

## The New York Times

ART & DESIGN | GALLERY GUIDE

### The Lower East Side as Petri Dish

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*This article is part of our spring gallery guide.*

OVER the past 18 months or so, the Lower East Side has become gallery central for New York City. You can't throw a cellphone without hitting a gallery, and quite a few are moving targets. Biggish Chelsea galleries are opening outposts here. Freshman dealers are setting up starter spaces, sometimes while still learning the trade at established galleries, and starters have graduated to larger or more accessible places. And as always, artists continue to take the initiative, opening exhibition spaces of their own. A few art dealers have joined forces to make ends meet.

The neighborhood is like a busy petri dish displaying many stages of the gallery life cycle. Building one of these things and making it last is consuming and risky. It is impressive and also moving to walk the streets of this neighborhood and realize how many people want to take that risk.

Among the new arrivals are smaller Chelsea galleries like Foxy Production, which relocated to a sunny space on Chatham Square and opened with a show of gallery artists. Another transplant, Andrew Edlin, specializing in outsider art, is now ensconced on the Bowery and has mounted an impressive survey of the multi-mediums genius Eugene Von Bruenchenhein. Chelsea's Derek Eller will open on Broome Street on May 6 with the artist Peter Linde Busk. The artist-run Essex Flowers has graduated from the basement of a flower shop to ground-floor quarters on Ludlow Street and now has Saturday as well as Sunday hours. And a few local galleries already have annexes here, most notably Miguel Abreu, among the most esoteric brands in the neighborhood. Starting on Sunday that gallery's large Eldridge Street space will show the videos, film stills and annotated scripts of the uncompromising French independent filmmakers Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, coinciding with their retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art.

Here are several standout shows.

**PIEROGI** Less than three weeks ago, Pierogi, a Williamsburg stalwart, made a solid landing on Suffolk Street with "The Felicific Calculus," the Manhattan debut of Ward

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Shelley, whom it has shown since 2001. Mr. Shelley is best known for offsetting his dystopian worldview with exuberant amounts of information, true and invented. On this occasion he has kitted out Pierogi's fresh, lovely space as a bookshop or library, hanging his chartlike paintings on paper among 20 fake bookshelves filled with hundreds of fake books that have a realistic ring. The charts sometimes focus on art but mostly track the end of the world by cars, shopping, climate change and so on. One of the most colorful is "Work, Spend, Forget," the history of consumer desire told as the dissection of a frog. The bookshelves and books together form "The Last Library," a continuing collaboration with the artist Douglas Paulson. The titles, by authors fictional and real, have a certain bite, as in "Master a Fearful Rhetoric" by "Newt Gingrich." All this may invite extended browsing in those whose interests include art, literature, history, politics, humor or science. Note the varieties of fonts Mr. Shelley and Mr. Paulson have digitally devised for the book spines.

**MITCHELL ALGUS** This veteran of Chelsea and SoHo opened on Delancey and Norfolk in January, continuing his revisionist project, now in its third decade, of bringing overlooked artists and patches of art history to light. The latest effort and one of his best is "Concept, Performance, Documentation, Language," an assembly of over 100 works mostly from the early 1970s. It tracks second-wave Conceptualists as they bent the relatively mandarin approaches of the first toward real life, encompassing the body (and feminism), the environment and popular culture while putting photographs and texts to new uses. The show resurrects work by artists like James Collins, Roger Welch, Neke Carson and Eunice Golden; shines a light on Story Art, Conceptual Art's second cousin; and includes little-seen early pieces by Betty Tompkins and Jaime Davidovich. This is a signal curatorial achievement.

**BRIDGET DONAHUE** Another strong show is Jessi Reaves's debut at the gallery established on the Bowery last year by Bridget Donahue, formerly a director at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, which also now has a space in the neighborhood. Ms. Reaves makes sculpture that is also furniture, not so much by blurring their shared border as by laying waste to it. Endowed with an aggressive and unsettling wit, her mutant chairs, tables and cabinets take bricolage to a new level, cobbling together found materials, objects large and small, and furniture scraps and innards. A sawdustlike glue is big, as are exposed foam, hand-carved woods, creative upholstery and startling contrasts of materials. Homages abound: Noguchi's classic 1947 coffee table is redone using sliced car doors for the mirroring forms of its base, conjuring Richard Prince. A butterfly chair is rendered in lavender suede and heavy wood, not canvas and tensile metal. I'm not sure how genuinely comfortable some of these pieces are, but they speak in tongues design-wise, turning the language inside out and making a wonderful noise.

