

Behind the Scenes

C. Sean Horton

The New York dealer tells us about how his path to becoming a gallerist has just been bad luck

EJG: How did you build your gallery roster? What factors do you consider when taking on an artist?

CSH: My roster began with Peter Gallo, a close friend from Vermont, and Asuka Ohsawa, with whom I went to grad school at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. From there, I tried to establish a niche by exhibiting work that deals with subjects like religion, sexuality, regionalism, and semiotics. Over the four years the roster has changed, and as I learned how to operate the gallery my criteria matured. It's important that I think the work is relevant to contemporary culture and has the potential to become historically significant, that I can have a good working relationship with the artist, and that I can sell the work or that it helps form a critical context for the other artists whom I represent.

EJG: In addition to your gallery on the Lower East Side, you also have a space on the Chelsea. Why the L.E.S.? How did you first decide on your space?

CSH: I wish I could say that I had the foresight to know that the Lower East Side was to become a destination for young galleries, but I chose the neighborhood because I appreciated the entrepreneurial spirit of the other small businesses there. I had a lot of respect for the five or so galleries that were pioneers there, like CANADA, Rivington Arms, and Orchard, so I knew at least I'd have good neighbors. I was also fortunate to find a cheap storefront, and I figured I could manage to stay open for at least three months. The super told me that Jesus wanted me to have the space—and really, who can argue with Jesus?



EJG: How did you decide on having a space in Berlin?

CSH: I make decisions very intuitively. I was in Berlin last summer and I was really impressed with the scene there, with the city as a whole, and I wanted to go back and be a part of that dialogue. This summer, I planned to do a one or two month pop-up space and I found a listing for a storefront. I took that and did a

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small show or two. And while I was there I found a space, sort of by accident—a large space and very inexpensive. So it seemed possible to have that as a year-round exhibition space. In fact, the entire year's operating costs are less than what it costs to have the smallest booth at the Armory Show for one weekend. So it makes sense and it's a great way to establish a dialogue between Berlin and New York, and that's what I hope to develop in the future. I'd like to grow with the artists I'm working with and add more European artists to the roster as well.

EJG: What are the challenges with running multiple spaces?

CSH: I think the challenge with operating several spaces is the staffing. Collectors expect the owner to be in the gallery when they come visit, and it's hard to be in three places at once. You want to have someone in each location who is the face of the gallery, who can connect with people when they come in, can educate people about the exhibitions and the gallery's history and roster. It's very difficult to find someone who has a similar investment in the overall project of the gallery. For me, that's the major challenge. The physical spaces themselves are the real benefit because you have more space to exhibit artists, and to me it makes more sense to have three smaller spaces in three locations as opposed to one larger space in one location.

EJG: Would you say that Horton Gallery has an aesthetic? How would you categorize it?

CSH: In some ways, Roberta Smith of *The New York Times* was correct—the gallery's aesthetic is one that exhibits quirky paintings by unknown artists. Obviously, I think the artists are becoming more well known than they were. I favor painting that has some sort of conviction behind it. It needs to be as sincere as possible

and communicate a unique vision of the world. I wouldn't categorize that as figurative or abstract or anything like that—I think those labels are a little too tricky—but something that has to do with materiality and formally striking objects. I also like the story behind what's being made, so I think that I'm drawn to artists who have interesting personal stories as well. It helps me understand the work in terms of sincerity, and that's important.

EJG: You've worked with a number of artists from *New American Paintings* and several emerging artists. Why emerging work?

CSH: I show an intergenerational mix of emerging and mid-career artists, some of which have previously been overlooked by the marketplace. The idea of working with my peers and friends makes my job more pleasurable and interesting. It allows me to develop close relationships and help nurture an artist's career at crucial moments. For me, the experience and dialogue that comes from those relationships is more rewarding than selling secondary-market works for larger profits, for example. It's a great thing when art and commerce join forces and allow someone to have a career as an artist.

EJG: How did you inevitably become a dealer? What was your path to becoming a gallerist?

CSH: Like a lot of art dealers, I am a failed artist. In my experience, most art dealers are either born into a family of art professionals, have access to large sums of money, or are failed artists. Unfortunately, I'm in the latter category. It also seems like most successful people in the art world are either beautiful, cool, or short. Again, unfortunately, I'm in the latter category. I wish I could say my path to becoming a dealer had something to do with genes or riches, but it's just been bad luck. ■