

## The wild west of NYC's galleries

BY SHANE McADAMS

Like most, I often end up taking the path of least resistance on a Saturday afternoon when I get the art itch. Invariably, I exit the Whitney or the Met wondering why I didn't embark on a more ambitious art excursion. MoMa's fine, but it's always there. And, let's face it, slaking your thirst for art at a museum on a Saturday can be as quenching as waiting in line to be sprayed in the face by a fire hose. But somehow we're comforted by knowing where they're doing the hosing.

The reason you've probably never been to **Participant Inc.**, **Canada**, **Sunday**, **James Fuentes LLC**, or any of the dozens of great low-profile venues on the Lower East Side, is because it's more of a sprawling wetlands than a watering hole. If an efficient art hop is what you're after, the Lower East Side isn't your thing; it takes detective and legwork to appreciate. Beyond being decentralized, the galleries downtown tend to keep a low profile. They don't collaborate to produce guide books and maps and they don't operate out of palatial galleries with frosted glass storefronts beckoning weekenders to come in and do figure eights before leaving twenty seconds later. They cater to a more discriminating gallery goer who plans on sticking around for a while.

Additionally, the Lower East Side and downtown community of art spaces seem to evolve faster than taxonomy can keep up. Galleries have always come and gone with the whims and bankrolls of their proprietors, but the L.E.S. spaces have a particularly day-by-day feel that gives them a unique vitality — it's the Wild West to Chelsea's rodeo. Most of these downtown holes-in-the-wall began as labors of love, often by artists, without the war chests, armies of employees, and histories of Chelsea's stalwarts, and because of this, or in spite of it, their programming has steered clear of the merchandizing flavor of its cross-town, blue-chip counterparts. As a result, the shows downtown are intimate, sophisticated, and usually well worth the tortuous path you'll beat around the lower half of Manhattan to find them.

Next time the urge hits you, take the F train to 2nd Avenue and head first to **Sunday** at 237 Eldridge Street. The gallery attendant who will greet you will also be its owner, director, installer, designer and window washer, C. Sean Horton, an avuncular, bearded art junkie who loves vintage country western music and Dr. Pepper. Horton literally built the interior



Villager photo by Geoff Smith

**C. Sean Horton, one of the pioneering gallerists on the Lower East Side, in front of his storefront art space, Sunday.**

himself, his keen eye has been honed from inside the studio, and it shows. In its first several months, the gallery has mounted a string of impressive exhibitions including Ed Blackburn's biblically inspired paintings and Gayleen Aiken's diaristic crayon and pen reflections on her native Vermont community.

Rivington Street a few blocks south has become the de-facto hub of the L.E.S. art district, even though its highest profile

at 102 Rivington, recently moved to 2nd Avenue. It still has its draws though. The convention-defying non-profit, **Participant Inc.**, run by the incomparable Lia Gangitano, has made a routine of putting on inventive cross-disciplinary, often collaborative projects at its space at 95 Rivington for the past six years, and continues to make waves that crash beyond Delancey. Close by, a venerable mainstay that's been in the area for over two decades,