

# *Hightailing* it to the HIGHLINE

In search of Southeast Asian Art in New  
York, **Curtis S. Chin** says all aboard!

PHOTOS ELLEN KAPLOWITZ, CURTIS CHIN, TYLER ROLLINS FINE ARTS & THE ARTISTS





**M**EW YORK! WHERE does one find a taste of South East Asian art in the Big Apple? Think contemporary. Hightail it downtown for a walk on the wild side. The High Line awaits—a public park imaginatively built on an abandoned freight rail line high above the streets of Manhattan’s West Side.

The first stretch of the park—part aerial greenway, part rails-to-trails reinvention—opened in June 2009, the first phase of the transformation of the abandoned railway track donated to the City of New York by CSX Transportation.

The latest and northernmost section, known as the High Line at the Rail Yards, opened to the public last September and I was quick to take an inaugural stroll.

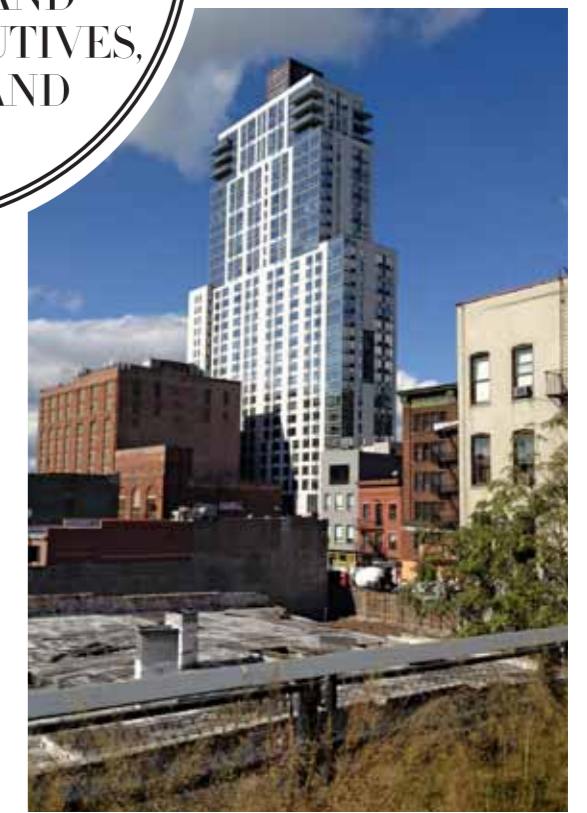
Since it opened, the High Line has been recording nearly five million visitors annually—strolling, talking, texting, eating, lounging, or taking a selfie.

About one and a half miles long and some 30- to 60-feet wide, the entire High Line is not a park in the typical sense—no dogs, no biking—but more the reimagining of a boardwalk that looks out over a sea of old brick buildings and new steel and glass luxury high-rises, with occasional glimpses of the Hudson River in between.

The Statue of Liberty can be seen to the south and the Empire State Building to the north-east. Mini-meadows and seasonal panoramas of ever-changing colours and textures delight the eye. In autumn, the more than 300 species of perennial plants, grasses, trees and shrubs include a dazzling array of skyblue asters, black-eyed Susans, blue stem goldenrod and evening primrose.

What the High Line lacks in size, it more than makes up in impact. Begin your own walk, as I often do, at Gansevoort Street, three blocks below 14th street, in the Meatpacking District and slowly meander northward. This district was once home to numerous slaughterhouses and meatpacking plants that gave the neighbourhood its name, and now boasts chic boutiques and trendy restaurants amidst the cobblestones and trucks from the few remaining meatpacking companies.

“West Chelsea, another of the neighbourhoods through which the High Line extends has been the centrepiece of New York’s contemporary art scene for many years,” said gallery



owner Tyler Rollins. But the High Line has brought a whole new level of attention to the area, and so too has my search for Southeast Asian art in New York City.

There’s also “a never-ending array of high-end residential construction that has dramatically altered the neighbourhood,” Tyler added. He should know. Just a few steps from one of several access points up to the elevated High Line is Tyler Rollins Fine Art, the main platform in New York, if not in the entire United States, for contemporary art from South East Asia—and one of the must-visit galleries in the neighbourhood.

Hungry for a bite after walking and gallery hopping in the High Line? Underline Coffee is an independent coffee house just under the High Line on 20th street, not far from the 529 Arts Building housing Tyler Rollins Fine Art and numerous other galleries. Nearby, the restaurant Cookshop on 10th Avenue under the chef Marc Meyer is also worth a visit, with its seasonal American menu focused on sustainable ingredients, humanely raised animals and the support of local farmers and artisans. I go for the classic American devilled eggs everytime to start.

Following a recent exhibition opening at his gallery of works by the Filipino artist Manuel Ocampo, entitled *The Corrections*, and a dinner with friends at Cookshop, Tyler told me that contemporary art galleries are still very much a mainstay of the neighbourhood.

