

For / sake arts

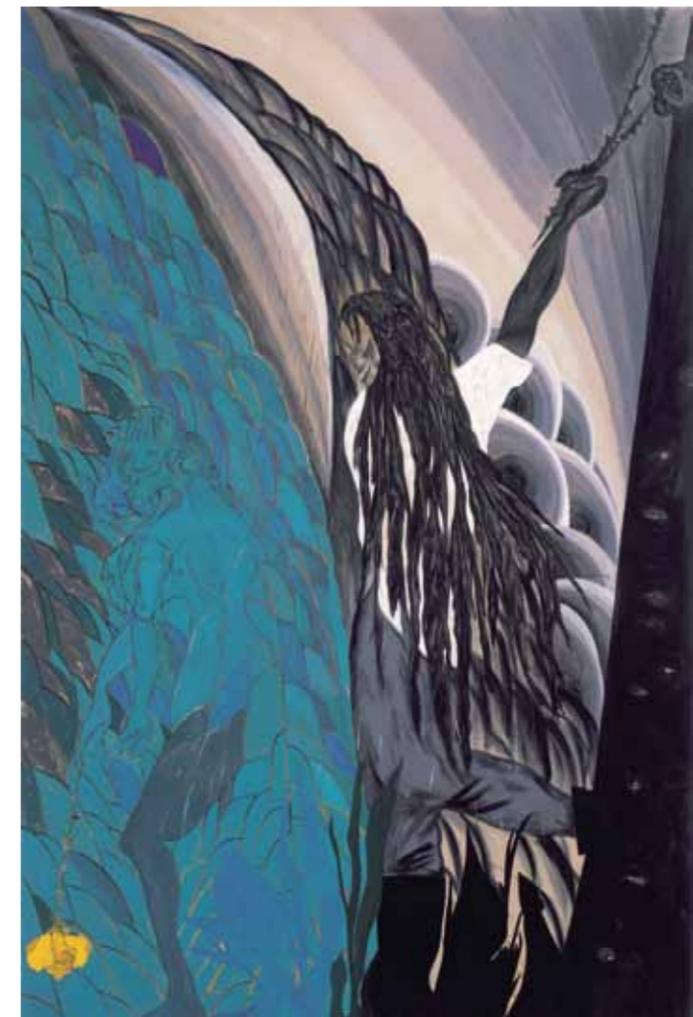
FROM CHELSEA'S BLUE CHIP GIANTS TO BROOKLYN'S HUMBLE ARTIST-OWNED SPACES TO THE PEOPLE TAKING ART INTO THEIR OWN HANDS, NEW YORK'S LEGENDARY ART SCENE IS A CHAMELEON CREATURE CAPABLE OF CONSTANT REINVENTION. PLUNGE INTO THE IMAGINATIVE CITY THAT HAS NEVER LOST ITS SWAY OVER THE GLOBAL ART WORLD

WORDS | KATHRYN CLARK

In pristine chambers stationed beneath the *Alice in Wonderland* towers of Frank Gehry's IAC building in New York's Chelsea neighbourhood, Julia Joern is busy preparing for the opening night of a Suzan Frecon showcase. Inspecting the intriguing double-hung oils, the director of the David Zwirner Gallery is excited. "[Frecon] is 70 years old," she begins. "Her paintings have a long turnaround. She works for several years on each, constantly sanding back the oils. The finish looks like lacquered gloss. Her output is small, but incredibly profound."

In the heady post-Warhol years, when galleries were priced out of Soho, it was Chelsea – with its wealth of garages, warehouses and vacant lots – that became the blank canvas onto which New York's art scene projected itself. Back then, space was the issue. Few predicted that the low-at-heel industrial area would morph into the critical mass of New York's art world. But with Barbara Gladstone, Paul Cooper, Gagosian and Matthew Marks setting a trend that has seen over 370 galleries open in Chelsea, today the west Manhattan neighbourhood is a key player in the globalised contemporary art industry. ⇒

IMAGE | Grepheast / Corbis, courtesy of David Zwirner New York





centred on the artist," Julia says. "Our artists collaborate closely with us. We are known for really managing their careers. We help with their publications, their studios – even get their kids into school. We help with all aspects of their life so they can focus on their work."

Decidedly market driven, Chelsea has developed a reputation for offering museum quality work to a savvy network of international collectors, concurrently playing a significant role in the development of contemporary art. New York Gallery Week, inaugurated this year under the direction of gallery director Casey Kaplan, enhanced this prestige while inviting the public back to the galleries.

Zwirner is best known for his quality art programming. "David works with four directors – it's a real democracy," Julia smiles. "They are always out seeing what's going on in the art world – at museums, galleries, art fairs. It's a natural process. Our artists are based all over the world. In the 1970s, you had to be in New York, but not anymore."

