

GUEST *of a* GUEST

How The New Rockaway Hotel Snagged Some Of The Best Art In The City



When you think about it, hotels have never just been "places to sleep." Through the centuries (and perhaps even millennia), they've not only served as lodging for travelers, but also as community gathering spaces - places to socialize, hubs of culture. With travel on hold for many New Yorkers, the tradition of turning to a hotel in your own backyard has become more relevant than ever. At the newly-opened [Rockaway Hotel](#) in the beachside oasis of The Rockaways, Queens, you'll find a celebration of local culture and community, along with a much-needed change of quarantine scenery.

And what's culture (or a beautiful escape) without art? Michi Jigarjian, the hotel's Managing Partner and Chief Social Impact Officer, has it covered. A presence on the NYC art scene as President of [Baxter St at CCNY](#) and the Co-Founder of [New Draft Collective](#), she's helped to "cultivate a hotel that is as artistically inspired as it is accommodating."

As head of the hotel's art programming, Jigarjian has sourced some of the best works in town, from artists that are both local and international, up-and-coming and established. We caught up with the eye behind the new hot spot's creative vision to talk all things art at the Rockaway (as if you needed one more reason to check in).

What is your title and role in the hotel?

Michi Jigarjian: *Partner and Chief Social Impact Officer at The Rockaway Hotel.*

My role as a partner has been to conceive the hotel's community engagement and art program as well as the overall ethos. A major part of this process was to better acquaint myself with the Rockaway peninsula. I believe that the gateway to understanding any culture or locale is listening and getting to know the different facets of the community over time. So, over the past few years I have been getting to know the different people of Rockaway; whether it is local studio visits with artists, shopping at the local vintage store, knowing the best surf break or understanding the different community initiatives. A huge resource in this process was our partners, Terence and Dee Tuburidy, whose respected family has been in Rockaway for generations.

How did you initially get involved in the art world? Are you an artist?

My grandfather was a writer and professor at the University of Pennsylvania and played a large role in my exposure to the arts across all mediums; whether we were sitting in on the symphony and opera rehearsals or having dinner with writers or painters – it was my culture growing up. That influence extended to my undergraduate time at Lehigh and then my graduate work at ICP Bard, where I am now on faculty in the MFA program. Photography was my main medium and then during my time at Bard, my practice and medium evolved into community. In 2011, I became the President of Baxter St at The Camera Club of New York and led the 135 year old organization towards its revitalization with a focus on supporting underrepresented lens based artists.



Why is art such an important focus for The Rockaway Hotel and for you?

Art can be the connective tissue of a community, serving as an extension of our values and our aesthetic. The Rockaways have a dynamic and culturally diverse artistic community. The art in the hotel is curated to exemplify that spirit in hopes to provide a welcoming, inclusive vibe. This extends to our community engagement and public art initiatives, which will begin with a community mural at the local school adjacent to the hotel. The hotel is also a sponsor and local hub for the virtual public art public art installation by Nancy Baker Cahill presented by Art Production in partnership with Jamaica

Bay-Rockaway Parks Conservancy.

Who are the artists behind some of the artwork chosen?

Throughout the hotel you will find contemporary artworks from local and internationally renowned artists. The lobby and ground level will feature commissioned works from Zoe Buckman, Hannah Whitaker and Kennedy Yanko, as well as featured artworks from Tom Sachs, Derrick Adams, Roe Ethridge, Rashid Johnson, Patti Smith, Katharina Grosse and Herbie Fletcher. Each guest room will feature a custom light by artist Sam Stewart in addition to a selection of photographic prints. These prints are procured from non-profit visual arts organizations and artist collectives including Aperture Foundation, Magnum Photos and Printed Matter, allowing us to support not only the talented artists who create the work, but also the spaces that promote their cultivation. Amid the COVID-19 crisis the hotel also contributed to Pictures For Elmhurst, a print sale of work by New York-based photographers with all proceeds going directly to medical workers on the front lines at Elmhurst Hospital Center.



What thoughts and feelings went into the selection of art you chose for the hotel? What inspired the selection of artwork?

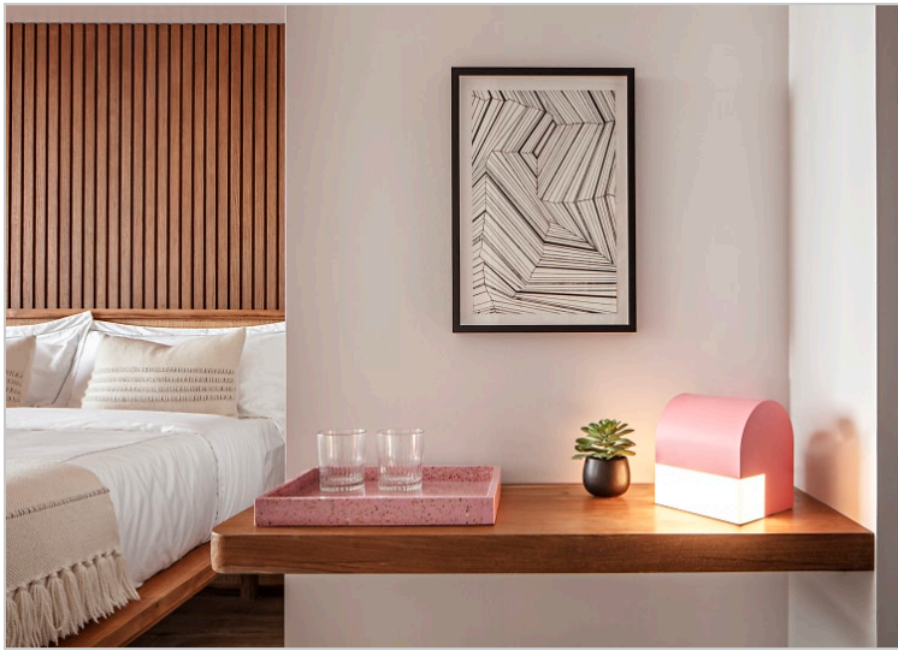
I always say art gives the hotel a soul. Our approach to curating the hotel started with how we want guests and visitors to feel in the space. The works on display are vibrant and dynamic, bringing the space to life. We strive to support artists and the arts community through our programs, meaning that we have personal relationships with the vast majority of artists whose work is featured at the hotel. We have also built relationships with many local artists through this process. The seamless integration of the local and international by both emerging and established artists is representative of the broad range of people we look forward to welcoming once the hotel opens – from locals, to Manhattanites just a short ferry ride away, to international visitors from around the world.

How does the design of the hotel connect to the art selected?

The art and design naturally complement each other, working in tandem to create a space that feels familiar and inviting while also evoking the vibe of the region. Curious Yellow is behind the interior design which emanates an eclectic, retro and calming atmosphere through the use of materials like teak, linen, wool, leather and rattan. You will notice tropical vibes mixed with urban edginess that reflects the energy, colors and spirit of the Rockaways.

What do you hope people will take away from their stay at the hotel?

I want Rockaway to be seen as the destination it truly is. Guests will have countless opportunities here for special experiences in a one-of-a-kind place. They could easily spend an entire day just enjoying the hotel between the pool, spa treatments, wellness classes, live music and entertainment, not to mention our four venues for food and drinks, but there is even more to experience just steps from the hotel. We hope guests and visitors will immerse themselves in the beautiful beaches with famous surf breaks, surrounding nature reserves like the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, as well as the charming local shops and cafes.



[Photos by Matthew Placek courtesy of The Rockaway Hotel]