STATE OF THE ART

Marylebone and Fitzrovia have long been incubators for nurturing new artistic programmes and spaces. But as the nature of the contemporary art market continues to change, **Lauren Romano** meets three local gallerists to find out what the future holds


Jessica Carlisle

SELECTED ARTISTS:
Marcelle Hanselaar, Malene Hartmann Rasmussen, (winner of the Jerwood Makers Open 2015), Paul Feiler

After a career as an art lawyer lost its lustre, Jessica Carlisle found her new vocation in 2008, just as the credit crunch began to bite. She now works as a gallerist, curator, project manager and artist agent and launched Jessica Carlisle Gallery in 2015

I wasn't really intending to start a gallery.
I used to be an artist's agent and had access to a huge database of artists who weren't represented, so I began putting on exhibitions. I ended up starting a pop-up under my own name, until eventually my business partner persuaded me to find a permanent space.
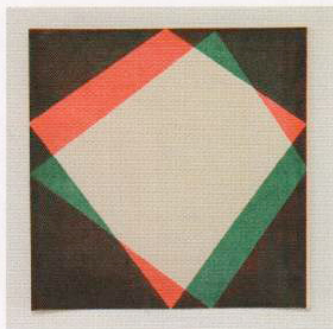
I moved into the art world just after the crash in 2008, so I wasn't around for the crazy bubble. More recently the market for emerging artists has also become very overheated. I personally think it's a good thing if that is beginning to right itself.

I like the art I exhibit to have a strong visual hook. What I show in the gallery has an element of craftsmanship as I'm drawn to artists that really engage with materials. This month we're holding a solo exhibition of Veronica Smirnoff's work (8 February – 4 March). She mixes her own pigments with egg yolk, and paints on wooden panels blessed by monks. There's such a story behind her paintings and the results are exquisite.

From a financial perspective the gallery space is becoming less relevant. Dealers at my level don't have vast turnovers, so paying a London rent is quite difficult. As a result,

gallerists are getting more creative with pop-up or temporary spaces, or collaborating with others. Art fairs are where a lot of the action happens now. People might go to galleries to see the work, but they'll buy it at a fair – it's a mindset thing.

There's a real appetite for art now, but I still think some people are scared of going into contemporary galleries. Maybe that's why they like art fairs because they're less intimidating in a way. For me, it's all about relationships and engaging with buyers who really want to know about the artists and invest in them and their work.

Malene Hartmann Rasmussen is one to watch. She works with ceramics and won the Jerwood Makers Open for her immersive installation featuring a swamp, sinister monsters and electronic birdsong.

The best thing about my job is when the artists I represent get picked up by new collectors. Finding different buyers and putting works on their radar is just so rewarding. ▶

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