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MANSION

REALITY SHOW
Amy Finlay's sculpture of boots in a puddle is suspended on the floor, far left. One of Rob Pruitt's Panda canvases, above, Keith Ed- mier's tribute to Far- rah Fawcett includes her footprints, left.

INSIDE STORY | DOREEN REMEN

A Panda, an Orb and Farrah's Footprints

An art collector teems through walls and windows to get artwork into the right spaces in her apartment

BY NANCY KEATEN

DOREEN REMEN BOUGHT a wall-size painting of a panda adorned with glitter, then found it wouldn't fit into the bedroom of her building on New York's Upper East Side. So she hired a company to lift the panda up through the window of her third-floor apartment, taking out the window frames in the process.

Ms. Remen, the 68-year-old co-founder of Art Production Fund, a nonprofit that helps produce and promote contemporary art, says she would never buy a piece of furniture that required dismantling through a window. But her art is different: "It's more than just an object. You get out of your way to have it because it is creating a heaven that moves and speaks," she says.

The glittery panda is one of a se- ries by artist Rob Pruitt. The piece is among many that fill Ms. Remen's home, creating a Who's Who of New York's contemporary-art scene. Just opposite the apartment's entryway, an enormous, fiberglass giraffe sculpture in white by Nari Ahnenda hangs by a wire from a gable in the ceiling. The wall behind it has an ex- pression of the same shape im- pressed, giving the impression the giraffe hanging over has hit the wall and left its mark. The orb sculpture re- placed painting a big hole in the wall; on the other side, a new closet was built to hide the back of the indented sculpture piece.

Around the corner, on the floor of the large, open dining and living room, is a glass box that contains a sea shell the size of a punch bowl made from milled peridotite crystals and holding sand imprinted with Far- rah Fawcett's (real) footprints, it is a tribute to artist Keith Edmier's sculpture on the screen and a reference to Bot- tica's 15th-century "The Birth of Ve- enus." Also on the floor is a plastic dome over a girl's plastic logs walking with boots through a purple on top of a mirror—by Amy Finlay.

Her apartment, Ms. Remen says, is an "alternative reality." She grew up surrounded by art. Her childhood home in Cincinnati was filled with paintings by her grandfat- her, Armand Risset, a successful Ja- panese artist. Later, she studied art at the Rhode Island School of Design. There she met fellow curator Yvonne Forst Villazor, and in 2000 the two of them founded the art fund. Ms. Remen later started artmarkit, which sells objects like toasters, umbrellas, cups and jewelry designed by artists. Ms. Remen and her husband, emo- ton Steven Wolner, bought a two-bed- room apartment 14 years ago in the 12-story building between Park and Madison Avenues. They later con- verted it with a neighboring apart- ment, and then six years ago added half of a third apartment they bought with a neighbor and then sold.

The second renovation cost six figures and focused on creating spaces for their art. They decide to say how much they paid for their units, but public records show a total for the combined units of $1.5 million. A similar-size apartment in the building sold this year for $2.9 million.

The result was an open, open space in front encompassing a living room and two dining areas, with bamboo floors and a nook of a kitchen repainted for an island bar. A small door, with doors that can be closed off to the main space, leads to the three bedrooms and four bath- rooms in the back of the unit, which the couple shared with their four cats and two daughters, who have since grown to college.

The biggest challenge of the innova- tion, says Ms. Remen, was getting the art into the right spaces. "You crave your own fantasy when you collect art," she says. "Each piece is changed by the piece that hangs next to it." You're activating a level of consciousness that's outside the day by day."