



Tom Christopher's mural at London Terrace Gardens.

## Capturing Chelsea on Canvas

*Tom Christopher's mural puts London Terrace Gardens on the map.*

By Nancy A. Ruhling

To really feel the artistic vibes of Chelsea, all you have to do is step into the lobby of London Terrace Gardens at 435 W. 23rd St., where Tom Christopher's mammoth "London Terrace Murals" shows you what it's really like to live in one of the city's more colorful neighborhoods.

In the 8-foot by 30-foot oil-on-canvas mural, Christopher, whose big, bold, in-your-face, expressionistic scenes of Manhattan have all but made him the city's artist in residence, moms with strollers share the street with homeless guys. Immigrant bike messengers pedaling for dear life trade lanes with barreling bus drivers and careening cabbies.

"I wanted to give the impression that you're walking down the street," says Christopher. He has done a number of public projects, including the block-long, blockbuster mural that punched up the outside of Roseland Ballroom from 1998 to 2004, and the ongoing exhibit of paintings in the lobby of the Times Square Information Center at 1560 Broadway, between 46th and 47th Streets. "It works because there are a lot of abstracts in it. You see the scene first and then you look again and you see all the brushwork, the pencil lines, the blank spaces. So it works on both levels. And it's an entertainment, an observation, a documentation."

Onda D'Urso, a partner in London Terrace Gardens, says the work was commissioned a decade ago for this, the company's "prize building," because "it's a 'wow!' piece."

It is, both say, a win-win project, because it gives Christopher a showcase for his largest permanent work, and it enhances the beauty and value of the nearly 1,000-unit apartment building. "In public spaces, I always do something uplifting," Christopher says. "The work, because it is in a place where a lot of people see it, should be something that's inspiring. The main thing you fight when you do a work of this type is time. You don't want to do something that's political or based on current events, like Diego Rivera's infamous mural at Rockefeller Center, because you don't want it to be dated."

Before commissioning Christopher, D'Urso looked at the work of several artists. "One of the reasons we chose Tom was because he was up and coming in terms of modern art," she says.

Her instincts paid off: Today, Christopher's works are shown all over the world—his current show is in Paris—and his regular-size paintings sell for \$10,000 to \$50,000 at the David Findlay Galleries, one of city's premier venues.

They settled upon a theme while Christopher presented ideas, sketches and consulted with D'Urso and a committee at every step of the process. So, there were no surprises.

"I always tell people to go with real art because it's a good investment," Christopher says. "And it should be something that you are proud to hand down from generation to generation. It's not carpeting, it's not paneling, which you know you are going to replace every couple of years. It's art."

Today, when people think of London Terrace Gardens, Christopher's mural is what first comes to mind. Indeed, the work is so identified with the building that D'Urso says, "I wouldn't recognize the space without it." —RENY