he is fashioning a campaign to save his work. “It's extremely painful to have it threatened,” he told *The Observer*. “I've gone through a lot of sleepless nights about it.” He added that he has hired a lawyer. (The building's managing agent declined to comment on the matter.)

Community Board 2 supports Mr. Myers' campaign to save *The Wall*. Board district

marks commission, urging it to block the work's removal. “The board is outraged that anybody would touch that work of art,” he said.

Mr. Myers, for his part, is girding for a long

brief speech designed to mend relations with a board that has long assailed his employer as indifferent to an array of neighborhood concerns. If Mr. Batman was hoping to accomplish that admirable goal, he certainly didn't show it.

Speaking at the board's public session, Mr. Batman started off by doing what might be expected of any effective spinmeister: He launched into a litany of all the good stuff Chelsea Piers has done. But Mr. Batman seemed ill-equipped to handle the grumbling and gnashing of teeth that are standard fare at any board meeting. With-



JAMES HAMILTON

Something there is that doesn't love *The Wall*.

battle: “I'm going to fight this with everything I can. We're taking this all the way.”

### CHELSEA PIERS' P.R. STRATEGY IRKS VINEGAR NEIGHBORS

Chelsea Piers has a P.R. problem.

For some reason, the sports complex is having trouble shaking its image as a heartless, profit-driven organization bent on stamping out any neighborhood input into the future of the Hudson River waterfront. Of course, it might have something to do with Chelsea Piers' novel approach to public relations, which was on display at Community Board 4's meeting on Nov. 5.

in moments, he was on the offensive, pursuing his flack attack in a tone that veered between sarcasm and outright belligerence.

Before long, the board's tone had begun to sound disturbingly similar to that of a mob preparing to touch a lit match to a cross. And Mr. Batman responded in kind.

“It seems that some people in this community sleep through the good stuff we do, and then wake up to drink a hot cup of vinegar,” he said, to a collective gasp of horror from the assembly. Call it the scorched-earth approach to image management.

The ensuing question-and-answer ses-

A sculptor is worried that his 25-year-old artwork on the wall of a SoHo condominium will be removed permanently.