

Hospitality

Supporting the Art Community

An Interview with Maria Zec,
Regional Vice President, USA East Coast, The Peninsula Hotels
and General Manager, The Peninsula Chicago

EDITORS' NOTE Since March 2002, Maria Zec has served as General Manager of The Peninsula Chicago and assumed her current post with The Peninsula Hotels in May 2007. Prior to this, she served as Managing Director and Hotel Manager at the New York Palace Hotel. Zec holds a B.S. in business management and a B.A. in French from Purdue University.

PROPERTY BRIEF The Peninsula Chicago (peninsula.com/chicago) has been recognized as a premier property with Forbes' Five-Star and AAA Five Diamond awards since its grand opening in 2001. The property boasts 339 luxurious guest rooms and suites and offers a 15,000-square-foot spa and fitness center, 24-hour room service, a ballroom, and seven additional meeting and event rooms as well as three distinctive restaurants and Z Bar.

Will you highlight The Peninsula Chicago's commitment to art and its permanent art collection?

The hotel's permanent art collection was curated to give a nod to Chicago's prominent design and famous architecture legacy while reflecting the building's Art Deco elements. The curator wanted guests walking through the public space to feel that they were passing through a museum showcasing art which truly enhances the setting and atmosphere of the hotel. In fact, there are a number of commissioned works throughout the public spaces and top suites by well-known artists such as Sol LeWitt, Sean Scully, Robert Mangold, Paul Housberg and more.

In 2016 when the hotel renovated our guestrooms and suites, a beautiful art wall was installed in every room. Designed by artist David Qian, there is a painted panel in guestrooms and it is hand-embroidered in suites. The primary motif is the chrysanthemum flower,



The Peninsula Chicago's guestrooms and suites feature a Chrysanthemum art wall



Gaetano Pesce's work on display at The Peninsula Chicago in conjunction with EXPO Chicago 2017

chosen intentionally as it is not only a significant subject of Asian art, but also the official flower of the city of Chicago.

Will you discuss The Peninsula Chicago's partnership with EXPO Chicago?

For the past five years, The Peninsula Chicago has been the premier hotel sponsor for EXPO Chicago, the city's annual contemporary art fair, which brings together some of the best galleries, artists and collectors in the world. Annually, the hotel transforms the lobby and public space to showcase internationally acclaimed artists' work for the public and guests to enjoy for a six-week special exhibition. We love shining a light on emerging talent as well as transforming our lobby and public space into an even more grand art gallery.

The hotel has recently created an Artist-in-Residence program. Will you elaborate on this program?

In an effort to create more ongoing art programming throughout the year, we launched an "Artist-in-Residence" program in the summer of 2018. The goal of this program is to feature a rotation of both established and emerging artists. To date, the hotel has hosted three artists including Chicago photographer Lincoln Schatz, Australian photographer Peter Lik, and Chicago artist Darren Jones. The response to the rotating singular artist work has been very well-received with guests commenting that the area provides a gallery feel and that each new exhibit and featured art completely changes the feeling of the area.

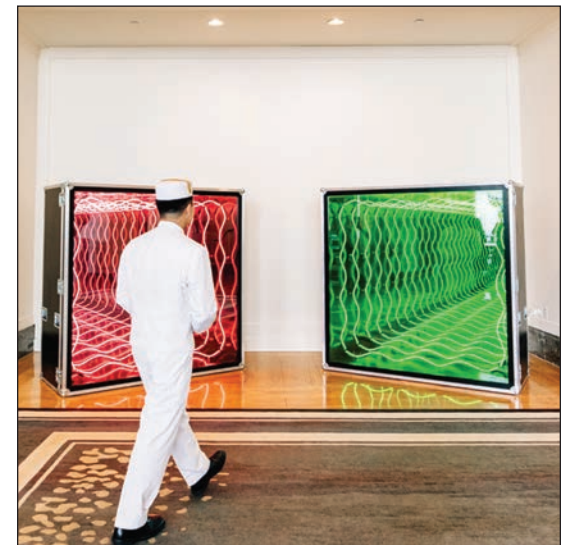
What was the vision in creating the academy programs as well as the art-influenced program at The Peninsula Chicago?

Our brand-wide program, The Peninsula Academy, is designed to give guests unique and unprecedented access to historical, cultural



Tony Karman, Maria Zec, James Nares and Nick Olney at EXPO Chicago 2019 at The Peninsula Chicago

and local lifestyle experiences in each of our hotel destinations through a variety of bespoke offerings for children and adults. At The Peninsula Chicago, we offer a program for art enthusiasts called "The Art Institute of Chicago: A Private Tour of a Revered Art Collection." Through this program, guests can experience exclusive access to the museum's very special collections. A national treasure, The Art Institute of Chicago, houses the country's leading collection of impressionists' paintings, among many other prized pieces.



Iván Navarro's *Impenetrable Room (pink)* and *Impenetrable Room (green)* on display in The Lobby during EXPO Chicago 2019

How does The Peninsula Hotels brand support the art community worldwide?

For many years, The Peninsula Hotels have supported the art community in a variety of ways with art exhibits in Hong Kong during Art Basel beginning five years ago, a dedicated gallery of rotating art in Beijing, and art initiatives around Fashion Week in Paris, just to name a few. In March 2019, Peninsula Hotels worked alongside curators Bettina Prentice and Isolde Brielmaier to present "Art in Resonance," a new, multiyear global contemporary art program that commissions work from artists who are poetically pushing the boundaries of their mediums. The program reflects a deeper commitment to engage directly with artists, not only as a venue to showcase their art, but as an originator and innovator of culture via commissioning artwork that will continue to travel to Peninsula destinations. ●