

SCENE & HERD

ARTFORUM

Winter Wonderland

NEW YORK 01.15.14



Left: Dealers Lucas Cooper and Paula Cooper. Right: Dealer Gavin Brown and artist Alex Katz. (Except where noted, all photos: Linda Yablonsky)

SO OFTEN NOW, everything looks and feels like everything else. Yet the New York art world managed to kick off 2014 with something different, namely Jersey City. On Wednesday, January 8, when a polar vortex had the East Coast in its bone-chilling grip, curious art advisers, collectors, and journalists from Manhattan traveled across the Hudson River to preview current exhibitions at Mana Contemporary.

"It's a city of art," said painter Yigal Ozeri, a founder with Mana chief executive Eugene Lemay, who parlayed success in the moving and fine art-storage business into a vast, two-million-square-foot complex on the one-time campus of the American Can Company. So far, the two-year-old operation includes built-to-suit studios for artists, a foundry, a printmaking shop, a recording studio, a theater, a cafe, commercial and nonprofit galleries, and storage for three hundred private collections. The future will add a boutique hotel, five restaurants, a sculpture garden, a coffee roasting company and a new stop for the PATH commuter train by the parking lot, a ten- or fifteen-minute trip from Lower Manhattan. Bushwick, are you listening?



Left: Dealers Anton Kern and Friedrich Petzel. Right: Artist Stan Douglas.

"The idea was to create a community for artists and collectors," Lemay said, with on-site facilities to serve all of them, all at once. While artists are making art, collectors can do studio visits, invite curators and friends to private exhibitions of their holdings, or add to them by picking from satellites of galleries based in the Middle East, Europe, Latin America, and Indonesia. "We come here a lot," said Sotheby's VP Lisa Dennison, who arrived for the evening with her entire, art-dedicated family. (One of her sons, Tyler Waywell, is a director for Mana Contemporary's Middle East Center for the Arts.) "We have more art-dedicated space than the Met," Lemay said. "Only the Louvre has more."

Who knew?

Choreographer Karole Armitage and architect Richard Meier did. She rehearses with her dance company here; he has a "museum" of 150 architectural models on open-storage display. Another choreographer, Shen Wei, is also a visual artist who makes big paintings down the hall; Aaron Young's studio is big enough to ride his motorcycle around it.

If the communal atmosphere felt more kibbutz than Bauhaus, it may have been because Lemay spent his youth in Israel after his Christian parents converted to Judaism and moved the family there from Michigan. He also led an assault squad during Israel's 1982 war with Lebanon, moving to New York in 1984 to charge into

the battlefields of art with weapons of mass construction. (More Mana Contemporaries are coming to Miami, London, and Los Angeles. Chicago has one now.)



Left: Architect Peter Marino. Right: Dealer Mary Boone.

Sunday afternoon open studios at the Jersey City flagship draw up to 5,000 people, the effusive Lemay said, "80 percent" from the art world. But this was a Wednesday, and about a hundred VIPs showed up for a tour of the main building's five floors. In a ground-floor gallery, Lemay himself showed penumbral inkjet paintings related to his wartime experience, and a performance by two of Shen Wei's company dancers was about to begin. "We're waiting for Charlie Rose," Lemay said.

Let loose in the building twenty minutes later, the art tourists discovered Ozeri signing copies of the latest volume in a history of photorealism put together by the married dealers Susan and Louis Meisel. "They put my painting on the cover!" Ozeri exclaimed, unable to contain his excitement. On the other floors, Meier and printmaker Gary Lichtenstein submitted to questions from their invading guests, while Moishan Gaspar dug in his heels for Mana's reincarnation of his Barcelona family's venerable gallery, closed since 1996, with books, correspondence, family photographs, and posters by Picasso, Braque, Miro, and Tàpies outlining the gallery's history. The Middle East Center had a three-part exhibition on one floor, and a collaborative project by Shoja Azari and Shahram Karimi on another.

Back in Manhattan on Thursday, the season's official opening night found David Zwirner's Ninteenth Street gallery fully recovered from its preholiday, 2,500-a-day onslaught of Yayoi Kusama enthusiasts. The space leading into Stan Douglas's jazzy new, Jean-Luc Godard-inspired film was now quite bare and dimly lit, its walls painted a welcome soft gray. Under the blinding lights at Bortolami Gallery, new Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis hire Jeffrey Uslip had put together "A Chromatic Loss," a group show of body-related, black, white, and gray artworks that was actually diverting, though you'd never guess that from the overwrought phrases ("...immanent criticality and material subversiveness simultaneously cohere as a unified collective") in the press release. By comparison—not that there is any reason for comparison—Saul Fletcher's new photographs at Anton Kern were the soul of simplicity and unforced beauty. When Lehmann Maupin's West Twenty-Sixth Street gallery filled up with fans of Alex Prager's photographs of various public assemblies, the slightly agoraphobic artist was not even a face in the crowd (the title of her show), because she had already departed for the gallery's Chrystie Street space, where the rest of her pictures were no doubt keeping good company. Discomfited by Prager's new video (studies of people who need people but are afraid of them), I headed uptown to Gregor Hildebrandt's New York solo debut at Emmanuel Perrotin.



