

# Competition in Common

## Art Around New York

BY SUSAN CANNING

Andy Coolquitt, installation view of "somebody  
place" at Lisa Cooley, 2014.

CARY WHITTIER, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND LISA COOLEY, NEW YORK







Installation view of "The Real Estate Show" at James Fuentes, 2014.

The gallery scene in New York, like the large metropolitan entity itself, consists of many diverse neighborhoods, each with its own constituents and concerns. Competitive but not cohesive, the New York art world remains a relatively small, even hermetic community with a common goal of showing and selling art of every type. Even as the galleries have grown in number and expanded their rosters to include more women artists, artists of color, and increasingly, artists from Africa and the Middle East, they remain vulnerable to shifting taste, economic fluctuation, and especially real estate development.

Perhaps the New York gallery scene owes its ongoing liveliness to the synergy gained by being part of a broader cultural dynamic that includes world-class museums and auction houses, incredible collections and collectors, and an active host of public art

organizations sponsoring free exhibitions in parks and other spaces from Manhattan to the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island.

The New York art world expanded a great deal in the 1980s, injecting the upstart DIY energy of the East Village into SoHo, and then, in the '90s, into Chelsea and Williamsburg. Yet despite the continuing increase in galleries and art districts over the last 15 years, ever-multiplying art fairs and the Internet have undermined the need for an actual place to show a real piece of art. At the same time, galleries with desirable locations, whether in Chelsea, Uptown, the Lower East Side, or Brooklyn, are paying increasingly higher rents, which adds to the pressure to make sales—with the unfortunate result that fewer galleries are taking risks.

Despite many closures, bankruptcies, and relocations after Superstorm Sandy, which flooded nearly every street-level gallery with up to five feet of water, destroying millions of dollars worth of art (two years later, many under-insured galleries are still recovering), almost 300 galleries can be found in Chelsea, from 18th to 28th Streets between 10th and 11th Avenues. A number of galleries, converted from taxi garages and industrial storage buildings, have museum-like spaces whose high ceilings and skylights can accommodate large-scale works (for example, Larry Gagosian and David Zwirner's recent co-exhibition of Jeff Koons sculpture), video projections, and elaborate installations. But large spaces can be intimidating to the casual viewer and challenging to artists who make smaller, more intimately scaled work or who don't

JASON MANDELLA

have big production budgets. At the same time, in order to remain visible and viable (and pay the rent), most mid-level galleries must rely on other strategies to succeed; and these days, art fairs have replaced gallery shows as the main venue for art commerce. Galleries unwilling to go the route of fairs and Internet sales have few options and are either closing or seeing their artists move to dealers willing to sustain their visibility beyond the gallery space or Web site.

Another element that threatens to undermine Chelsea's viability as an art district is unabated real estate development—particularly along the High Line. In the last two years, upscale condominiums have sprouted like mushrooms, transforming what had been a marginal neighborhood only 30 years ago into an investment enclave for the wealthy. Many of these buildings have ground-floor commercial spaces that will soon be leased to clothing stores, banks, and other entities able to pay high rents, eventually turning Chelsea and its galleries, like SoHo previously, into an upscale shopping mall.

As rents escalate, Chelsea dealers who do not own their buildings are quickly losing their leases. Some have moved further east to 7th Avenue or relocated to Midtown or the Upper East Side and many, increasingly, to the Lower East Side (LES), which has established itself in only a few short years as a place to see new art. Lacking the grand scale of Chelsea spaces, many LES galleries are located in ground-floor storefronts of tenement buildings that can be had for low rent—though gentrification and higher rents will no doubt soon come here as well.

With a sharp eye for talent, young LES dealers like Miguel Abreu, James Fuentes, Lisa Cooley, Laurel Gitlen, Rachel Uffner, and Reena Spaulings (a pseudonym for an artist collective) have transformed nondescript noodle shops, mah jong parlors, leather and wholesale clothing stores along Orchard and Ludlow Streets and around East Broadway into intriguing venues for performance, installation, and conceptual work. Their efforts have quickly established the LES as a place to discover engaging new work, often mixed with downtown

COURTESY THE ARTISTS AND KLAUS VON NICHTSSAGEND GALLERY



Above: Joy Curtis, installation view of "Joy Curtis," 2013–14. Below: Ian Pedigo, installation view of "Cosmopolitan Sleep Positions," 2014. Both at Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery.



fashion. In the last two years, trendy boutiques have moved to Orchard, and many pioneering galleries have relocated to larger spaces near Essex and Delancey Streets, where they feature curator-organized thematic shows (James Fuentes, for example,

recently re-staged the notorious 1979 "Real Estate Show" originally in an abandoned building, now a bank, on Delancey) and exhibitions of older, under-represented artists along with younger, emerging artists. Older dealers like Leslie Heller continue





**Work In Progress: Residential**

Anticipated Completion:  
Spring 2016

Owner:  
S&R Corporation  
177 n. 9th  
Brooklyn NY 11211

For Additional Information:  
(510) 708-7780

General Contractor:  
Joshua Hoffert, Square Fabrication  
348 Morgan Ave, Brooklyn NY 11227  
(311) 566-3340

To anonymously report unsafe conditions at this worksite, call 311

Para reportar condiciones peligrosas en un sitio de trabajo, llame al 311. No tiene que dar su nombre.

