



Outside Christie's in Rockefeller Center, New York.

Newsroom

Christie's Opens Newly Designed Selldorf Galleries

The auction house's Rockefeller Center locale expands its footprint to 60,000 square feet

By Carly Olson

Photography by Courtesy of Christie's

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Often, good architecture is a game of strategy: mixing styles of different eras into something cutting-edge, building a spectacular structure within a client's budget, or creating a developer's vision under the constraints of zoning laws. At other times, the puzzle is simpler. The missing piece is clear, just awaiting the right treatment. For Christie's in New York City, the piece in question was a room full of wires.

At the auction house's Rockefeller center headquarters—which boasts 60,000 square feet of exhibition space—a recent acquisition of real estate has connected the first floor galleries, while adding even more space for a robust lineup of programming on the horizon. The 5,000-square-foot addition—formerly a cable-filled server room and office occupied by the Rockefeller Group Telecommunications Services—previously took a bite out of Christie's otherwise contiguous footprint. When the space became available last year, the house busted down the walls and cut it open, creating more open space and five new galleries on the ground floor, which opened to the public last week.

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A gallery staged for Asia Week.

The integration and renovation process was spearheaded by AD100 firm [Selldorf Architects](#), which has previously worked on updates to Christie's galleries. Eileen Pierce served as the lighting designer. "Our latest project builds on that work by connecting the full suite of spaces to the west of the main entrance," Lisa Green, a partner at Selldorf, told AD PRO by email. Christie's renovated spaces include a flexible wall layout, museum and theater quality lighting, and 14-foot-high ceilings. "We often build out aesthetic enhancements like extra walls and sight lines, but we've created layout that does that from the get-go," says Emily Sarokin, director of Gallery Operations at Christie's. "A handful of the walls can easily be dismantled but they look permanent—like if we have another 33-foot-long canvas like we had last May," she adds with a laugh.

Indeed, these unique needs at auction houses must be carefully considered in the design process. "Unlike a museum that has a year or two to plan exhibitions, we are working on an abbreviated timeline so we can operate on a different pace than a museum would, which is a unique challenge of the auction industry" says Sarokin. "So we have spaces where you can put an entire collection of decorative arts and spaces for one single painting."



The expansive new spaces feature top-of-the-line lighting and 14-foot ceilings.

In addition to the practical and functional, Selldorf spiced up the space with luxe details and finishes. "The terrazzo floors and bronze detailing evoke the architecture of Rockefeller Center," Green says. "We felt it was important to bring the original palette of the larger complex into the Christie's space. It was not about modernizing it per se but rather giving it a fresh set of finishes that respond to its iconic and landmark location."

For a venue which boasted 57,000 square feet of exhibition space prior to the recent upgrade, some may ask why an expansion is necessary. As the Christie's team sees it, this was done not only to help the flow of gallery space but also to affirm the evolving direction of the auction house's programming. Sarokin explained that Christie's wants to host more lectures and events and make the building a more central cultural institution. Additionally, "marquis weeks," as Sarokin calls them, such as [Asia Week](#) and 20th-Century Week, are becoming increasingly important selling moments for Christie's. These annual events are stacked with back-to-back thematic sales, requiring a mass movement and display of art and objects.

"We started marquis weeks around 2012," Sarokin says, "and have realized that consignors and collectors like to have their specific purchases feel at home in the thematic presentation of the material." Since then, marquis weeks have evolved into museum-quality exhibitions with wall text and immersive displays that can take over several galleries at once. In order to keep up with the growing interest in these sales, the space must grow. Already, there are around 100 exhibitions and sales at Christie's per year, all of which are free and open to the public. Last year, there were close to 100,000 visitors to the galleries.

This renovation caps off yet another notable update to the landmark building, which Christie's has called home since 1999. The original redesign was overseen by noted firm Gensler, and a bright mural by Sol Lewitt, completed that same year, covers the lobby's walls. As is the nature of the business, things move quickly, growth is paramount, and glitz is part of the game. As LeWitt once said, "Rockefeller Center is a work of art itself."

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