

## Massive Art Installation Coming to Vacant Donnell Library

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MIDTOWN WEST — The Museum of Modern Art is about to get some competition from an unlikely source.

The Donnell Library Center, which has stood empty in its vantage point across the street from MoMA for nearly two years, is being transformed into a temporary art exhibition by the nonprofit arts group [Chashama](#). The group has been converting vacant properties across the city into for the past 15 years, and said its plans for the former public library include placing easels inside the window spaces and inviting artists to illuminate them with lights and color.

On Tuesday, crews were busy at work inside the usually-empty space, installing giant white easels and extending window ledges to showcase the art, which will be viewed from the street.

The first round of displays will feature digital artist Robert Stratton, who creates portraits out of interactive LED lights. Already, one of the panels is aglow with green and purple lights that transform when touched.

Another display, by Harlem artist Roy Secord, will feature blue, gray and white diamonds meant to invoke morning stars.

The main exhibition is set to debut in August, and will span the building's 30 windows, which run along W. 53rd Street across from the museum, Chashama's development director, Kim Schnaubert, said.

The popular Donnell Library was closed two years ago when the building was purchased by Orient-Express Hotels to make way for a new 11-story hotel, the *New York Times* [reported](#).

At the time, the company had agreed to build a new branch on the building's ground and basement floors. But last March, Orient-Express [backed out](#) of the \$59 million deal, leaving the fate of the space in limbo.

In the meantime, residents have been eager to do something to bring the building back to life.

"Having an empty, unused space on such a prominent block seemed inappropriate," said Wally Rubin, the district manager of Community Board 5.

After hearing numerous complaints from residents, he said the board came up with the idea for the installation, which the New York Public Library and local leaders later approved.

Chashama's Schnaubert said New Yorkers can expect to see "powerful, thought-provoking pieces" appropriate to the large and high-profile space.

"We're looking for projects that are going to make a statement," she said.

The group's past installations have ranged from large-scale dioramas to performance art pieces, including [a high-fiving machine](#) and windows filled with men [dressed as](#) chickens and gorillas.

Roy Secord, who was hard at work Tuesday preparing for his Donnell debut, said the installations are sure to give the sterile building a boost.

"This is just going to blast Saturday," he said, smiling. "It's going to completely change the whole dynamic of this section of the block."

Local residents said it's about time that something happened with the space.

"It's a great idea," said Tom Zuback, 43, a photographer who lives on the street. "Especially because it's across from the MoMA, it should be used for something," he said.

Chashama will continue [accepting proposals](#) from artists who want to be featured in the space through September 7.