

The fourth floor north wing corridor of The Crawford Hotel is home to Michael Dowling's "Buffalo Hand." Dowling is one of 62 Colorado artists featured in the Union Station collection.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

AMID THE BUSTLE OF DENVER'S NEWLY REDEVELOPED UNION STATION, THE CRAWFORD HOTEL BRINGS A UNIQUELY MODERN FLAVOR TO A PROPERTY BEST KNOWN FOR ITS HISTORY. GETTING EVERYTHING IN ITS RIGHT PLACE TOOK PLENTY OF TIME, RESOURCES, AND COLLABORATION. FOR THE CURATORS AT NINE DOT ARTS, PLACING NEARLY 600 WORKS OF ART WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING.

WORDS: CHARLIE KEATON • IMAGES: DANIEL O'CONNOR



SPEND A FEW MINUTES WANDERING THE HALLS OF DENVER UNION STATION AND YOU'RE BOUND TO BE STRUCK NOT JUST BY THE DRAMATIC CEILINGS OR THE ECLECTIC EATERIES, BUT ALSO BY THE ART—NOT THE SAFE, BLEND-INTO-THE-SCENERY PASTELS THAT FREQUENTLY CLUTTER THE WALLS OF PUBLIC SPACES, BUT ACTUAL ART. CHALLENGING PIECES THAT GRAB YOUR ATTENTION AND START CONVERSATIONS.

This isn't mere good fortune, and it isn't an accident. The 589 pieces that populate the Union Station collection were hand-picked over the course of more than six months under the guidance of NINE dot ARTS, a curating and consultancy outfit headquartered in Denver's up-and-coming RiNo district. Taken together, the collection brings warmth and vitality to one of the city's most historic landmarks. "In a sense, what we were doing was reacting to the origins of the building," said Dana Crawford, the woman behind the redevelopment of Larimer Square in the 1960s and The

Oxford Hotel in the 1980s. Crawford is a primary force behind the Union Station redevelopment and the namesake of the building's crown jewel, The Crawford Hotel. "It was sort of like a little vacation to go over there and get involved with the art that is going to be a part of this great effort of bringing this building back to life. It redefines Denver in a very big way."

A project of this size and scope required partners who were equal to the task. Crawford's Urban Neighborhoods, Inc., worked in tandem with Walter Isenberg's Sage Hospitality (developers of The Curtis Hotel and The JW Marriott, among others), and with local firms Larimer Associates and McWhinney. The result is a luxurious 112-room hotel that pulls off a delicate balancing act, embracing the property's rich history while also flashing a fresh, modern atmosphere.

From room to room, from one floor to the next, The Crawford's personality bends and shifts, setting expectations in one hallway only to defy them in another. Famous works by well-known

artists hang alongside unknown works by undiscovered artists. Authentic transit scrolls and original blueprints from the early 1900s offset a giant silver leaf mural. Found objects from inside the benches of Union Station's Great Hall offer a playful counter to the vast array of more traditional prints and canvases.

Despite all this diversity, there's a common theme that emerges as you move from the main floor lobby to the top-floor guest rooms. Whether it's Jake Weidmann's "Indivisible" at the concierge desk, Bob Benevenuto's "Hide and Seek" in the third floor north wing, or Mai Wyn Schantz's "Seneca Deer" in the fourth floor lofts, many of the pieces are notable for their ability to marry the old with the new. Again and again, guests are met with classic Western iconography reinterpreted through a distinctly modern lens. Which, when you get right down to it, is an apt way to describe The Crawford Hotel, the entire Union Station redevelopment project, and the city it now anchors.

More than creative expression or personal experience, art has become



The concierge desk at The Crawford Hotel is home to several dozen silhouette portraits, including NINE dot ARTS co-founders Martha Weidmann and Molly Casey, developer Walter Isenberg, and Dana Crawford herself.

Each floor of The Crawford features a unique theme, with custom-selected Colorado art to match. Loft rooms on the fourth floor include Western-inspired pieces like Wiotly Bird's "Jackalopes."



IMAGE: Paul Brokering

something of a litmus test for the evolutionary path of American cities. When gauging a city's cultural stock, visitors tend to consider the quality of local restaurants, the abundance of music and theatre opportunities, and, increasingly, the depth and breadth of the art and architecture scenes. Judged against those criteria, Denver is an ascending city, and one that continues to attract a wide array of burgeoning talent. None of which was lost on Crawford. "We wanted the spotlight to be on Colorado artists," she said. "We wanted to get humor into it, and we wanted to bring a sense of the appreciation for the evolution of art in Colorado."