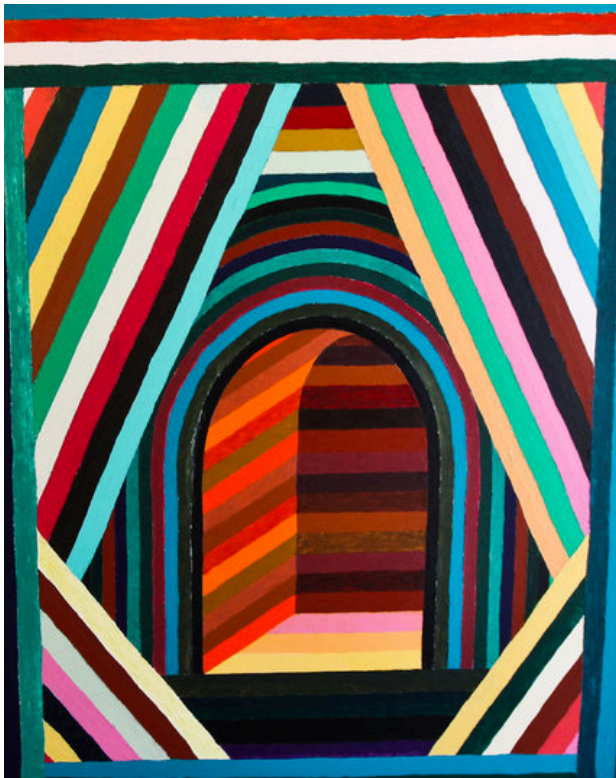
**CANADA** This 14-year veteran of these parts added the adjacent storefront to its Broome Street space in January, enabling a double bill of two vociferous solo shows that channel aspects of the art of the 1980s. In "Skin Game" in the main space, the maverick performance artist and erstwhile sculptor Michael Mahalchick riffs on appropriation and popular culture.

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His cheek-to-jowl hang of moldering collages inflicted on vintage rock posters is often darkly visionary. The chiropractor's table at the center of the room serves Mr. Mahalchick in his performances, which will occur Friday evening and on May 1.

In the new adjunct space, Alicia Gibson is making her New York solo debut with "Purgatory Emporium," a crowd of paintings that bedevil Neo-Expressionism and graffiti art with multitudes of words, brushwork and color. Some work better than others, with the emptier, quieter ones making the strongest impression, but there is no questioning the talent. Ms. Gibson intends to make her presence felt, and so far is not ruling out ranting.



"Two Gone Over," a work by Matt Kleberg on display at Mulherin New York.

Credit Byron Smith for The New York Times

**MULHERIN NEW YORK** Sonia Dutton and Katharine Mulherin, whose main base is Toronto, have teamed up in a space on Forsyth Street, where they are taking turns mounting shows. (They're in the former home of Callicoon Fine Arts, now around the corner.) Ms. Mulherin is taking her at-bat with a display of new paintings by Matt Kleberg, who complicates the parallel stripes of modernism with light and shadow, wilder colors and warped spaces that conjure abstract prosceniums and archways. The endearing results pay homage to Frank Stella but take visionary liberties. "Hankerings," the title here, suits the paintings' allure; there is a concurrent "Hankerings" show at Morgan Lehman in Chelsea.

**ROMEO** Aurel Schmidt is another young artist who has turned proactive where galleries are concerned. She is known for a somewhat refined Surrealistic figurative style, especially in large drawings. In recent months she has, mostly on her own, wrested into existence an exhibition space that will concentrate on works on paper, naming it Romeo. The inaugural

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exhibition features drawings, prints and related works by about 40 artists, known and not, from several generations. Especially excellent is “Swinburne’s Pasiphae,” a video by Mary Reid Kelley replete with her signature hand-drawn style and stagy recitation. Other familiar names include Stanya Kahn, Anton van Dalen (whose solo show is next at Romeo), Gina Beavers, Rita Ackermann and Kinke Kooi, outdoing herself in a mostly green hyper-real fantasy mix of entrailslike plants and interiors. The artists unfamiliar to me include Jacques Louis Vidal and Stefanie Popp; Christopher Milic (a 24-year-old skateboarder); Alexander Nolan; Nate Antolik; and Maria Calandra, who specializes in graphite drawings of other artists’ studios and contributes a view of the Romeo show being installed. Pleasantly, there’s not much glass between you and the art here; it’s mostly pinned directly to the wall.

**JAMES COHAN** The neighborhood has acquired its first “gallery building,” a four-story, four-gallery structure at 291 Grand Street. If the address has an art-historical ring that’s because Alfred Stieglitz named his first gallery, founded in 1907, 291 (its number on Fifth Avenue). On the ground floor, the James Cohan Gallery of Chelsea has opened an outpost that is showing “The Living Need Light, the Dead Need Music,” a magical new video by the Propeller Group, an artists’ collective with members based in Hanoi, Vietnam, and Los Angeles. Set in Vietnam, the video follows a brass band and its charismatic bandmaster, often in concert with snake swallows and fire eaters, through rituals and adventures — a funeral, a street festival and a muddy march into the sea. The camera returns repeatedly to a transgender youth whose fluid sexuality and shifting persona feel like the heart of the matter. (Mr. Brown’s space is in this building, as is 47 Canal; both will open shows in early May.)

**NATHALIE KARG** On the top floor of 291 Grand Street, Nathalie Karg, who recently relocated from the East Village, is showing abstract paintings by Nathlie Provosty, in her commercial-gallery debut. Ms. Provosty approaches the modernist monochrome as a convention of unlimited possibility. Especially in the large blue-black canvases that contrast matte and glossy, atmospheric and geometric, she effectively complicates the perceptual mysteries of Ad Reinhardt’s Black Paintings with her own sense of scale, atmosphere and material punch. This is no mean feat.

## Don’t Miss

James Fuentes, a Lower East Side original now in his second space, has a show (through Sunday) of the American-South African photographer Roger Ballen, who has continued his gray-on-gray collaborations with people on the margins. These carefully staged photographs portray the extralegal inhabitants of an abandoned house outside Johannesburg, often against walls decorated with their artwork. Shades of Beckett, Miró and Dubuffet drift about in the ether; harsh reality and elegant artifice keep each other at bay.