Zwirner has an international investor base, and several serious long-term American collectors. While the financial crash was a wake up call for everyone, Zwirner escaped unscathed, alluding to the resilience of the high-end art market. "We have the same collectors, only they're taking longer to decide," Julia explains. "The frenzy with waiting lists, opening night sellouts, buying works sight unseen – that is all over, but we didn't like that. The market has corrected. The collectors come in for private viewings to look and learn about the art. In the boom, we'd sell out on opening night. Now we sell out over the duration of a show. Sometimes David hosts dinners so that the artists can meet the collectors; there is that social aspect."

Wandering around the west-side galleries, it's pleasing to see that Chelsea has maintained a balance between the creative and commercial, in a nod to the contribution that the public has played in Chelsea's success. "People in New York want to learn, and they appreciate good art," Julia offers. "They often spend a whole Saturday going

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from gallery to gallery. There is a nice sense of community in Chelsea and people feel like they can be part of that."

As the afternoon calms the assault of summer sunshine, young people sporting vintage fashion parade along Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn's Williamsburg neighbourhood. Populated by artists and art students and loaded with small, staunchly non-commercial galleries, Williamsburg is going through the growing pains of gentrification. A different animal from Chelsea's slick, ultra-professional art machine, Brooklyn has a decidedly rebellious artistic streak; it's like comparing Coco Chanel with Vivienne Westwood in her early days. Art magazine *Wagmag* lists over 30 galleries in Williamsburg and almost 90 throughout Brooklyn. But while Chelsea carries on as usual, Brooklyn's art community is facing leaner times.

Ellen Rand, director of Art 101, sips a macchiato at Fabiane's Café on a Bedford Avenue street corner. "I woke up one day in 2004, and decided to open a gallery," she begins. "My accountant said 'it's the worst idea'." In true Brooklyn spirit, Ellen opened the gallery anyway. "I'm a painter and I know how hard it is to make it in the art world; so many talented artists are simply not being shown."

Presenting mainly local artists in an inviting space that used to be her home, Ellen does not adhere to selection criteria. "I simply have to fall in love with their work," she muses. "I started out showing paintings. Now I also have a few photographers, sculptors and the occasional conceptual piece. My gallery is open to the street, which is wonderful. People come in and out and it's an amazing exchange of energy and ideas. Money was never my goal – I do this because I love it."

Brooklyn's galleries are an eclectic bunch – like Art 101, most are artist-run spaces started simply for the love of art. Founded in 1994, Pierogi, named after a Polish dumpling, is the veritable granddaddy of Williamsburg's art scene, staging monthly solo shows featuring emerging and mid-career artists. Figureworks on North 6th Street has become a New York authority on figurative art. A charming little

space on Havemeyer Street, Cinders Gallery is currently featuring "100 Records" by Sonny Smith. "There aren't as many galleries here as there were when I opened," Ellen comments. "But there are still quite a few, and it's really nice to be part of that community."

Like Cinders and rest of Brooklyn's galleries, Art 101 is a survivor – prices range from a few hundred dollars up to about US\$7,000 – a far cry less than the sums flying around Chelsea. But for Ellen, it's just enough. "The last two years have been difficult. The high end has not been so badly affected – but all of us are. There are many emerging =>



PREVIOUS PAGE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Manhattan Bridge, from Brooklyn Street; *Death & the Roses* (2009) by Chris Ofili, represented by David Zwirner Gallery; *Plane* (Red Plank) (1988 – 1993) by minimalist artist John McCracken
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The entrance to Art 101 on Grand Street, Williamsburg; Brooklyn is an emerging art hub; street art in Williamsburg; "Family" by Dylan Williams, represented by Art 101

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your dog for its birthday, can you imagine? It's the fall of our civilisation! People buy a diamond dog collar, but they won't pay for art. Goodness knows what tomorrow will bring.”

One interesting development has been the emergence of “alternative space projects”. Similar to retail “pop up shops”, these short-duration nomadic art shows encompass small exhibitions in unconventional spaces – usually people's homes – with the intent of celebrating art rather than selling it. Although there are

artists whose work can be acquired for very reasonable amounts. But because of the financial crash, many art buyers are afraid to buy here, and instead go to Chelsea because the art there has been through the process. Art has become a commodity and I feel sad about that. But overall, it's been a wonderful ride.”

Ellen is currently refurbishing Art 101 ahead of the upcoming show “What Art Can Do”, a retrospective of the work of six Brooklyn gallery directors. When discussing his motives, featured artist Richard Timperio, director of the Sideshow Gallery, perhaps speaks for all: “[I intended] to create a space that would foster young Williamsburg artists, giving them exposure and a means to create a dialogue with the larger art community. I wanted to provide a forum for all art that attains a high quality and embodies integrity, regardless of style or approach, where art is the only thing that matters.”

