

REPORT FROM THE LOWER EAST SIDE

Mapping New Territory

With the relocated New Museum now open, gallery colonizing of Manhattan's former tenement district continues apace.

BY STEPHEN MAINE

The move is on. Some 30 galleries now operate on Manhattan's Lower East Side, about double the number that existed 18 months ago. Some are fledgling efforts by ambitious young dealers looking to set up shop but skeptical of Chelsea's notorious mall environment. Others, alert to a growing art audience associated with the New Museum's Bowery location, have relocated from elsewhere in the city. A few uptown players have recently established outposts in the area, enabling them to expand on their existing programs.

Area pioneer Maccaroni has moved to the West Village. Silo is gone, and, in accordance with their three-year plan, Orchard will disband in April. But neighborhood stalwarts Reena Spaulings, Rivington Arms and Participant Inc. have recently found new homes in the area, and Canada has significantly expanded its exhibition space. Canada's Suzanne Butler estimates that the gallery, which opened its doors in 2001, saw more walk-in traffic in the last two months of 2007 than in its first three years of operation. The reason? "Maps," she states succinctly, referring to those that accompanied recent magazine and newspaper articles on the area, as well as a monthly guide to local exhibition venues unfortunately titled "LES is More."

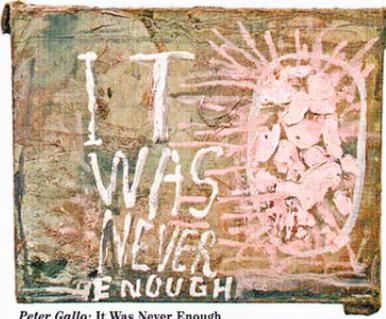
As to gallery-hopping, the contrast with Chelsea is marked. The Lower East Side is easy to get to by subway, dotted with a variety of eating and drinking establishments, and graced with lively public spaces that are perfect for taking a break. While no longer underground, the scene here still enjoys a certain "alternative" identity and the accompanying aura of hipness—the legacy of decades of unwashed beatniks, hippies and punks. Until recently, many Lower East Side galleries had reluctantly accepted, as a

condition of their relative isolation, the paradox of presenting challenging, innovative art that few people would see. They traded economic harvest for creative autonomy. That appears to be changing, though what effect larger and more diverse audiences will have on the quality of work on view, and on the gallery-going experience, remains to be seen.

Newcomers

Among the newcomers is Sunday, established in October 2006 by Sean Horton in a modest storefront space on Eldridge near Houston Street, the district's approximate northern boundary. Horton, one of numerous dealers who have adopted the term "inter-generational" to describe their programs, is implicitly positioning himself in opposition to many influential collectors' notorious predilection for younger artists. An alumnus of the Boston Museum School, Horton appreciates that many area galleries are run by artists. He worked for two years in Chelsea galleries and contrasts the more leisurely gallery-going rhythm of his new neighborhood to that of his erstwhile, hyperactive one, where visitors "often had that blank-eyed, deer-in-the-headlights expression" before they bolted out the door. Indeed, Sunday's recent show of small-scaled, materially and narratively layered work by Peter Gallo defied a quick scan.

The typically tight spaces of the neighborhood's tenement architecture limit the scale of what can be exhibited in many of these venues; depending on gallery-goers' tastes, the result is variously intimate or claustrophobic. Around the corner on Stanton, independent curator Amy Smith-Stewart opened her doors in April 2007. For her, Chelsea "was never an option, because I felt there was no way to personalize the gallery experience," as her touchstones—including Orchard, Reena Spaulings and Participant—were able to do. Smith-Stewart notes the influence of American Fine Arts, the late Colin de Land's iconoclastic gallery, on issues of authorship and identity that are something of a LES specialty. Last November, she collaborated with Fruit and Flower Deli, a gallery one door to the east, to present the group event "The World Premier of Snöfrid" as part of Performa 07 [see article this issue]. Snöfrid is the performance persona of Ylva Oglund, who, with her husband Rodrigo Mallea Lira, operates Fruit and Flower Deli. The gallery opened last fall, and its activities are directed by an invisible entity Mallea Lira identifies as the Oracle. The Oracle transmits the wishes of a ghost inhabiting the space to the Keeper—that would be Mallea Lira himself. This reconditte though wholly good-natured procedure casts a conceptual shadow over not just artistic production but the curatorial process as well. Among the gallery's current projects is one by a team known as International Festival; the piece consists of covering the gallery's rent for 2008. Twelve framed rent receipts over the course of the year will constitute its sole artifacts.