For help designing this high-profile property, Crawford and Isenberg turned to Tryba Architects and JG Johnson Architects. When they needed help with interior design for the Great Hall and the Terminal Bar, they turned to New York City-based AvroKO Designs LLC. And when it came time to dress up the place and give it a heartbeat, they turned to NINE dot ARTS, a rapidly-growing company that curates collections of all sizes for hotels, health care facilities, and even public art projects. Whereas a gallery owner works directly on behalf of the artist, NINE dot ARTS approaches public art from a different angle, bridging the often-substantial gap between a stark commercial

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- DANA CRAWFORD

environment and an engaging, enriching experience. NINE dot ARTS co-founder Martha Weidmann first met Walter Isenberg while working on the art collection for Springhill Suites at Metropolitan State University of Denver in 2012. They shared a taste for unusual, provocative art and each felt strongly about the importance of supporting local artists. Two years later, Weidmann and co-founder Molly Casey curate art for Sage Hospitality properties from San Diego to Boston.

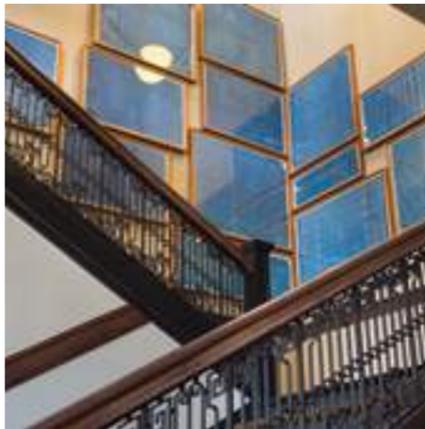
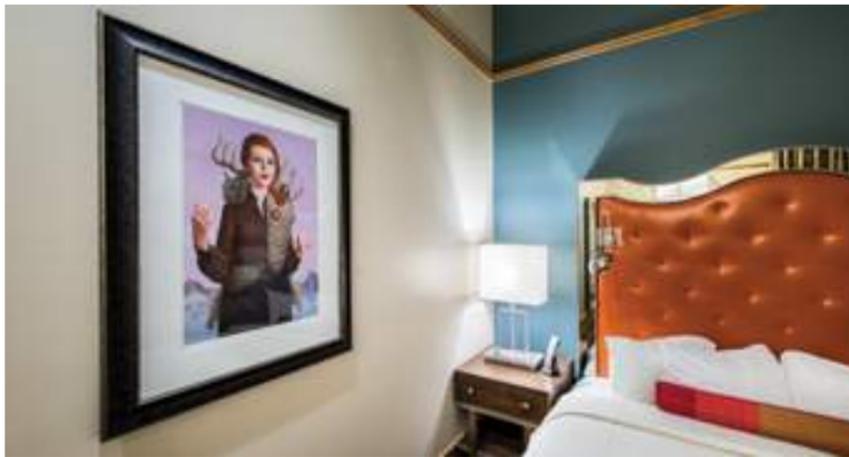
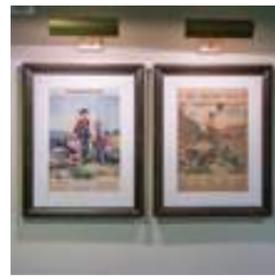
Here in Denver, NINE dot ARTS also presides over a growing roster of projects large and small. Their handiwork can be seen at the Colorado Convention Center and the Gates Family Foundation. At any given time, their nine-person team is at work on several dozen commercial projects, each uniquely tailored to meet the client's vision. "The whole point is never to curate the same collection twice," said Weidmann.

That need to provide a novel experience for each project is hinted at in the company's name. NINE dot ARTS refers to a famous puzzle consisting of three equal rows of three dots. The challenge is to connect all nine dots using no more than four straight lines, without lifting the pen and without tracing over the same line more than once. The exercise has been stumping people for at least a century, but the solution turns out to be both simple and profound. Solving a problem



Robert Weidmann's custom silver leaf murals accent the eastern archways of The Cooper Lounge. The pattern makes playful use of light, revealing or obscuring itself depending on the time of day and the viewer's perspective.

CONNECTING THE DOTS



The Union Station collection is as diverse as it is eclectic.

