



MAMA Gallery Tackles the Arts District Head-On

By RACHEL MANY

Ever since MOCA's highly successful 2011 exhibition, Art in the Streets, the Eastside seems to have fallen rather stagnant where art is concerned, gradually losing momentum in favor of high-priced lofts and trendy storefronts. But with the slow growth of small contemporary galleries like CES and The Box, along with bigger revitalization projects from MOCA's Geffen Contemporary and Hauser Wirth & Schimmel, it seems the Arts District is once again home to, well, art.

Within this new frontier lies the recently inaugurated MAMA Gallery, a burgeoning art space that's helping reinvigorate the Arts District's creative growth. We sat down with founders Eli Consilvio and Adarsha Benjamin to discuss their roots, their evolving program, LA's art trends, and the serious magnitude of our coffee needs:

LAC: MAMA is your shared brainchild. How did you two meet? What brought you together to open a gallery space?

MAMA: We had collaborated on a few projects together in the past, and were working on another exhibition when we realized our true purpose in coming together was to open MAMA. Eli had been working with galleries for the past 20 years, and more recently has been consulting for collectors, artists and institutions. It was a natural move for him. Adarsha had been independently curating and had always wanted to open a gallery as a physical representation of her ethereal visions. Together, we are earth and water, and it's been going great.

LAC: Tell us a bit about the space? What drew you to this particular location?

MAMA: We just wanted to be in the Arts District proper: not over the bridge, not south of 7th, just plop in the middle. So that helped keep our options down. It started with a building we looked at on 3rd and Garey (which was unavailable), but the owner had another space in the neighborhood we could rent. It was instant good vibes and when we saw the space we knew it was the one. The two brick walls really struck us in the space. They were the original structural walls of a house that was built in 1908 to oversee a vineyard (which is now a warehouse).

LAC: Between James Georgopoulos, Amanda Charchian, and Cole Sternberg, you seem to be developing quite a roster of new, cutting-edge artists. How do you select your artists?

MAMA: Most of the artists we have worked with thus far [are people] we have known for years, and [we] consider them friends. Recently, we have been meeting some wonderful artists and are looking forward to expanding our roster with some of them. The artist/gallerist relationship is just that—a relationship. Sometimes you like the other person for a myriad of reasons, and sometimes you just don't.

LAC: Take us through the process of curating a show. What is the climate like before and after a big opening?

MAMA: It starts as a seed, in various shades and colors. An idea, a concept, an artist, an image, inspires something bigger; and from that first starting point, we direct and dissect and get to somewhere that feels really juicy and complete. That being said, we are just really getting started with what and who our curatorial agenda will be. It's only growing and expanding, and the climate is always fast paced and energetic. Unless we haven't had coffee—then it's like Night of The Living Dead over here.

LAC: Well, you have already had four successful shows since launching in December! That seems like quite a lot: do you plan on continuing this pace for your future shows?

MAMA: This is our natural pace. Everything that has happened thus far has been very organic. We have not been either overly aggressive or extremely passive. Things are happening because of the energy we are creating and are being surrounded by. We have had such a great response to our evolving program that we will continue to move forward.

LAC: What are you most excited about for the future of the gallery?

MAMA: Expansion. We are excited to be doing more exhibitions outside of the gallery, including this summer's installation with artist Cole Sternberg in the Hamptons. This year's Paris Photo LA was great fun. We are looking forward to the growth of the artists and collectors we are working with.

LAC: Any art trends you're witnessing in LA's art scene?

MAMA: We are actually witnessing a few different trends happening concurrently. There is a leap into the future with post-internet artists like Petra Cortright and Jon Rafman really exploding and representing the digital side of things. And then there is a wave of artists who seem to be seeking refuge from the Internet and social media, and their work is a reflection on that, or a conversation on what the physical reality means to them. They work with their hands and fabricate themselves, like James Georgopoulos. It is such a wonderful time to be in LA.