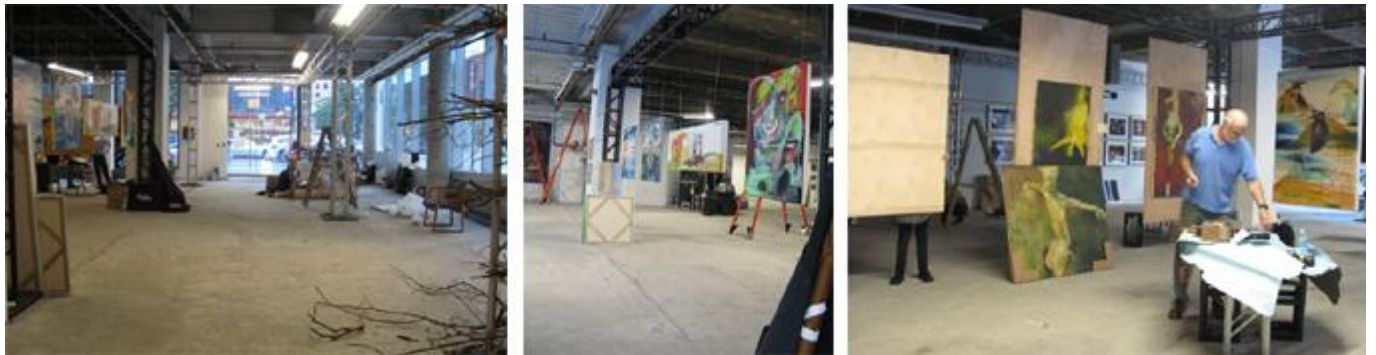


## Commercial landlords move quickly to donate space to the arts

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By [Laurel Maury](#)



A gallery show at the Chashama space at 679 Third Avenue (Credit: Susu Pianchupattana of Chashama)

The practice of landlords donating space to the arts to enliven a neighborhood is blossoming in New York City. It's been occurring since at least the early 1980s, when David Walentas, founder of Two Trees Management, donated space to lure artists to Dumbo.

Although Chashama and Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, two arts non-profit organizations that facilitate the donation of space to artists, say they've noticed no increase in offerings of space with the economic downturn, the quickness and ease with which Downtown Brooklyn Partnership has been able to fill vacant space with art installations, shows that landlords are increasingly open to this practice.

Next month, installations are scheduled to open in about six vacant storefronts Dekalb Avenue Associates owns at 395 Flatbush Ave. Extension. Many of the pieces involve light and movement, and they'll be turned on 24 hours a day. Downtown Brooklyn Partnership, a non-profit dedicated to developing Downtown Brooklyn, helped facilitate the show. The idea is to encourage the community to submit art proposals for vacant space.

Last spring, the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership stumbled upon the model of donating space through a Business Improvement District, which was trying to figure out what to do with a vacancy in a BID area on State Street, and decided to put in some artwork.

The BID approached Two Trees about its abandoned storefront on a side area off Court Street, which then felt dark and empty. Two Trees quickly agreed to house an art installation. Two Trees has a lot of experience donating space for the arts. Highly visible and brightly lit, the art

installation “Lithium,” which went up in July, encouraged foot traffic and “really activated the street,” said Katie Dixon, the partnership’s director of arts and culture. By the end of the month, the space had a commercial renter, which Dixon believes was due to the artwork.

Another project that the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership was instrumental in negotiating is a set of art installations in 13 consecutive storefronts on Willoughby Street between Bridge and Duffield streets. Negotiated through the Metrotech BID, the art installations went up in July and are scheduled to run through November. This project also happened quickly; Metrotech only approached the owner, United American Land, this past spring.

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Lower Manhattan Cultural Council hasn’t noticed an increase in donations of space for the arts, it says, but at least one space — from Trinity Real Estate — came to it because of the recession.

Trinity Real Estate, the land management arm of Manhattan’s Trinity Church, planned to build on the site between Canal and Grand streets, and Sixth Avenue, but decided that “the market for development was not exactly ripe,” said Carl Weisbrod, president of Trinity Real Estate. Although a parking lot was the most obvious use for the space, Weisbrod said, Trinity instead asked the cultural council to install a temporary sculpture garden —which opened Sept. 18 — to “brand the neighborhood as creative,” he said.

Trinity has owned land in New York City for over 300 years, and it chose to go with the council instead of a rent-paying parking lot because it wanted to invest in the neighborhood in a way that brought in more of the arts, Weisbrod said.