Peter Gallo: *It Was Never Enough*, 1980-2006, oil on canvas, 9 by 11 1/2 inches. Courtesy Sunday.



Megan Pflug: *Moon*, 2008, carbon transfer, 5 feet in diameter. Courtesy V&A.

Lizzi Bougatsos: *Birdhouse for Humans*, 2007, cardboard, metal grating and mixed mediums, 113 by 97 by 93 inches. Courtesy James Fuentes LLC.



View of Rainer Ganahl's performance *Bicycle Quatering*, 1757/2007, part of the multi-artist Performa 07 event "The World Premier of Snöfrid." Courtesy Fruit and Flower Deli.

Skeptics might suspect that these galleries are making a virtue of economic necessity, except that commercial space in Lower Manhattan is no longer especially cheap. Ground-floor rents nearly equal those in Chelsea.

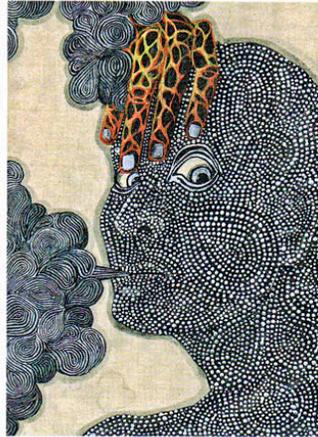
Victoria Donner operates V&A out of a smallish space on an upper floor of an office building on Mott Street. In selecting a space in which to present her take on the tradition of materially and intellectually rugged downtown painting, she "wanted something that felt like New York." Even cozier are spots like Siobhan Lowe's Never Work, and Number 35, recently opened by Cindy Rucker. A few hundred square feet is room enough for Lisa Cooley, whose eponymous gallery opened in January. After eight years of apprenticeship at Nicole Klagsbrun and Andrea Rosen galleries, Cooley is confident of her ability to attract collectors, including "international early adopters," to her lower Orchard Street location adjacent to Miguel Abreu. Geographically marginal but conceptually at the heart of the Lower East Side, James Fuentes stakes out the (current) southern extreme of the district with his diminutive venue specializing in "intermedia," located between Chinatown and the Brooklyn Bridge. A decade of gallery work under his belt, Fuentes opened his space a year ago; a recent success was a widely noted exhibition of painting, sculpture and hybrids by 2008 Whitney Biennial pick Lizzi Bougatsos.

Relocated

Time was, a successful and/or dissatisfied gallery in Brooklyn's Williamsburg section would look to Chelsea for greater market share; swapping a comfortable location near Bedford Avenue for a position on



Barnaby Whitfield: The Prestige (Ground Control), 2007, pastel on paper, 36 by 28½ inches. Courtesy 31 Grand.



Amelie Chabannes: Intimate Biometric #3, 2007, acrylic and watercolor on wood, 13 by 9 inches. Courtesy Luxe.



Kersten Brätsch: Untitled, 2007, oil and spray paint on paper, 120 by 80 inches. Courtesy Salon 94 Freemans.

