

WORK OF ART

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On the third floor, Robert Wieferich's painting *View of Georgetown*, 49 by 61 inches, oil on canvas, makes the executive suite waiting area feel oasis-like, with Angela Adams carpet and furniture by Tim Hill Fine Woodworking & Design.

By Allison Paige | Photos by Craig Becker

At WEX's global headquarters in Portland, Elizabeth Moss Galleries provides art to enrich and inspire "LIFE WITHOUT INDUSTRY is guilt, and industry without art is brutality," the 19th-century English art critic John Ruskin once wrote. Anyone who has toiled in a windowless cube staring at one of those bought-in-bulk motivational posters featuring a whale tail emblazoned with words like INSPIRATION knows exactly what he was talking about.

For the lucky folks at WEX, a leading financial technology services provider, art and technology come together beautifully at the company's new global headquarters at 1 Hancock Street in Portland. Recently, WEX collaborated with Liz Moss, of Elizabeth Moss Galleries in Falmouth, and SMRT Architects and Engineers of Portland to curate a selection of Maine art to inspire and motivate in a way those corny old posters never could. Liz explains, "Art is incredibly powerful because it can speak of things such as diversity and lifestyle that are hard to put into words. Original art is very tactical and often connects with people intellectually and spiritually. It can be used to convey the philosophies and ideals of an organization."



to “unattended fueling” and rebranded as Wright Express. Now, simply called WEX, it currently specializes in payment systems for fleets, corporate payments, and health care and is one of Maine’s fastest-growing companies. The 100,000-square-foot four-story headquarters was developed by Jonathan S. Cohen and Archetype Architects and completed in March 2019 by Cianbro. The building’s sleek curtain-wall facade lets in copious light and offers views of Casco Bay, where the to and fro of ferries and lobster boats is the closest thing WEX employees see to a traffic jam.

“WEX is a cutting-edge, technology-based company whose heart is dead center in Maine,” notes Liz. “Its CEO, Melissa Smith, is from Northern Maine. The company recognizes the importance of fostering growth for Maine’s job market and is willing to invest in its economy and culture. Their new headquarters is a prime location to show Maine artists and, at the same time, enrich their employees’ environment.”

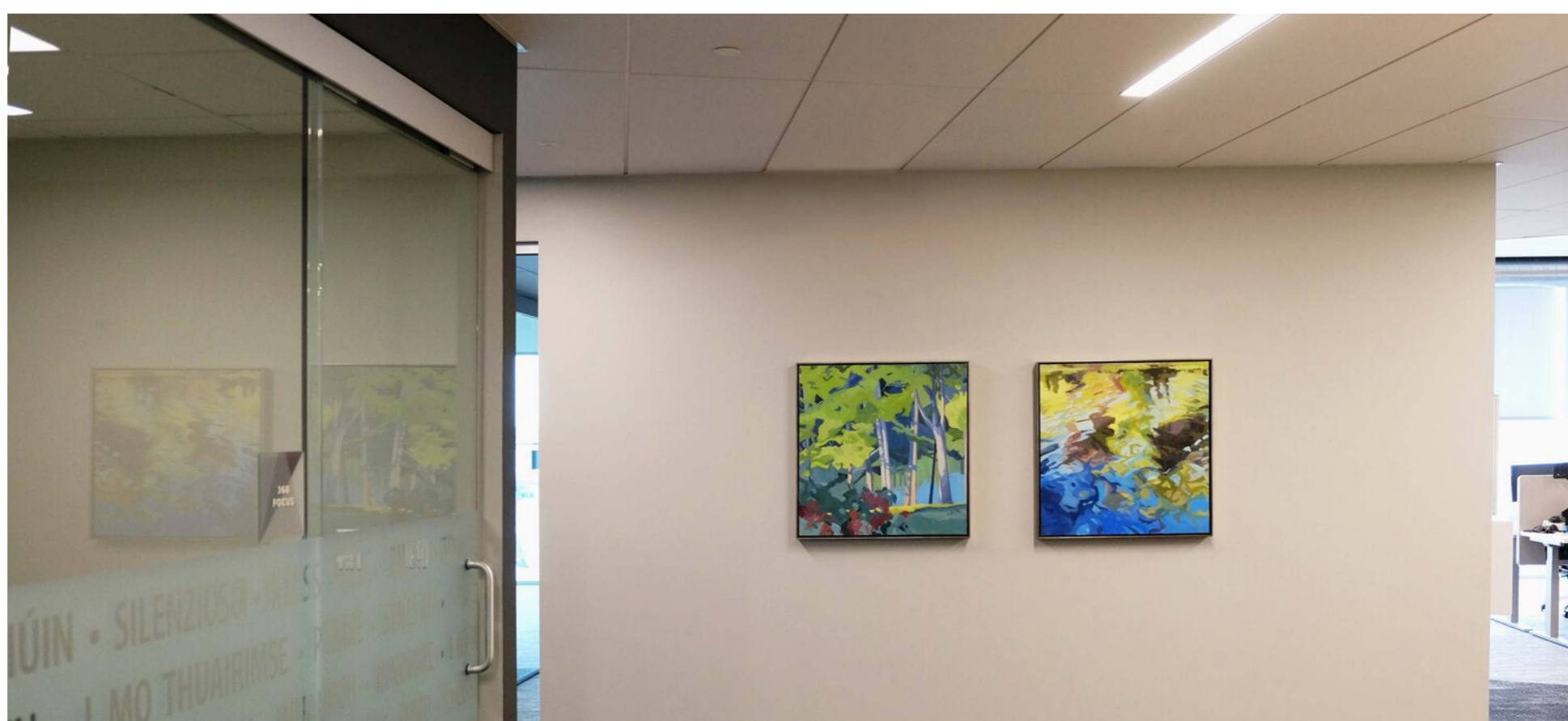
SMRT designed the interior using the WELL Building Standard, a rubric that focuses on the health and well-being of its occupants. Physical health is prioritized with an on-site gym, bicycle storage, and collaborative office spaces that encourage movement. Breakout rooms and a cafe offer space for deep concentration and socializing. Biophilic features such as indoor plants and a large saltwater fish tank reduce stress and bring the outdoors in, while a 20,000-square-foot rooftop deck offers access to fresh air and ocean views. Indeed, the global headquarters, now home to 400 employees, is state of the art, so it seems only right that it be filled with art of the state.



