

## Eli Consilvio on The New MAMA Gallery in LA

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It seemed that for the past few years, art was blowing up everywhere in Los Angeles *except* in the Arts District. But the little pocket on the east side of Downtown Los Angeles has come alive lately with the reinvigoration of **MOCA's** Geffen Contemporary Building, smart programming from **The Box** (owned by **Paul McCarthy's** daughter **Mara**), and the impending opening of mega-gallery **Hauser, Wirth & Schimmel**. All that makes the brand new **MAMA Gallery**, run by former consultant **Eli Consilvio** and artist and curator **Adarsha Benjamin**, perfectly situated in the middle of the burgeoning area.

MAMA's first show, "Erection," featured site-specific works about the actual construction of the unique space, which was converted from what must have been a charming old townhouse. A few prime examples of how the artists used the space: **Mattia Biagi's** mini-sculpture park; **Jem Goulding's** rainbow "painting" made by bouncing light through a crystal, off of a wall, and onto a canvas; and **Alia Penner's** sculpture lifted off the ground by balloons. The latter floats gently just under the ceiling, drawing attention to the original exposed beams. *Whitewall* spoke with Consilvio about collaboration and what it means to start a gallery.

**WW: How did you and Adarsha Benjamin meet? And how did you guys end up with a gallery together?**

**ELI CONSILVIO:** Adarsha and I met in Venice through our mutual friend, artist **James Georgopoulos** [who is in "Erection"]. I was producing some shows with **Siren Studios**, and I ended up doing a solo, one-night-only pop-up show of her photography and video works. She came to me with this idea to curate a show called "Sexual Education," and we got together one afternoon to talk about it. That turned into, "Let's find a space to do it," which turned into, "Let's open a gallery." We're still going to do the "Sexual Education" show in the future.

**WW: Your inaugural show, "Erection," recently opened. What can you tell me about that show?**

**EC:** The original idea was to do a "gallery warming" where artists would come during the physical construction of the gallery and construct site-specific pieces at the same time. Then things got crazy with the construction, and we realized it would be too much to have builders and artists working on top of one another—plus, we were working on a performance in Miami with **Ryan Heffington**—so we just asked artists to work with the architecture of the space. **Cole Sternberg's** piece, for instance, is a painting on the same material that the floor of the office and the project space are made out of; we purchased extra of the same material and he painted on it.

**WW: MAMA is in such an excellent space in the Arts District of Downtown, which hasn't really had a great reputation in the past few years, save for The Box, but now with Hauser, Wirth & Schimmel opening, it's going to be something of a hotspot again. How did you end up finding this place?**

**EC:** The owner of the building took us on a tour of a couple spaces. He owns a few different available buildings in the Arts District. Adarsha immediately fell in love with the space. After multiple site visits, we got the concept of how the space was going to work. It took a lot of construction, but to be honest, we got the lease on September 15, and turned it around in just three months. That's pretty quick for demo and building.

**WW: "Erection" is made up of artists both of you have worked with separately. What do you see as the differences and similarities between the artists that both you and Adarsha bring to the table? What is the advantage of working with a partner?**

**EC:** The idea was just that: to bring our two influences and two sides we worked with together and see what happens. What happens in the future, we don't know yet, because we're still developing. But we know it works,

because at one point, every single one of the artists in the show were in the gallery working on their installations. When you think about that, it's pretty crazy. The community that came together was just amazing. Adarsha and I are developing our aesthetic together. It's not just "her and I" now, it's the gallery's aesthetic. But the advantage is that, though we both believe similarly in a strong final product, we have different working styles. Adarsha is very demanding, and I'm demanding, but Adarsha is very free flowing, while I might have a more structured style. The balance is really great, at least for the two projects we've done together so far. We compliment each other like air and water. It's all very natural.

**WW: Can you tell us more about the performance with Ryan Heffington at Art Basel?**

**EC:** Working with Ryan Heffington came about through Adarsha. She curated a performance of his in Miami a couple years ago. We approached him about doing something, and he said he has had a "punk rock water ballet" on his mind for ten years. We said, "We're going to get you a pool in Miami." Actually, we finalized the project one month before Art Basel, which is crazy. And I can honestly say that it's one of the best performances I've ever seen. We are thinking about possibly re-creating the work, but we are definitely going to do more work with Ryan.

**WW: You've been in the art world for a minute, but this is your first gallery. Has reality set in that you actually own a gallery?**

**EC:** It's been natural for me. My first job in the art world was consigning photos that were left to me by my father. I consigned with **Fahey/Klein** and **Fraenkel Gallery** in San Francisco and a few other galleries in New York. I did that for 20 years, and then started a consultancy company about six years ago called the **Art Reserve**. I was working with artists doing exhibitions, managing them, and placing works in collections, which is basically what a gallerist does. The difference in owning a gallery is finally I have a home where I can do everything, and I can continue to work directly with artists—which is what I love to do—and foster careers and help artists do what they want to do.

**WW: I've always thought of you and Adarsha as both working outside the system. Can you tell me a little bit about your feelings about working within the system now that you have a gallery?**

**EC:** That's a good question. The one thing I had a problem with outside the system was the quick turnaround, and that the work never lived past a short duration. I always ended up working quickly and extremely hard for short longevity or reward. I wanted the work I did to exist longer. At a gallery, you can invest in a show for a year, and have it be up for six week or two months. That's what the gallery allows you to do: it memorializes the work. But I was trying to fight it for a long time, and see if I could do this thing outside of the norm, but that was what was missing was longevity and having a home. So the gallery is a little norm, but still a little weird, and we're going to keep the nomadic spirit and maintain relationships with artists outside of our roster.

"Erection" is on view at MAMA Gallery through January 24, 2015.