

# Art Omi plans new \$60 million destination in Columbia County

**Luke Nathan**

January 11, 2024

Art Omi, the nonprofit arts center in Ghent, is developing a second Columbia County destination. The \$60 million project, Art Omi Pavilions, will feature at least a dozen exhibition buildings linked by outdoor pathways on a 190-acre hillside property off Route 66 in Chatham. A number of prominent artists and architects are already involved in the project. "The idea is to create this very rich, very diverse museum complex," said Francis Greenburger, chairman and CEO of real estate firm Time Equities Inc. and the founder of Art Omi.

Different artists and collectors, collaborating with architects of their choice, will design the buildings, or pavilions, to house long-term, "legacy" collections, said Greenburger. Most if not all the pavilions will be enclosed rather than open air.

Artist or collector involvement in designing the structures that will exhibit their works is not unprecedented, said Greenburger, who cited artist Donald Judd's compound in Marfa, Texas, and, in the Berkshires, MASS MoCA's Sol LeWitt retrospective.

Artists and collectors committed to the project, according to Greenburger, include:

-Artist Alice Aycock, who is working with architecture studio Jahn on a pavilion that draws inspiration from metal agricultural structures.

-Artists Rakuko Naito and the late Tadaaki Kuwayama, a married couple who worked separately, whose pavilion is being designed by one of their children, the architect Maki Kuwayama.

-Artist Torkwase Dyson, who is working with Gluckman Tang Architects, a firm with extensive experience designing museums and galleries.

-Collectors Susan and Michael Hort, who are working with New York City-based BKSK Architects.

Another pavilion, dedicated to rotating, one-to-two-year exhibitions, designed by Lee Skolnick of Skolnick Architecture + Design Partnership, will be 3D printed, Greenburger said.

The site will also have a visitor center designed by BKSK.



Art Omi Pavilions will feature an array of custom-designed buildings on a nearly 200-acre site in Chatham, New York. Image: Jeremy Garretson

Bill Wallace, an architect based in Chatham, is coordinating the project and will be the architect of record for all the buildings, regardless of who is handling their design, Greenburger said.

The project obtained site-plan approval from the town in 2021. Extensive infrastructure work, including road construction and utility installation, has been completed, according to Greenburger.

Each pavilion will have a footprint no larger than 5,700 square feet. Greenburger estimated that each one will cost \$2 million to \$5 million to build and the total project cost will be at least \$60 million.

The Pavilions project last year secured substantial backing from New York state: \$5 million from the New York State Council on the Arts and \$2 million through an Empire State Development tourism grant program.

"It was an immense shot in the arm, and their contribution is a critical link in getting this thing off the ground," Greenburger said of the state support, which Art Omi is matching.

Greenburger for decades owned the land where the project is being constructed and once considered building a home for himself there, he said. He later promised to leave the property to his daughters. When the Pavilions project idea arose, he offered them other land he owns in the county.

## Marlborough

545 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001 / +1 212 541 4900 / marlboroughnewyork.com



“They liked the idea of the project and encouraged me to go forward with it,” said Greenburger, who last year deeded the land to a newly created nonprofit, Art Omi Pavilions @ Chatham Inc., an affiliate organization of Art Omi.

The property, which offers a broad view of the Hudson Valley, is located close to the intersection of Route 66 and High Bridge Road. Greenburger said the organization continues to have discussions with other prospective artists and collectors but is not in a rush to secure commitments.

The nonprofit intends to break ground in May of this year and hopes to complete the first two to three buildings for a soft opening in the fall of 2025, with an official opening the following spring, according to Greenburger. The timeline is subject to contractor availability.

Wallace, the local architect, has estimated that one to two pavilions will be built per year as part of a phased construction process, according to a document filed with the town planning board. As many as 18 pavilions could eventually be built. Greenburger said he wants the site’s landscape to remain as natural as possible. The group intends to use only native species for additional plantings, he said.

Only a small fraction of the property is being developed, and a portion of the site has been reserved for grazing cows, according to Greenburger. The project “will mostly be invisible” from Route 66, he said. The landscape, together with the distinctive buildings and the art they’ll contain, is meant to be part of the visitor experience, Greenburger said. “We think that for visitors, this will become an important art destination,” not unlike MASS MoCA or the Clark Art Institute in western Massachusetts, he said.

## **Marlborough**

545 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001 / +1 212 541 4900 / [marlboroughnewyork.com](http://marlboroughnewyork.com)