

Waterside Takes on Artistic Air

By ROBERTA GRANT

While Waterside—the eye-catching new housing complex overlooking the East River at 23d St.—was still on the drawing boards, it was always the intention of its sponsors and designers to do something

special with the two-acre public space created between the four angular, brown-brick towers.

It is, to be sure, a vast open waterfront area—novel achievement in a city more noted for its towering con-

gestion. There's a terraced playground for Waterside tenants overlooking the public area, a restaurant overlooking the water and shopping facilities bordering the plaza—the beginnings of an appealing space that would

draw the non-resident public.

Now, more than a year after completion of the first buildings, the Waterside Plaza is being turned into an open-air art gallery with changing sculpture exhibitions. It is reported to be the city's largest outdoor exhibition space and will give artists the opportunity to experiment with their work in an actual urban context rather than in a studio, a fabricating factory or a rural field.

The first exhibit, five works by Kenneth Snelson—light, airy networks of steel and aluminum tubing and cable—will be opened with a public celebration at the plaza from 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Called "a new urban environment for arts and people," the gallery is the outgrowth of an unusual collaborative effort by Waterside's builder, Richard Ravitch, president of the HRH Construction Corp.; the architects, Davis, Brody and Associates; and the Public Arts Council, a program of the Municipal Art Society.

'No Place to Put Them'

"So many artists own so much of their own work," says Snelson, "because there is no place to put large pieces. Museums can't show them and studios are too small. Every artist's problems are different. Mine is having large outdoor pieces stored unassembled."

There has been growing interest recently in including art in new building plazas, parks and other public spaces. Yet, says Doris Freedman, head of the arts council, "There is little urban space to display the works that are available, no really large area to view them in the context they are designed for. The artist has no place to experiment, to test material or resolve the problem of scale. With, hopefully, three shows a year, Waterside Plaza can fill some of those needs."

As the City's director of cultural affairs from 1967 to 1970, Mrs. Freedman initiated the Sculpture and Environment Program that placed large-scale works in key spots around the city. Since then, through the arts council, she has been instrumental in bringing together private sponsors and communities with artists interested in outdoor projects. After four years, some 40 wall paintings and outdoor sculptures have been placed around the city.

'No New Planning'

There is urgent need, Mrs. Freedman says, for private sponsorship of outdoor exhibitions because "the city's program is slacking off and there's no new planning for the visual arts. It's increasingly difficult to get city permits, artists are getting discouraged and they're sending their work to other cities that are using them well."

"Zoning here has provided for plazas," she adds, "but it has been used most uncreatively. Sculpture can give an identity to barren empty space. We have more to do in exploring its possibilities."

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