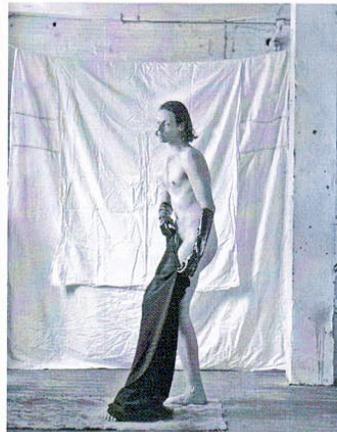
the geographical fringes of New York's art epicenter seemed like a smart move. Thierry Goldberg Gallery (formerly Sixtyseven) did just that, moving from a third-floor walk up in a Williamsburg loft to a bland box in a Chelsea warren, where its lively, focused program blended in with the crowd. Director Ron Segev, referring to the move last March to the western end of Rivington Street, says that initially he had misgivings, but the situation changed dramatically in just a few months. "Everybody is coming to see us now," Segev says. "And they're not suffering from retinal fatigue when they do."

A year ago, Megan Bush and Heather Stevens of 31 Grand left their roomy but remote digs near the Williamsburg waterfront for a space of comparable size on Ludlow Street, where they, too, enjoy considerably more foot traffic. Echoing the artist-friendly sentiments of Sunday's Horton, Stevens enjoys the

diversity of this new audience, which includes many artists. The new space has three distinct galleries and a migratory office, lending flexibility to installations. Like Thierry Goldberg, 31 Grand presents a narrative, illustrational, sometimes self-consciously "dark" selection, a Williamsburg trademark having little in common with the tradition of downtown Manhattan painting.

Janos Gat recently moved his gallery from the Upper East Side to a building on the Bowery: "The moment I heard that the New Museum broke ground, I started looking for space nearby." Such proximity is essential since Gat, who emphasizes overlooked or forgotten work from the 1960s by Europeans and Americans, typically sells to visiting curators. Gat's current show of gestural abstraction by the Hungarian-born Parisian painter Judit Reigl [see article this issue] typifies his thoughtful, historical perspective. Dennis Christie of DCKT looked at buildings throughout the neighborhood and opted not to "be a maverick" with a great although remote space, but to focus on the Bowery. His search ended on the ground floor of the building that houses Gat, and DCKT hopes to open its 1,800-square-foot space in mid-March. Other Chelsea galleries that have made the move include Envoy and Christopher Henry. Luxe, formerly of 57th Street, now has a Stanton Street address; the slick, media-centric work often seen there would seem to be a tough sell so far downtown, but then, we are witnessing a throw-out-the-rulebook moment.

Skeptics might suspect that these galleries are making a virtue of economic necessity, except that commercial space in Lower Manhattan is no longer especially cheap. Hudson, the single-named dealer who moved Feature to an architecturally quirky Chelsea space in 1999, looked at other options as his lease matured (founded in Chicago in 1984, the gallery arrived in SoHo in 1988). With ground-floor rents on suitable spaces now nearly equal to those in Chelsea (57th Street is still higher), real estate economics was not a major factor. More important was the vibe of the neighborhood in contrast to that of Chelsea, which,



Alice O'Malley: James F. Murphy, 2000, silver gelatin print, 24 by 20 inches. Courtesy Participant Inc.

approaching overdevelopment, has suffered "a bit of an implosion of vitality." Where three- to five-year leases are the norm, Hudson enjoys the stability of a 10-year lease. Feature opened its doors on the Bowery last month with an exhibition of paintings by gallery regular Daniel Hesidence.

Outposts

A number of successful operations have opened second spaces in the shadow of the New Museum, forming a nexus that is the district's center of gravity. By retaining elements of its annex's mercantile identity, such as the tin ceiling, marble stairs and timeworn floor boards, Lehmann Maupin acknowledges the history of the neighborhood. The 6,000-square-foot gallery, by far the most impressive in the area, is not an experimental or "project" space, but will work with the roster of artists familiar from the Chelsea flagship.

