

Glentzer, Molly, "Artist makes 'Waves' in the Corporate World", *Houston Chronicle*, Dec 28, 2012.

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Artist Makes 'Waves' in the Corporate World

by Molly Glentzer, December 28, 2012.

Thousands of people traipse through the atrium of 2 Houston Center each weekday, but until recently they had no reason to pause there and think about the space - or their place in it.

Now they're snapping pictures with their cellphones, so engaged that the property manager worries about accidents.

Above them, Spanish artist Daniel Canogar's sculptural LED installation "Waves" swims through the air like a giant spiral of ribbon caught by a breeze.

Suspended from the ceiling on cables strong enough to hold several cars, the 3,200-pound artwork comprises 350,000 LEDs in 606 specially designed, flexible tiles affixed to metal with magnets.

"Waves" is bright, fun - and impossible to ignore. It also appears to be exactly what this space needed, and not just visually.

Because the video projected through the LEDs features tenants of the center on a digitally manipulated, 11-minute loop, it also has engendered a sense of community.

"This is not a decorative piece; not traditional art functioning in a traditional application," art consultant Julie Kinzelman said. "It's functioning the way it should in a public environment because it becomes a place to commune and gather and talk."

The atrium of 2 Houston Center is a cavernous crossroads of escalators, elevators, glass and bricklike pavers where three floors are visible at once. When it was built in the 1970s, it was to be the epicenter of a dynamic city within a city with a tram to U.S. 59.

The campus eventually grew to about 4.2 million square feet, including five office towers, a mall and a hotel. But through a succession of owners, the bold vision didn't materialize.

Last January, the owners hired CBRE to manage the complex, and they immediately set out to renovate the central atrium. Rottet Studio brightened the brown expanse by drawing attention to its outdoor plaza with better lighting. They also installed granite planters and made the space more comfortable, adding seating and TVs along with a warmer-looking reception area.

"It had good bones and didn't need wholesale change," interior architect Lauren Rottet said.

But the atrium did need a punch of art.

Enter Kinzelman, whom CBRE executive vice president Cody Armbrister calls "the art shepherd." To energize the space, she suggested they think beyond the walls and commission a strong, luminous work that would somehow connect all that atrium air.

"This is a great opportunity to engage multiple perspectives and various vantage points because there's people everywhere," she told them.

Then she had to find an artist who could produce such a piece on time and on budget. During several months of research, she found Canogar through his New York agent, bitforms gallery.



CBRE executives Chuck Moore, left, and Cody Armbrister stand above the art installation "Waves," created by Spanish artist Daniel Canogar, at 2 Houston Center. Photo: Michael Paulsen, Staff / © 2012 Houston Chronicle

His proposal resonated over those of about 30 other candidates because he understood the space as a thoroughfare, Armbrister said. "He wanted to find a way to communicate the energy of the space ... and how do you translate that to art?"

Canogar, a lanky 48-year-old who resembles Daniel Day-Lewis, met me at the center early this month.

He was flying home to Madrid that day, and he had major exhibits opening Dec. 13 in A Coruña, Spain, and Dec. 20 in Istanbul, Turkey, but he was enjoying a moment of relief.

"It's a big responsibility, and I'm honored that I was chosen. These opportunities don't come along very often," he said. But completing the installation, with its structural and technological challenges, took a burden off his shoulders.

Canogar is better known in Europe, where in the past five years he's focused on installations that "activate" recycled, obsolete technology such as analog TV screens, DVDs and burnt-out incandescent light bulbs by projecting light or images through or onto them. "It's like a memory - like an echo of the life they once had has been brought back to life," he said. Although he's done small projects this year for the J Hotel in Greenwich, Conn., and Jaleo restaurant in Washington, D.C, this is his first major public space commission in the U.S. - and one of his most significant.

Visiting 2 Houston Center in July to observe how people used the atrium, Canogar was fascinated by the human "rivers of traffic" he saw flowing there all day. He thought the sculpture should change as it was viewed from different angles, "to invite the public to explore it - not just go blindly through it every day, but to start experiencing the space in a different way."

Thus, the twisting ribbon effect. To make his idea work, however, he needed technology that didn't exist.

Canogar created his first LED sculpture in 2010 as a temporary installation for the European Union Council in Brussels. It looked like a flat ribbon, and the video was low resolution, almost mesh-looking.

His design for "Waves" required flexible, corkscrew-shaped LED tiles, and it took a while to find a Chinese fabricator who would make them. (All LEDs are made in China, he discovered.)

Canogar has always aimed to move images in a sculptural way - to release them from the confines of screens so they permeate the everyday experience - but the pivoting LEDs bring a quantum leap to his art.

"I'm beginning to have technology available that allows me to do this in ways I'd never imagined," he said. "It's a very exciting moment for my career."

Technology alone, of course, isn't all that artful if it doesn't have a soul.

That's where another Canogar signature became important: He likes to make videos that involve the locals, typically asking them to crawl across a green-screen platform to create a bank of imagery that he manipulates.

Canogar said he's kind of obsessed with crawling because it's a primal, playful act that suggests the vulnerability of human development. "When I see a businessman in his Armani suit get on the green screen and crawl across it, there's something very interesting about going back to his origins," he said.

Looping in tenants was key, Armbrister said, because "Waves" didn't just show up one day. "They have a lot more invested in it than if it had just been a piece of art showing up on Monday morning when they came to work."

CBRE invited everyone in the center to participate Oct. 30 when Canogar and his team suspended a camera above a 26-foot green screen in the 1 Houston Center lobby. With its big lights, the production drew a crowd, and about 90 people performed.



People walk under the art installation "Waves" at Two Houston Center created by Spanish artist Daniel Canogar, Thursday, Dec. 13, 2012, in Houston. The 100-foot-long ribbon-shaped LED video piece is suspended above the ceiling of the atrium. (Michael Paulsen / Houston Chronicle) Photo: Michael Paulsen, Staff / © 2012 Houston Chronicle

Some people brought their kids to romp. Some pretended to fly like Superman. One leasing agent "rode" a subordinate like a horse.

Kinzelman played along. So did Moore and Armbrister, who found it a little odd at first but got into the spirit once they saw others letting their hair down.

"I think we all have a secret performer-actor in us," Canogar said.

The video begins with the children, and the images are slowly distorted until they become colorful abstractions playing across the LED pathway that, like life, is full of ups and downs and turns.

Canogar said some of those who participated are surprised how simple the finished product looks. "I would love people to know what an accomplishment it was just to build it and hang it; but at the same time, you shouldn't be thinking about that when you're enjoying the artwork. You should just be enjoying it for what it is," he said.

Canogar himself was surprised to hear how "Waves" has brought people together here. They might have recognized each other before, but now they speak to each other on the escalators and elevators. Sometimes they stop in the atrium and wait to see themselves being silly on the screen.

"It's a very bold move, very daring, in a corporate environment, that they went along with this idea - and even had the idea to begin with," Canogar said. "I'm very happy that this kind of forward thinking is happening in spaces like this."