

FINE CONTEMPORARY ART FLOURISHES AT FLORIAN-WITH A TWIST

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Who can resist the lure of the new, the downtown, the contemporary? A departure from the status quo, eschewing the establishment—there's nothing more fun than leaving the stuffy canonized establishments of midtown to open up a new venture downtown. More fun if the restaurant is right down the street from the Ace hotel, and the fittings and furnishings are geared toward a more casual, refined-but-fun atmosphere.



Shelly Fireman, restaurateur extraordinaire and art collector par excellence, has partnered with designer David Korins of Broadway set design fame to outfit his newest establishment, Florian, with a sumptuous yet contemporary atmosphere. Though I'm sure the food is the biggest draw for most visitors, I was there on another mission—to take a peek inside at the art Fireman has injected into his latest establishment. And the results of my visit were certainly entertaining.

Fireman has imported imposing bronze sculptures of female figures involved in acts of hospitality—frozen in the act of serving and welcoming, the artworks themselves strike an interesting balance between glorifying the female form and celebrating gracious service. Created in and shipped from Tuscany, the imposing bronze sculptures greet the visitor upon entry to the restaurant, add gravitas to the bar and provide a point of delineation between the front seating area and the back, more sequestered, tables. Floriana, the larger than life sculpture behind the bar,

is a personal favorite—a florid celebration of the female form, the sculpture itself is quite spectacular. One speculates on whether she in fact does open bottles by herself once the lights go out, as she appears so lifelike.



A trio of small polished bronze figurines placed in a rear alcove reprise the life-sized figures dotting the restaurant. They echo the clever, tongue-in-cheek poses represented throughout the rest of the space as they provide cleaning services. The issue of gender at some point needs addressing—yes, these are all female figures depicted in positions of gracious welcome. Yes they are all nude. But there comes a point when you realize if they were handsome and nude male figures, they

would be equally aesthetically enjoyable and equally welcome to serve as subsidiary figures in the luxurious environment. And make no mistake, luxurious and glorious opulence is the point of Florian. The surroundings make the dining experience more Palazzio and less Park Avenue.



On a personal note: when you swing by to dine, check out the satirical wine bottles labeled with a variety of art world references to the rear right of the restaurant (to the right if facing in from the street). These labels riff off of appropriation art and Marcel Duchamp with equal aplomb, and provide an unexpected twist to the otherwise expected variation on the wine cellar. Well played, Florian. Welcome to the Flatiron.