

NEW YORK

Chelsea-based ArtBridge Turns NYC Scaffolding into Public Art Exhibitions



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If you're a New Yorker, you're all too familiar with the color hunter green.

The city-mandated shade, which many have compared to a Christmas tree, adorns much of the 300-plus miles of construction fencing found throughout the five boroughs. The color is as much a part of the NYC sidewalk experience as subway entrances and crowds of tourists. That's why leading scaffolding company CORE partnered with ArtBridge to not only ensure compliance with NYC's new Local Law163, but also to support the nonprofit's mission to cover this ubiquitous color with artwork sourced from local artists, replacing hunter green with unique and eye-catching art that represents the city itself. *TRD* sat down with ArtBridge founder Rodney Durso, ArtBridge executive director Stephen Pierson, and CORE Scaffold co-founder and CEO Willy Pilku to learn how ArtBridge and CORE are bringing NYC's sidewalks to life.

Humble Beginnings

ArtBridge started as a way for Durso, an award-winning graphic designer who left a successful branding and marketing career to pursue his passion for painting, to get exposure for his work around Chelsea.

"I started painting at a studio on West 26th Street," he recalls. "It was around the time of the financial meltdown, when there were a lot of half-finished construction sites." Breaking into the art world is challenging for new painters, so Durso came up with a novel solution that would kill two birds with one stone: put his art on the scaffolding that enclosed the building where he lived.

The result was an exhibition featuring work by 26 artists selected by a jury panel of "well-known creative professionals" installed on scaffolding around London Terrace Gardens in Chelsea. "The artists were super excited. The building was excited. The neighbors were happy," says Durso. "Then it became kind of a big deal."

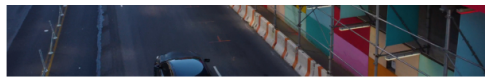
From that one exhibit, ArtBridge was born. Fifteen years later, the nonprofit has created over 100 public exhibitions, covering more than 6 miles of public space with work by local artists. While rooted in NYC, ArtBridge has also taken their unique concept around the world, working with community organizers to exhibit the artwork of local artists in São Paulo, Brazil, Cape Town, South Africa, and L'Aquila, Italy.

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100 Flatbush Avenue

"It elevates the pedestrian experience," says Durso, who compares the effect of walking through a neighborhood that's covered with "a big green scaffold" to how it feels when you walk past an ArtBridge installation. "It makes you stop and smile."

Even Durso is overwhelmed by how the program has grown over the years. "When we first started, we were doing maybe three exhibits a year," he says. "Now we're doing like 5 a month. Often, I'll bump into an art exhibit that I didn't know about – it's extremely humbling and very exciting"

Lifting Up Local Artists

ArtBridge has a singular advantage when it comes to finding art for its installations.

"One of New York's greatest assets is its thousands of talented artists," says Pierson. "We provide a mechanism to get artists noticed, while transforming the liability of 300 miles of construction fencing into an communal asset."

Willy Pilku, who has two decades of experience in the scaffolding industry under his belt, joined ArtBridge's Board of Directors two years ago after discovering the nonprofit while investigating efforts to beautify the city.

"What impressed me after meeting Rodney and Stephen is that their mission is much more than simply putting artwork on sheds and fences," Willy told *TRD*. "The collaboration that they have done with local stakeholders and community engagement really shows the work of ArtBridge in empowering local artists while transforming prominent urban spaces."

While ArtBridge installations can be found throughout the city via City Canvas permits, Pierson and Durso are particularly proud of the [Bridging the Divide](#) initiative. This ongoing program amplifies the voices of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents, starting with a series of workshops that result in displaying their work, in collaboration with local artists, on the construction fencing that surrounds their homes.



NYCHA Chelsea

"We embrace the idea that our exhibitions can be especially impactful in neighborhoods that have traditionally been underserved by the arts," explains Pierson. "So we produce many of our exhibitions in neighborhoods like Brownsville and the South Bronx."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ArtBridge produced over three linear miles of exhibitions in 21 public housing developments across all five boroughs. The programs worked with 55 local artists as well as over 130 NYCHA residents who were hired to facilitate the process, an effort that supported the community during a difficult time.

CORE Scaffold Partnership

As CEO of one of NYC's leading scaffolding companies, Willy Pilku is a valuable member of the ArtBridge team.

"He's not only sharp and understands the world, but he really wants

to do good,” says Pierson. “He’s been trying to get artwork on CORE scaffolding wherever it goes.”

Willy Pilku joined ArtBridge in the wake of the City Council passing Local Law 163, which codified the organization’s City Canvas pilot program, and has been a major player in putting the program into action.

“He’s very aware that, for this local law to be successful, it needs the buy-in of scaffolding vendors,” explains Pierson. “He’s really leading the way.”

So next time you’re walking through New York City and see a piece of art on a stretch of construction fencing, thank ArtBridge and CORE Scaffold for their efforts in beautifying the streets of the city Durso, Pierson, and Willy Pilku love. Learn more about ArtBridge’s ongoing mission [here](#).

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