

Art Where People Are

New York Times (1923-Current file); Jan 2, 1980; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times pg. A22

Art Where People Are

Museums and businesses aren't strangers; the trend in museum shops is toward small department stores, and merchandising plays a big part in museum supershows. But a nice reverse twist has been appearing in which art is also taking its place in the world of commerce — and not just on corporate walls but as a part of the city's daily life. Museum branches seem to be moving quietly into downtown landmarks and shopping centers where they're proving extremely popular.

The most successful example is the branch of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts that opened in the Faneuil Hall Marketplace last June. It occupies the top floor of one of the historic Quincy Market buildings. The displays draw on the museum's varied collections and have attracted record numbers of people, many of whom have never visited the parent institution. The current show at Faneuil Hall, a seasonal selection of the museum's putti, cherubim and heavenly bodies called "On Angels' Wings," is one of the Marketplace's holiday delights.

In New York, the Whitney Museum maintains a

Water Street gallery that is now a familiar feature of Manhattan's financial district. The Whitney is also branching out into a handsome stone structure, on Old Slip, that was designed as a police station around the turn of the century, when the Italian Renaissance seemed correct municipal dress. The museum hopes to turn the landmark into a center for the visual and performing arts. Plans for a theater museum, using the collections of the Museum of the City of New York, are going ahead in the theater district.

In every case, the location adds special meaning and vitality to the displays — a vitality that austere, isolated institutions often fail to achieve. The recycled landmarks are practically born museums. A New York palazzetto, or the light-filled loft of the Boston Market, can give the treasures of centuries a great welcome.

The lesson in all this isn't simply that art is a pleasure but that it's more so when it happens to be where you are. Art so easily encountered, its revelations so unexpected, makes for moments that enrich days and lives. Museums suit markets.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.