Looking at the people walking their dogs in the street, Ellen smiles. “People in New York love their dogs. There are places you can take



now a scattering of projects, the original outfit was Parlour Door, conceived by Ciara Gilmartin and Leslie Rosa-Stumpf, perhaps unsurprisingly in Brooklyn. The first Parlour was held in October 2008, and shows have been held almost every month since.

“Art needed to be jump started,” says Ciara, a 13-year New York resident originally from England. “It had become so insulated in a five block radius [in Chelsea]. But Brooklyn is a community full of artists. We wanted to create a platform for young artists with no gallery. We wanted to open it up, to give artists more freedom to show without the pressure of selling. We thought that if we held shows in a different place each time, it would challenge both us as curators and artists to think outside the ‘white cube.’”

The typical Parlour show encompasses an install on the Friday, an opening night on Saturday and viewing by appointment on Sunday. “Most people come to the opening night,” says Ciara. “We have a loyal group that comes to every one, and there are always new faces. Art can be cruel at times, and it's great to have such solid support.” Using people's homes as exhibition spaces is an interesting challenge. “We ask our hosts not to change anything. We may rearrange the furniture to complement the art, but it's all quite natural. We bring food and wine and it's more comfortable than a gallery. It's also interesting because art is ultimately destined for people's homes.”

Some have suggested that Parlour was a pragmatic response to the financial crash – pieces have been sold at just four of the project's 17 shows thus far. But Ciara maintains that Parlour was in the works for a long time. “The crash definitely made



IMAGES | Jason Schmidt, courtesy David Zwirner, New York

people question how art could survive during tough times,” Ciara admits. “But this had to happen regardless. Parlour was a reaction to the lacklustre art world, whose goals and format had not changed for ages. We wanted to support our artist friends and ourselves as curators. Now it's more important than ever as galleries are closing down.”

To date, Parlour has visited four out of the five New York boroughs. Highlights have included an unforgettable Queens show featuring the delicate art of taxidermy, and a Staten Island project that was memorable for the journey. “We want to bring art to all five boroughs,” Ciara says. “This is an interesting time in history. As humans, we need to reflect on our role in the world. Artists are sensitive to their surroundings, and it was inevitable that this would come up in their work.”



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: “Mother” by Portuguese artist Marlene Dumas, represented by David Zwirner; visitors at a Parlour Door opening night; an apartment converted into a Parlour art show; Leslie Rosa-Stumpf and Ciara Gilmartin, the creators of Parlour Door; David Zwirner with artwork from David Flavin

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“Ultimately, while we come up with and curate the shows, the artists still have ownership,” Ciara finishes. “It creates a harmonious relationship between us and them. We want art to be organic, experimental and spontaneous like it was in the sixties and seventies. We hope Parlour will become like a family and community.”

So as Chelsea continues to reframe the borders of contemporary art, and Brooklyn pushes on doing the best it can, Leslie and Ciara go around to open studios, developing their networks, visiting art schools and adding to their increasingly ambitious bucket list of show ideas. The girls are certainly on to something. In uncertain financial times, the idea of art as a community is critical to its survival. But this shouldn't be too much of a problem. This is New York City, after all. ☺

EXPERIENCE NEW YORK

FOR DINING: THE PARK

CS Lewis might have come up with The Park as a side dish to his iconic Narnia series, so romantic is this parking garage-turned Chelsea dining institution. Blurring the line between indoors and outdoors, leafy trees reach towards a glass ceiling, and outdoor-style tables are clustered around the cobblestones. Sharp staff deliver fresh vintages and mouthwatering dishes such as zingy calamari with chipotle aioli and oven baked sea bass with white bean salad.

WWW.THEPARKNYC.COM

FOR ART: THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The shining lighthouse in New York's art world, MOMA is the industry's standard bearer and the port of call for anyone needing a crash course in modern art. MOMA houses an unrivalled array of exhibitions spanning photography, design, urban planning, painting, sculpture and more. The sculpture garden is a microcosm of New York – tangled with a citizenship of tourists and children, art students and hedge-fund managers all taking something different from the experience.

WWW.MOMA.ORG

FOR AN ESCAPE: THE CATSKILLS

Immortalised in the classic film *Dirty Dancing*, the Catskills region has become a favourite escape. An easy drive from Manhattan, the Catskill Escarpment soars up from the Hudson Valley. The area is studded with arty towns, luxury lodges, walking trails and campsites all capitalizing on the region's striking beauty. There is also a village called Woodstock, but that's another story.

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