

ARTSY

The L.A. Artist-Run Galleries You Need to Know

ARTSY EDITORIAL

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Do artists make better gallerists? In our ongoing series exploring the inner workings and inspirations behind artist-run galleries around the world, we turn our focus to Los Angeles.

Amid L.A.'s infamous sprawl, where affordable, quirky spaces abound and gallery districts in Hollywood and Downtown continue to expand, it's no surprise that artist-run galleries are multiplying like rabbits. From influential mainstays like Night Gallery to feisty, interdisciplinary newcomers like EMBASSY, the below galleries represent a sampling from the California megalopolis's art scene—one brimfull of experimentation bolstered by an abundance of square footage in which artists can spread their wings.

MAMA Gallery

ADARSHA BENJAMIN, ELI CONSILVIO

1242 PALMETTO STREET, DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES



As its maternal name suggests, MAMA is in the business of nurturing artists. Adarsha Benjamin and Eli Consilvio opened the gallery in December 2014, drawn to the brick-and-mortar model despite original plans to operate primarily online. Their Downtown L.A. space—a former warehouse embedded with architectural gems like a domed roof, wood beams, and brick walls—was inaugurated at the onset of the recent gallery boom in the neighborhood.

Their first show, titled “ERECTION” (which was preceded by a soft opening, debuting the photographs of actress Jena Malone), playfully brought together 15 artists, many of whom presented works that were inspired by the space itself. Perhaps the highlight was James Georgopoulos’s video installation made with the shell of a 1968 Ford F250. Since then, the gallery has developed a small, thoughtful roster and introduced a slate of smart solo shows—including the stunning Cole Sternberg exhibition that is now on view.

Artsy: What inspired you to open a gallery?

Adarsha Benjamin: Circadian rhythm inspired us. Destiny. An absolute obsession with art and all that it inspires. We chose MAMA as our name because you’ll never forget it and it probably was your first word.

Artsy: How do you balance your own art practice with running the gallery?

AB: The gallery has become our art practice. I can speak personally in saying that all my creativity is channeled through the space now. As a gallerist, there is so much more to what we do than “selling art.” We are involved on every level and often put ourselves in the shows in the form of an installation or idea. That being said, I still try to maintain a photographic and film practice outside of the space.

Artsy: Can you tell us a bit about your exhibition program?

AB: We are just entering our second year, and our program has really just started to evolve into what we want it to be. Our first year was a gamble, a bit of a wild card. We now have a small roster we represent and an extended group of artists we are working with. It’s instinctual and it’s based on a keen eye. The relationship between gallery and artist is very important, so once that is developed and you know you would do anything for each other...then off you go.

Artsy: What makes a gallery successful?

AB: Are people paying attention? Talking? Discussing? Are you inspiring people? Did you feel something? Take something away from the experience? If you said yes, then that is successful to me. Oh, and being able to pay the bills. Or just eating really good meals and Artforum ads.

Artsy: What’s next?

AB: We recently expanded and we don’t plan to do any more of that for this year. But we’re also expanding spiritually, creatively, ethically, financially. We’re very excited about showing Ariana Papademetropoulos, James Georgopoulos, and Ren Hang!