Other Southeast artists represented by Tyler Rollins Fine Art include the Filipino artist Ronald Ventura, whose dramatic exhibition entitled *E. R. (Endless Resurrection)* I was able to catch last autumn; Sopheap Pich, widely considered

THE GALLERIES AROUND THE HIGH LINE ARE NOW DRAWING COLLECTORS AND NON-COLLECTORS, DIPLOMATS, AND BUSINESS EXECUTIVES, THE YOUNG AND THE OLD

**MULTIPLE VISION**

**CLOCKWISE:** *Quietly Floating* by the Thai artist Pinaree Sanpitak; The High Line at the north end; Installation view of *Hanging by a Thread*, by Pinaree Sanpitak at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, 2012

**INSET:** A piece made of wood on fabric and G.I. steel bars entitled *Polyhex Portraits III* by Patricia Perez Eustaquio

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** Art can be seen on buildings along the High Line





With Tyler Rollins in front of Manuel Ocampo's silkscreen and oil painting entitled, "Consumer Crisis"

to be Cambodia's most internationally prominent contemporary artist and whose work, primarily with thin strips of rattan and bamboo, was featured in a 2013 solo show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and my friend Jakkai Siributr, one of Thailand's leading artists working with textiles. Jakkai produces meticulously hand-made tapestry and installation works that make powerful statements about religious, social, and political issues in contemporary Thailand.

Always bustling on Thursday evenings, the traditional time for exhibition openings, the galleries around the High Line are now drawing collectors and non-collectors, diplomats, and business executives, the young and the old.

They were clearly in attendance at Tyler Gallery's "friend raiser," where I served on the host committee, together with Sheila Platt, a clinical social worker and wife of the former U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Nicolas Platt; the lawyer Tristan Loanzon; the photographer Paul Tañedo; and communications executive Libby Schnee. The event was held to raise awareness of the good work of the Community & Family Services International (CFSI), a Manila-based regional humanitarian organisation that focuses on helping rebuild the lives of people destroyed by

disaster and armed conflict in Asia, particularly in Mindanao and the Visayas in the Philippines.

We, friends of CFSI, could not have chosen a better setting. As Sheila spoke movingly of CFSI's work in South East Asia, around the group danced the artwork of Pinaree Sanpitak, one of the most compelling and respected Thai artists of her generation. Her work has been described as among the most powerful explorations of women's experience in all of South East Asia.

Entitled *Hanging by a Thread*, the exhibition centered on an installation that was the artist's response to devastating floods that had hit Bangkok—and too often found echoes in the natural disasters that hit the Philippines, Indonesia and across the region. Using traditional Thai printed cotton Paa-Lai fabrics of the type included in Royal-sponsored relief bags, Pinaree had constructed a group of woven hammocks that were suspended in the gallery from slender threads.

How fitting too that "hanging by a thread" could have once described the fate of the elevated rail tracks in the face of concerns about prohibitive costs, initial real-estate developer opposition and community doubts. Today, the High Line weaves triumphantly northward to the edge of the West Side Yard on 34th Street, between 10th and 12th Avenues near the Javits

Convention Centre.

Once at risk of being torn down, old New York Central Railroad tracks are now at the core of this innovative High Line park. With support by celebrities like the actor Edward Norton, the billionaire IAC chair Barry Diller and his wife, designer and executive Diane von Furstenberg, as well as numerous everyday New Yorkers, businesses and organisations such as the Tiffany & Co. Foundation, the High Line has sped the transformation of this part of Manhattan. It has set an example to other urban developers who are perhaps all too eager to tear down, instead of reinvent, decaying infrastructure.

In an example of a public-private partnership that works, the High Line is owned by the City of New York, and maintained and operated by the non-profit Friends of the High Line. Friends of the High Line was founded by Joshua David and Robert Hammond, residents of the High Line neighbourhood, to advocate for the High Line's preservation and reuse as public open space.

**PAVED PATHWAYS**

**THIS PAGE:** The High Line has become one of New York's most interesting and dynamic places to take a stroll **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Tyler Rollins and Curtis Chin at Jakkai Siributr exhibition opening







THE HIGH LINE WEAVES TRIUMPHANTLY NORTHWARD TO THE EDGE OF THE WEST SIDE YARD ON 34TH STREET, BETWEEN 10TH AND 12TH AVENUES

Thanks to their vision, I find myself with fellow New Yorkers and visitors alike strolling, in every season of the year, high above the noisy streets below. Self-seeded grasses and other plants, even trees, that grew on the out-of-use elevated rail track beds during the 25 years after the trains stopped running inspired the designers to “keep it wild.” In 2004, James Corner Field Operations, a landscape architecture firm, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, and Piet Oudolf, planting designer, were chosen as the design team for the remarkable project.

My typical walk crosses beneath The Standard, an 18-story luxury boutique hotel that arches over the High Line. The Top of the Standard located at, well, the top of The Standard, offers afternoon tea, evening jazz, and always spectacular views.

Continuing northward, I pass public art projects on and around

the High Line—including site-specific commissions, exhibitions, performances, video programs and a series of “billboard interventions.”

Wooden and concrete walkways, raised seating areas, a sundeck with broad-beamed wood chaises angled toward the sunset and viewing points are all part of the design. An open-air “urban theatre” perched above 17th Street offers a jumbo, street-wide window right up the middle of 10th Avenue.

Dynamic. That’s a word to describe the High Line. All aboard – whether for art, food and the high life, or simply a stroll on the wild side. **T**

**BOLD BEAUTY THIS PAGE:** An installation view of Manuel Ocampo: *The Corrections*, at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, 2015.  
**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Graphite and oil on canvas entitled *Visiting Artist's Demons* by Ronald Ventura

MODERN ART



*Untitled (Maybe this could be...)*  
Manuel Ocampo, 2012, oil and acrylic on canvas  
75" x 78 1/2"  
(190 x 200 cm)



*Flowers for X*  
Patricia Perez Eustaquio, 2013, oil on canvas  
58" x 60"  
(147 x 152 cm)



*Las Plagas*  
Manuel Ocampo, 2014, silkscreen and oil on canvas,  
78" x 72"  
(198 x 183 cm)