



A SPACE OF HER OWN

Former White Cube director Sara Kay opens a new Lower East Side gallery to champion women artists — and collectors.

BY CAIT MUNRO



"Women On The Outs: Quilts and Abstract Expressions" is on view through January 13 at Sara Kay Gallery.

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It's not every day that an upstart gallery presents a show with museum-quality curation, deftly mixing genres and movements. So it was with great anticipation that I entered Sara Kay's eponymous gallery on New York's Lower East Side, where I was greeted with a room-dominating abstract cast by Jean Dubuffet and paintings on loan from pioneering outsider art collector Audrey B. Heckler. (The link? Dubuffet was an avid collector of outsider artists, gaining considerable inspiration throughout his career from the work of prisoners, psychiatric patients and children.)

"I found this space, and when things fall into place, you've gotta take note," says Kay. "I've spent a long time thinking about this."

If this first show at Sara Kay Gallery boasts a unique perspective—the kind that sees rare Picasso ceramics from the artist's personal collection placed casually alongside a frenetic ink drawing by Madge Gill and a strange, gripping portrait by Mose Tolliver—it's likely thanks to Kay's wide-ranging art-world CV. After beginning her career at the American Folk Art Museum, Kay took a job in the Old Master Drawings department at Christie's, where she had dreamed of working since childhood. From there, she landed at Jan Krugier Gallery, which at the time held exclusive representation for work by Pablo Picasso from the Marina Picasso estate. When Krugier died in 2008, Kay decided to finally take on the contemporary sector, becoming a director at White Cube in London.

"I kind of knew when I was doing all these different things that eventually I'd want to bring it all together," Kay explains. "It's very much the way I think,

and this gallery is a reflection of that."

Kay is also a founder of the Professional Organization for Women in the Arts (POWArts), a nonprofit that supports women working on the business side of the art world. This commitment to supporting other women is evident in the gallery, which places an emphasis on supporting female artists and collectors. In March, Kay will exhibit new work by Natalie Frank, a painter best known for her feminist re-imaginings of Grimm Fairy Tales, in conjunction with the launch of her book, "The Story of O."

But Kay is careful not to put any kind of label on the gallery. "I'm an advocate for women in the field, and I have been for many years," she says. "But I don't think we do things in a bubble and I don't think we do them alone, no matter what area of life it is."

She is also not idealistic about the realities of opening a mid-size gallery during a moment in the art world when many smaller dealers are struggling. In the past year alone, New York art scene stalwarts like On Stellar Rays, Andrea Rosen Gallery and Feuer/Mesler have closed up shop, citing high rents as well as the pressure to participate in a steady stream of pricey art fairs, often at the expense of gallery programming.

"There's been a lot of amazing galleries that have gone out of business in recent months," Kay admits. "Did I think about it? Of course I did. This was not impulsive. I'm conscious of everything that's going on but I also recognize this is where I'm at."