Left: Public Art Fund director Nicholas Baume with PAF associate curator Andria Hickey and collector Jill Kraus. Right: Artist Dara Friedman and collector Mara Rubell.

The Berlin-based artist makes paintings and collages out of now useless audio tape, recording songs by bands like Einstürzende Neubauten and The Cure before pressing them to canvas. Upstairs, he hung old videotapes around the room to make black curtains. Downstairs, the empty audiocassettes were the "tiles" for a mosaic floor-work. The installations so impressed architect Peter Marino that he commissioned the artist to make a new work for an exhibition he's preparing for the Bass Museum, opening during the next Miami Basel. "The art world is great," said advisor Marcia Levine during dinner at Orsay. "You meet so many nice people."

By comparison Friday was quiet, though openings at WallSpace, Marlborough Contemporary, and Derek Eller were not. At WallSpace, the generational shift that began taking place among artists a few years ago hit its stride, both on the walls in its group show and in the supporting crowd. The same was true at Marlborough, where Davina Semo's neo-minimalist sculptures gave a whole new meaning to chain mail. In this context, David Dupuis suddenly seemed an *éminence grise* at Derek Eller, though he is hardly a senior citizen. However, his maturity worked to his advantage in his exquisite, collaged drawings, which exuded the desires of youth but from an advanced perspective that made them all the more poignant.

Heightened emotion arrived at Paula Cooper's satellite space on Tenth Avenue on Saturday night as a wave of extraordinary sound, actually a song of the sirens. It came from four opera singers, all women, whom Liz Glynn persuaded to board boats that would ferry them from Staten Island to Manhattan, humming all the way, and then walk (still humming) for an hour—through a chilly rain—to the gallery, where they broke into full-throated song. The onetime performance introduced Glynn's new papier-mâché sculptures, though they really looked like antiquities salvaged from the sea. (The show has a piracy theme.) "You never hear voices that big in a space this small," observed Public Art Fund director Nicholas Baume, one of the many struck dumb by the experience. When I asked Beverly Vanessa Hill, who had the biggest and richest voice, what it took to make the whole journey, she said, "I understood that comfort is not good for art." She was magnificent.



Left: Printmaker Gary Lichtenstein. Right: Artist Liz Glynn with opera singer Beverly Vanessa Hill.

Downtown at Maccarone, the arrangements of small objects on view, by the fully bearded Cypriot artist Panos Kyriacou, also seemed like relics from a culture you couldn't quite name. Michele Maccarone discovered his work in the joint Cypriot/Lithuanian pavilion at the last Venice Biennale and took herself straight to Cyprus to sign him up. "This kind of thing almost never happens," she said. "But I really think he's important."

Next door at Gavin Brown, eighty-six-year-old Alex Katz caused many a double-take by flying the canvases of his new portraits in opposite corners of freestanding steel frames. Lit by soft, overhead spotlights, they looked a bit like pennants that seemed to glow from within. "Until I found out who made them, I thought this was work by a young artist," said Jose Castillo Pazos, the artist whom a beaming Chrissie Iles introduced to everyone in sight as her new beau. Katz has made cutouts before, starting in 1959, when they were painted on wood, but this installation turned a whole new page on those. It also gave an extra dimension to an already deep, and deeply disconcerting, new film by Dara Friedman. Screening on two walls of the gallery's back room, with Katz's double portraits in the middle, seventeen different couples acted out their most intimate moments.



Left: Dealer Stefania Bortolami and Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis chief curator Jeffrey Usip. Right: Art Production Fund co-founder Yvonne Force Villareal with artist Leo Villareal.

Dinner for the artists was not on the gallery's expansive rooftop terrace, as dinners here usually are, but indoors, where the close quarters caused some mighty fine elbow bumping between Irving Sandler and Richard Armstrong here, Mera Rubell and Mark Handforth (celebrating his forty-fifth birthday) there. Dealer John Riepenhoff, whose Green Gallery in Milwaukee had opened a show by—guess who?—the emerging artist Gavin Brown only two days earlier, neatly sat himself amid collectors who included Michael and Susan Hort, Marty and Rebecca Eisenberg, and more. "I know it looks suspicious, with Gavin's show on and all," he admitted, "but it was really the only empty seat when I came in."

In the latest of what Yvonne Force Villareal called Brown's "notorious" toasts, he began, "If Dara and Mark become what Alex and Ada have become, that would be extraordinary." Apparently making it up as he went along, he characterized the Katz/Friedman combo by saying that "they breathe truths in each other's work that I didn't know were there before." That sounded totally right. Verne Dawson, another gallery artist, thought so. "Great show," he noted. "It's a very good time to be here."

— Linda Yablonsky