In a lobby alcove, Annie Darling’s abstract painting *Ariel View*, 36 by 36 inches, encaustic and oil on panel, includes bright, primary colors that highlight the company’s visual identity, particularly the pops of red that echo the company’s logo.

“We thought a lot about how the artwork was going to impact employee experience in the building,” says Jeana Stewart, SMRT Workplace Studio leader and interior designer. “Some of the pieces are meant to inspire creativity, curiosity, and innovation, and others are meant to provide people with a moment of respite and reflection.”

Entering the lobby, WEX’s vibrant red logo is dually apparent in the playful crimson sparkle tiles on the walls and in pops of color in an abstract painting. Carpets and furniture from local talents Angela Adams and Tim Hill Fine Woodworking & Design provide oasis-like sitting areas, where the carpets mimic tidal pools or beach dunes, and the Scandinavia-inspired furniture feels clean and modern. “We selected furniture to reflect the comforts of home; details like area rugs, pillows, floor lamps, and wood accent walls soften the environment,” says Jessica King, SMRT director of environmental design. “WEX’s core values were delineated by floor level, with community and relationships featured on level one, innovation featured on level two, execution featured on level three, and integrity featured on level four.”



On the third floor, a corridor beside glass-walled focus rooms is adorned with a contemplative pair of paintings by Anne Ireland, *Reflections* and *Down by the River*, each 30 by 30 inches, oil on canvas.

Additionally, each floor has its own visual identity, from red to blue to green. But if the palette is primary, the artworks offer more than an accompaniment to the color scheme. The paintings, by artists Darthea Cross, Annie Darling, Liz Hoag, Anne Ireland, Richard Keen, and Carol Sloane, are chiefly expressionistic depictions of Maine's coast, woods, and waterfront and serve as windows or portals—a place for the eye to rest and the mind to wander.

“The artwork perfectly complements the creativity and innovation taking place on a day-to-day basis in our business,” says WEX’s CEO and Chair, Melissa Smith. “Both the bold colors and modern aesthetic fit seamlessly with the architecture of the building and the soaring natural light that surrounds them. Liz really has done an outstanding job curating this work.” Liz is quick to return the praise. “There are special things going on inside that building. While we were hanging art, I witnessed employees taking breaks from their computer screens to put together a puzzle that was laid out for anyone to do. I think they believe in the whole person as employee: healthy food, encouragement to exercise, and an aesthetically pleasing workspace. These all come together to inspire and enrich.”



An exterior shot of WEX's global headquarters in Portland. The building's curved curtain-wall windows provide the offices abundant sunlight and views of Casco Bay.

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