Salon 94 Freemans, a satellite of Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn's posh uptown showcase, makes no such pretense of connection to its newfound downtown milieu. Though its program is still unfocused, a recent show of jewelry and other upscale baubles seemed calculated to distance the gallery from its surroundings. Back in September, it kicked off with a spare, haunting show by Pakistan-born sculptor Huma Bhabha (shared with the uptown location; see *A.I.A.*, Dec. '07) and recently

showed new work by postmodern portrait photographer Katy Graman.

Greenberg Van Doren brings its stylish program to the area via Eleven Rivington. (Rohatyn, a cofounder, left several years ago to establish Salon 94; the galleries occasionally collaborate.) The gallery had been looking to open another location since last winter, says director Augusto Arbizo, but "in Chelsea, unless you make a really big statement, it's easy to get lost." The gallery will highlight primarily young and emerging artists and include established international artists with little visibility in the U.S. A sense of community is important to Arbizo, who is in touch with nearby galleries to coordinate openings.

(Eleven Rivington is open on Sunday, a tradition among older LES galleries that has been resisted by newcomers, and particularly by outposts of uptown galleries with typical Tuesday-through-Saturday hours.) Its inaugural show, featuring three darkly brooding canvases by Cameron Martin (other works by Martin were on view in the gallery's 57th Street space), might have set a neighborhood standard for

reticence; Jackie Saccoccio's subsequent solo outing of vibrant, brushy abstractions was considerably more loquacious.

Joel Mesler launched Rental in Los Angeles in 2005 and opened a LES branch last May with Philip Deely at the helm. Their unusual concept is to work with out-of-town galleries that wish to establish, for a few weeks at least, a New York presence. "We have a roster



Jackie Saccoccio: *Blue Balls* (left) and *I'm Feeling Feelings* (right), both 2007, oil on canvas. Courtesy Eleven Rivington.

Selected LES Galleries

31 Grand
143 Ludlow St.
212.228.0901
www.31grand.com

ABC No Rio
156 Rivington St.
212.254.3697
www.abcnorio.org

Miguel Abreu Gallery
36 Orchard St.
212.995.1774
www.miguelabreugallery.com

Abrons Art Center
Henry Street Settlement
466 Grand St.
212.598.0400
www.henrystreet.org

Asian American Art Center
26 Bowery, 3rd Floor
212.233.2154
www.artspiral.org/index.html

Jen Bekman
6 Spring St.
212.219.0166
www.jenbekman.com

Canada
55 Chrystie St.
212.925.4631
www.canadanewyork.com

Lisa Cooley
34 Orchard St.
347.351.8075
www.lisa-cooley.com

Cuchifritos
120 Essex St.
[no phone number]
www.aai-nyc.org/cuchifritos

DCKT Contemporary
195 Bowery
212.741.9955
www.dcktcontemporary.com

Educational Alliance
197 East Broadway
212.780.2300
www.edalliance.org

Eleven Rivington
11 Rivington St.
212.982.1930
www.elevenrivington.com

Envoy
131 Chrystie St.
212.226.4555
www.envoygallery.com

Feature Inc.
276 Bowery
212.675.7772
www.feature.com

Fruit and Flower Deli
53 Stanton St.
keeper@fruitandflowerdeli.com
www.fruitandflowerdeli.com

James Fuentes LLC
35 St. James Place
212.577.1201
www.jamesfuentes.com

Galleryonewentyeight
128 Rivington St.
212.674.0244
www.galleryonewentyeight.org

Janos Gat Gallery
195 Bowery
212.677.3525
www.janosgatgallery.com

Thierry Goldberg Projects
5 Rivington St.
212.967.2260
www.thierrygoldberg.com

Christopher Henry Gallery
127 Elizabeth St.
212.244.6004
www.christopherhenrygallery.com

Kenkeleba
214 E. 2nd St.
212.674.3939
[no web site]

