

STATE OF THE ARTIST

For certain members of the media and fashion elite, a Joseph La Piana painting is about as indispensable a home accessory as a Sub-Zero fridge or a Pratesi dust ruffle. Donna Karan, Kevin Huvane, Sally Hershberger and Clive Davis all have La Piana's work on their walls. On Thursday, others will have the chance to buy his works when the artist's latest project, "Kinetic State," opens at the Robert Miller Gallery in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood.

The exhibit features 25 works, including two 11-foot "zero gravity" sculptures (so called because they are suspended from the ceiling), enamel and acrylic Pollock-esque splotch paintings, and the show's magnum opus — an installation of 140

multicolored aluminum and steel pieces, titled "Spacial Relief."

Of course, given the scale of the artist's work, buyers have to have the sort of space that can handle a suspended 11-foot monstrosity. Friend and art enthusiast Liz Rosen (ex-wife of Aby Rosen) does, and so La Piana designed a large-scale mobile for her, made of a series of filaments hung from the walls and ceiling. "The front of the house has huge glass walls like a museum," the artist recalls. "It was perfect." He's learned to deal with smaller spaces, but "there are times when I cringe."

The self-taught La Piana has certainly come a long way from his childhood in Queens, N.Y., during which his Italian-immigrant parents tried to discourage their son's interest in art — however unsuccessfully. "I remember lying to my mother and saying, 'My teacher says I need sparkles and construction paper,'" La Piana says with a laugh.

He appeased his parents by earning a business degree from Florida State University, but after graduation defected to Hollywood, where he palled around with Thom Browne and Libertine's Johnson Hartig. Two decades later, he says, "It's kind of wild that everyone has pursued their creative dream."

His social set these days is no less glittery, thanks, in part, to rubbing elbows with celebrities while taking on bit parts on television series like "Sex and the City" and "Law and Order: Criminal Intent." He played a detective in the Sandra Bullock-vehicle "Murder by Numbers," and the actress is expected at the "Kinetic State" opening.

These days, the artist is loathe to discuss his acting gigs — "I just did those things because that's what was taking me through my journey," he says. "Art is personal. It's about maintaining the integrity of the work."

— Amanda FitzSimons