**NYC**  
New York City Department of Buildings  
To see other permittees on this property, visit [www.nyc.gov/buildings](http://www.nyc.gov/buildings)

Andrew Ohanesian, *Scaffold and Building signage*, 2014. Wood, steel, paper, and plastic netting, installation at Pierogi.

ambitious programs, even as newer galleries like Monya Rowe, Klaus von Nichtssagend, and Kerry Schuss have moved in. Abreu, who shows mostly European artists with roots in film and critical theory, has expanded his operations to a building that he bought on Eldridge. Here, he joins another group of galleries located around Broome street, including Canada (known for its eclectic aesthetic and enthusiasm for painting), Jack Hanley, Nicelle Beauchene, and Simon Preston. These galleries maintain more traditional “white cube” spaces, with large, well-lit rooms, while still managing to

create intimate viewing experiences. While such galleries promote the Lower East Side as a place for edgy new art, another group of LES galleries clusters around the New Museum along the Bowery, Chrystie, and Rivington Streets. These include a number of upscale Chelsea transplants such as Sperone Westwater (in an elegant six-story building designed by Norman Foster), Lehmann Maupin’s second gallery, and Betty Cunningham. They join Salon 94, which has two venues in the area. The trend of Chelsea galleries opening satellite spaces in the LES continues with Marianne Boesky

renting a storefront on Clinton Street and Gagosian recently showing Urs Fischer’s bronzes in a defunct bank on Delancey. Yet despite this pressure to turn the LES into the next Chelsea, smaller galleries remain prevalent, and an ambitious dealer can still find affordable space. Nonprofits also maintain a viable presence, especially Participant, which regularly stages performance art, and Abrons Art Center, which offers an artist residency with studios and a hallway exhibition space for emerging artists and curators. Yet as the neighborhood increasingly attracts reviews, collectors, and sales, even the most innovative spaces must rely on art fairs to survive.

While the Lower East Side and Chelsea keep viewers in Manhattan, Brooklyn vies for attention. Williamsburg, once a thriving community of often artist-run galleries, has been squeezed out by high-end development. Only Pierogi, one of the founders of that scene, remains active; the gallery celebrated its 20th anniversary in September with an exhibition of all the artists it has shown. The dynamic energy that once characterized Williamsburg has now moved further east to the Bushwick/Ridgewood neighborhood, which has adopted the artist-driven, DIY spirit of Williamsburg and the East Village. Most galleries are clustered near the Morgan stop of the L subway line or along Myrtle, Bushwick, and Troutman Streets in industrial spaces or in the apartments and studios of artist-gallerists.

Bushwick/Ridgewood is notable for its casual, laid-back character (many galleries, especially the ones run by artists, are open only on weekend afternoons) and its collaborative, community-oriented spirit. Nonprofits like Momena, Norte Maar, and NUTUREart co-exist with independent dealers and more commercial spaces such as Studio 10, Theodore:Art, Robert Henry Contemporary, Sugar, Outlet, and Valentine. All share a focus on emerging or under-represented artists, and many show experimental, temporal installations and time-based work alongside more traditional painting and sculpture. Low rents and a range of available spaces, from raw industrial to storefront, give these venues a certain flexibility

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PIEROGI GALLERY



Left: Jimmy Miracle, *Armoire*, 2013. Weathered armoire and filament, 82 x 22 x 12 in. Work shown at Outlet Fine Art. Right: Ben Godward, installation view of “Voitenko vs Berkeley (contemplations of the imploded past perfect (intremes))” at Norte Maar, 2013.

LEFT: COURTESY THE ARTIST AND OUTLET FINE ART / RIGHT: COURTESY THE ARTIST AND NORTE MAAR

and encourage risk-taking—as does the neighborhood’s emphasis on providing opportunities for artists to exhibit. Many galleries also stage events such as concerts, poetry readings, dinner parties, and performances, often in conjunction with the neighborhood’s lively music scene. Twice a year, Bushwick Open Studios, like the LES Fashion Week or Chelsea’s Studio Walk, brings in collectors and new viewers, promoting an alternative art fair model in tune with the collaborative Bushwick community. Similarly, in October, the nonprofit Norte Maar organized “Exchange Rate,” an event in which Bushwick galleries traded spaces with their counterparts in London, Asia,



France, Spain, and Los Angeles. With creative strategies like these, Bushwick/Ridgewood galleries are receiving critical attention and becoming the place for enterprising collectors to visit. The neighborhood has even attracted Chelsea galleries like Lühring Augustine, which recently showed a large installation by Tom Friedman in its space. Again, with increased visibility comes real estate speculation, and high-end co-ops are displacing Bushwick’s large Latino population. But despite the gentrification that artists and galleries always seem to bring in their wake, and despite the limited viewing times, the informality of presentation, and the challenge of finding galleries, the

Bushwick/Ridgewood art scene continues to thrive.

As galleries in all of New York’s many neighborhoods resort to alternative strategies—including art fairs, walks, fashion shows, open studios, and artist exchanges—to sustain their physical spaces, they remain enthusiastic and optimistic. This is good news for artists, collectors, art lovers, and even tourists desirous of catching the pulse of the contemporary art world; for a vibrant gallery scene, dispersed and varied as the city’s art world is, remains essential to New York’s energy, economy, and cultural vitality.

*Susan Canning is a writer based in New York.*