Lehmann Maupin
201 Chrystie St.
212.254.0054
www.lehmannmaupin.com

Luxe
53 Stanton St.
212.582.4425
www.luxegallery.net

Museum 52
95 Rivington St.
212.228.3090
www.museum52.com

Never Work
191 Henry St.
212.228.9206
www.never-work.net

Number 35
39 Essex St.
212.388.9311
www.numberthirtyfive.com

Orchard
47 Orchard St.
212.219.1061
www.orchard47.org

Participant Inc.
253 Houston St.
212.254.4334
www.participantinc.org

Reena Spaulings Fine Art
165 East Broadway
212.477.5006
www.reenaspaulings.com

Rental
120 East Broadway, 6th floor
212.608.6002
www.rental-gallery.com

Rivington Arms
4 E. 2nd St.
646.654.3213
www.rivingtonarms.com

Salon 94 Freemans
1 Freeman Alley
212.529.7400
www.salon94.com

Smith-Stewart
53 Stanton St.
212.477.2821
www.smith-stewart.com

Sunday
237 Eldridge St.
212.253.0700
www.sundaynyc.com

Thrust Projects
114 Bowery #301
212.431.4802
www.thrustprojects.com

Tribes
285 E. 3rd St.
212.674.3778
www.tribes.org

V&A
98 Mott St. #206
212.966.5754
www.vandany.com

Woodward
133 Eldridge St.
212.966.3411
www.woodwardgallery.net



Left to right, Lisa Hamilton's *Butterknife* and an untitled painting by Elizabeth Cooper, both 2007; in the exhibition "Freeze Frame." Courtesy Thrust Projects.

of galleries rather than artists," says Deely, whose level of curatorial control varies from project to project as contingencies require. The sixth-floor space on scruffy East Broadway enjoys commanding views of Lower Manhattan; intentionally or not, this above-the-treetops perspective is consistent with the gallery's sweeping ambition. The formula appears to have filled a need, as Rental is booked through fall of 2008.

From even farther afield comes Museum 52, a New York incarnation of the four-year-old London gallery, in the distinctive, bi-level Rivington Street location formerly occupied by Participant. Co-director Rachel

Uffner trained at New York's D'Amelio Terras. It was hard to tell from the inaugural show, "Display," where the gallery is headed, though in the back room a clutch of collages by Philip Hausmeier, made of perforated and overlaid pages from glossy magazines, transcended the exhibition's navel-gazing conceit and tapped into that neighborhood niche concern, identity.

Community?

The source of another recently ubiquitous map was "boundLES," a seven-week-long exhibition, mounted at three venerable centers of creative activity in the neighborhood: the Abrons Art Center, the Educational Alliance and ABC No Rio. A weekend of performance and video, timed to coincide with the New Museum's opening in December, was held at University Settlement. Jane Kim of Thrust Projects (still in its original Bowery location) co-curated the shows with critic Cecilia Alemani, bringing together commercial and alternative sensibilities in a genuine, well-meaning expression of esprit de corps. But as in all frontiers, the competition for turf qualifies any impulse to promulgate common interests.

The efflorescence of galleries is just one component of a torrent of new money flowing into the area: capital with an artsy, cultural face. Renovation of existing spaces is of course a prerequisite for a gallery, since no one (except maybe an art dealer) lives, works or plays inside a white cube. More relevant to the neighborhood's future is new construction, which Bernard Tschumi's flashy, bevelled, bizarrely incongruous condominium

on Norfolk Street, dubbed "Blue," dubiously symbolizes. Development has profound ramifications not merely for art in the city but for the quality of life of many of its inhabitants. Proposed changes to zoning regulations that apply to a large swath of the Lower East Side, as well as to the East Village to the north, would put limits on new development and help ensure the construction of affordable housing. Time—and the Department of City Planning—will tell whether the influx of cash creates a flash flood that sweeps away local character and drowns the weak, or a rising tide that lifts all boats. □

Author: *Stephen Maine is an artist and writer based in Brooklyn.*

R.H. Quaytman: *Chapter 6, Orchard*, 2006, silkscreen on wood, 12 1/4 by 20 inches. Courtesy Orchard.

