



NEW YORK: GALLERIES 'MIGRATE' TO THE LOWER EAST SIDE

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Numerous galleries have set up shop on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the last few years, with the New Museum's high-tech 52,000 square foot edifice slated for completion in late 2007. It rises above the Bowery like a phoenix next to the fancy new condominiums and rooftop additions that soar as many as ten stories high over their original structures, taking the place of the homeless shelters and flea-bag hotels that historically comprised skid row.

When the short-lived era of East Village art galleries ended in the mid 1980s, gallerists either moved their operations to big-money Soho or closed. But a new hardcore scene developed further south along Rivington Street, with galleries such as

No Se No, Freddie the Dreamer, Jim C's La Casa Nada, and the veritable palace of the scene, the B.A.D. Museum (Bohemia After Dark), which was on the Bowery, just a couple of hundred yards from where the New Museum is being built today. Still there, ABC No Rio is the longest running art space in the neighbourhood, but it keeps unfathomable hours. Throughout the 1990s fledgling galleries such as Livestock, run by former East Village gallery owner, Rich Collichio, came and went, unable to compete with the burgeoning Chelsea enterprises, while deviant and start-up spaces headed across the river to Williamsburgh. Esso Gallery opened in 1996 on Chrystie Street, but moved to Chelsea in 2000 along with the first few waves of galleries opening there, following the lead of the DIA Art Foundation.

The New Museum's move to the Bowery will inevitably have further gentrifying effects on the locality, but not to the extent of usurping the established Chelsea art Mecca. Love it or hate it, it's not going anywhere for a long time. There are half a dozen well-funded non-profits in Long Island City, Queens, and several in Harlem, but they have not stolen Chelsea's thunder. Last year we saw many of the more successful Brooklyn galleries migrating to an already glutted Chelsea, in much the same fashion as the East Village galleries moving to Soho, before losing their artists to gallerists who had already secured leases for the higher-status real estate. The styles and quality of the artwork being exhibited in the Lower East Side galleries today is no different from what is being shown elsewhere in the city, or in the art world at large. But there is a lot of the freewheeling wild-west spirit. The comings and goings of the gallery business are essentially dictated by the real-estate market and the necessity of affordable, accessible space.

Now, with Chelsea overwhelmed and Williamsburgh becoming old news, the Lower East Side is downtown's last frontier. Michelle Maccarone pretty much started this latest generation of galleries, opening in 2001 in a three-story building far east on Canal Street, but she is currently moving to a 3000-plus square foot space in the far west Village/Soho. Another pioneer, Reena Spaulings, who specialises in conceptual,



Above: Raha Raissni, installation view of 'Siele', 2006. Courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, NY Below: Francois Boué, Malachi Farrell, Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard, installation view of 'Collapsible Monuments', 2007. Courtesy: Thrust Projects, NY. Bottom: Scott Lyall, installation view of 'a dancer dances', 2006. Courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, NY

neo-Dadaist art, has recently relocated to just a few blocks from her original spot. In fact, Reena Spaulings is a fictitious individual – group projects are displayed as being the artwork of this one elusive persona. On Chrystie Street, hard-to-find Canada shows somewhat more conventional work – paintings and objects, anyway. Nearby, Miguel Abreu's taste tends towards conceptual art, surrealism, and a sort of smart expressionism. The non-profit Cuchifritos is located inside Essex Street Market, where you can still munch an eggroll or buy vegetables while admiring the exhibition. Writer/curator David Gibson organised two exhibitions there, as well as several at the Educational Alliance not far away. Back on Rivington Street, another non-profit, Participant, shows installations and performative works, while Gallery 128 presents a variety of emerging artists. Naga closed a little while ago, and Rivington Arms moved a few blocks recently, but kept the name. Their new place is close to the four-year-old Jen Beckman gallery, which shows photography and various small works, and to 33 Bond which is set to open imminently.

Technically, these last three are not really in the Lower East Side. The influx spills over into the surrounding neighbourhoods of the East

Village and Soho. Off Rivington, 50 yards up Freeman's Alley, Silo was ahead of its time, and, unable to renegotiate a reasonable lease, closed this winter after two and a half years, even though the New Museum presciently mounted a show in the space in 2004. Last summer, Home Sweet Home gallery opened and closed after just one show, but Chelsea's Envoy has annexed the space. The latest

operation to take up tenancy is called 127: raw art and short events/exhibitions will be their format. Invisible NYC cohabits with a tattoo parlour, and there was a line around the block recently to see the street-art show arranged by a real-estate developer in a building destined for extensive renovations. Painter Tony Zito runs his own portrait gallery on Ludlow Street, staying open late to catch the

local bar crowd. James Fuentes LLC is a brand-new tiny project space with a courtyard that has lots of possibility, and Orchard 47 is a three-year co-operative gallery, destined to terminate next year.

There are at least a further dozen art spaces in the area, if you can find them. Basement Aire is literally in a basement. Some are open only on the weekends, others keep standard hours. Sunday (Str: Us, Free Us) just opened in Livestock's old space, where Sean Horton, the proprietor, is interested in exhibiting 'emblematic work, and overlooked artists'. The Fusion Museum is still there after some 20 years on and off, while Aidon Savoy is a comfortable four and a half years old. V & A and Thrust are both in commercial buildings in Chinatown (which comprises most of the Lower East Side), where you wouldn't expect to find an art gallery. Meanwhile, Asia Song Society shows only Asian artists. Numerous other galleries have come and gone in fits and sputters for years, but word on the street is that there are half a dozen new venues about to open their doors, and others are presently shopping for space in the area. Once the glittering monolith on the Bowery opens there will only be a short window of time between ultra-hip hotbed and, 'There goes the neighbourhood.'