TOP ROW

"Under the Bridge," Lori Bunton

"Prometheus' Regret," Kevin Sloan

Archival covers from *The Denver Post*

SECOND ROW

"Fur Trader," Kris Lewis

"Suitcases," Phil Bender

THIRD ROW

Original blueprints from 1914 Union Station expansion
(Image: Paul Brokering)

"Indivisible," Jake Weidmann

BOTTOM ROW

Portraits from the 1983 Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Denver

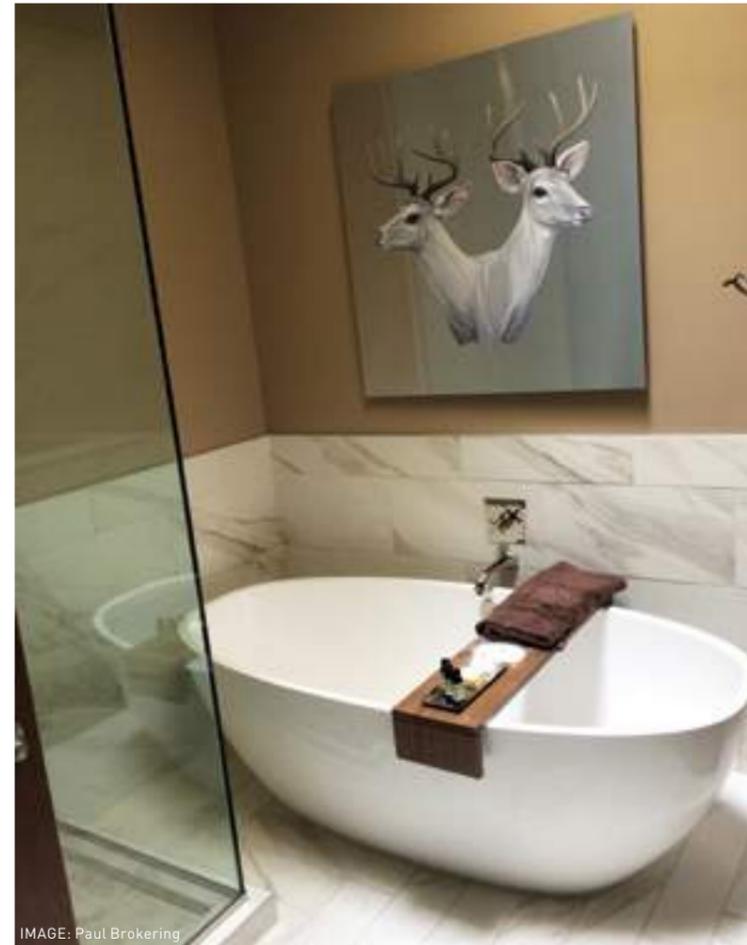


IMAGE: Paul Brokering

Colorado-based artist Mai Wyn Schantz is known for exploring the relationship between our high-tech world and the nature that surrounds us. Her "Seneca Deer" is featured prominently in many guest rooms at The Crawford Hotel.

like this requires lateral thinking—or, to put a finer point on it, thinking (quite literally) outside the box.

Weidmann and Casey took that concept and developed a proprietary nine-step process, from extensive pre-planning all the way through post-project sustainability, which helps clients define their goals and create a fully integrated experience. This structured approach allows for great attention to detail while simultaneously serving the bigger picture. When all is said and done, the art on the walls isn't there for decoration. It's part of the brand.

Redeveloping a historic property like Union Station requires scientific mastery, business acumen, and the seamless

coordination of countless people over long periods of intense work. But it also requires an artist's eye for detail and a gift for breathing new life into old spaces. After all, it isn't enough to build the thing or to spruce it up with art that camouflages itself, chameleon-like, into the background.

A place like this, which houses not only the spirit of the past, but also a passport into the future, must have its own voice. The murals, the blueprints, and the paintings should speak to visitors—and just as importantly, those pieces should move the visitors to speak back. In the words of Weidmann: "If it disappears, what's the point? Better to leave it blank."

NINE dot ARTS
PROJECTS AROUND COLORADO

ART ABOUT TOWN

IN ADDITION TO UNION STATION AND THE CRAWFORD HOTEL, THE TEAM AT NINE DOT ARTS HAS CURATED SEVERAL OTHER HIGH-PROFILE COLLECTIONS AROUND COLORADO.



COLORADO CONVENTION CENTER

Eight large-scale installations

NINE dot ARTS added eight works by Denver-based artists and galleries to the 2.5-million-square-foot building, and showcased the breadth of Denver's artistic talent—four artists are under 40 years old while another is over 80.



GATES FAMILY FOUNDATION

Twenty art pieces

The building's historic reuse was coupled with a varied art collection featuring Native American parfleche, hand-cast paper, photography, and suspended sculpture.



SAINT JOSEPH HOSPITAL

One thousand pieces

Unlike many commercial collections, Saint Joseph Hospital's 1,000+ pieces are designed to reflect an environment of healing and nurturing. Both the interior and exterior works were culled from an open call for entries that garnered submissions from more than 3,000 artists.

ninedotarts.com
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IMAGES: Paul Brokering