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TRAVELMAG

Like a Local: The Best Art Galleries on the Lower East Side

By Christopher Kompanek

Once home to working class Jewish immigrants, the Lower East Side has become a hotbed of creativity for artists of all stripes. Comprised of new stores by young gallery owners and veterans who have relocated from the pricier, established areas of Chelsea and SoHo, the art scene here is rich and varied, steadily building its reputation as one of the hottest art gallery scenes in the city.



Inside Nicelle Beauchene (Photo: Nicelle Beauchene Gallery)

Below are ten of the best places to spend an afternoon perusing in the Lower East Side.

Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

After eight years of working in Chelsea galleries, Nicelle Beauchene opened her own in 2008. Artists exhibited here have gone on to the Whitney Biennial, among other esteemed places. Recent exhibitions include Vanessa Maltese's curious installation of scattered shoes, "Company." Yevgeniya Baras's masterfully mysterious "All Inside of

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Itself, Close” contained a series of richly covered oil canvases depicting lush abstract landscapes, seemingly pulled from deep wondrous dreams.

327 Broome St

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Located just a stone’s throw from the contemporary art mecca The New Museum, this gallery went from 650 square feet to over 3,200. The expanded digs allow for extensive exhibitions of American artists. Recent highlights include the vibrant large-scale works of Aiko Hachisuka, Tschabalala Self, and Caroline Wells Chandler, which are as playful as they are rich in color. Volker Huller’s gorgeous abstract works, with a nod to cubism, are another highlight.

195 Chrystie St

Richard Taittinger Gallery



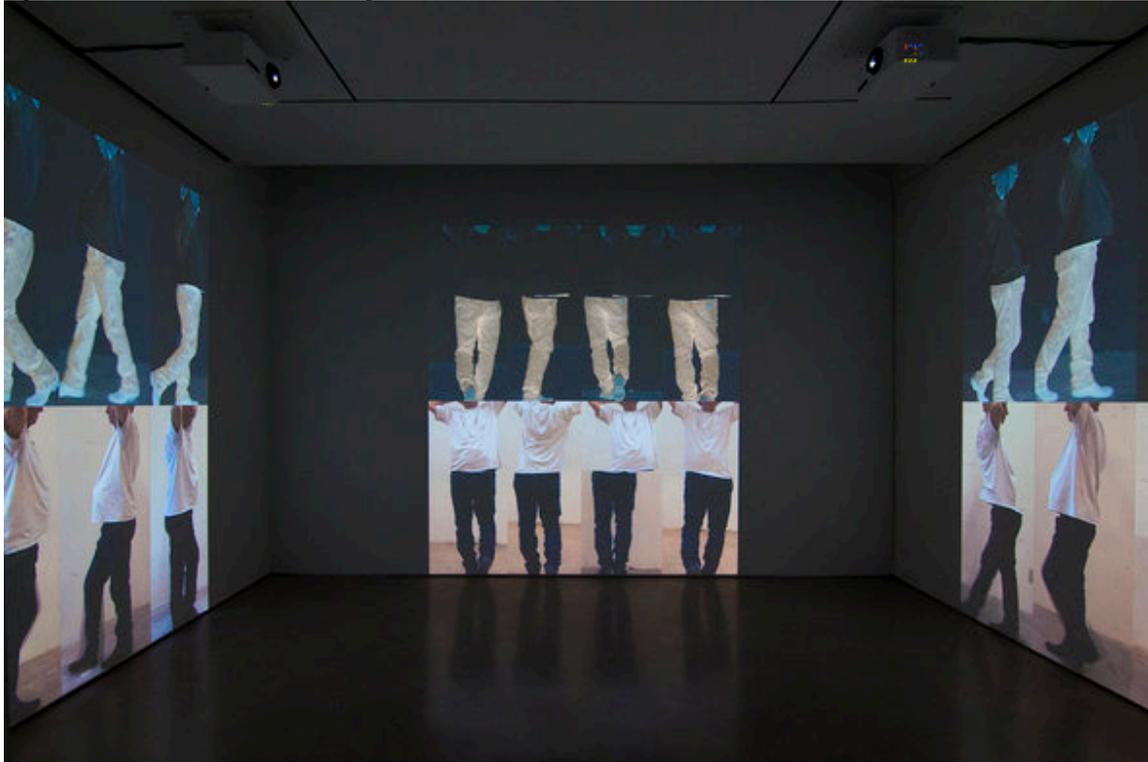
Inside Richard Taittinger Gallery (Photo: Richard Taittinger Gallery)

Owned by a champagne scion with a passion for contemporary art, this gallery regularly exhibits some of the most dynamic contemporary artists from around the globe. Recent exhibits include Frances Goodman’s eye-catching “Rapaciously Yours,” which marked the South African artist’s first major solo exhibition in the United States. In one piece, a giant sculpture of a tongue extends from the wall, while a painting features fingers beckoning the viewer inside a pair of ruby-glossed lips.

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154 Ludlow St

Sperone Westwater Gallery



Bruce Nauman's "Contrapposto Studies, i through vii" at Sperone Westwater (Photo: Sperone Westwater)

Award-winning architects Foster + Partners designed this stunning space when the gallery moved from its former location in the Meatpacking District. Its signature feature is a red-boxed moving gallery that can be seen from the street and does double duty as an elevator to transport patrons to the upper floor exhibitions. Known for exhibiting some of Bruce Nauman's earliest shows, the gallery continues to host revered pioneers, like Katherine Bradford, whose recent exhibition of six-large scale paintings explore the vast expanse of space and the beauty to be found inside dark corners of the universe.

257 Bowery

Rachel Uffner Gallery



This expanded bi-level space focuses on established artists with big museum shows under their belt. Recent exhibitions include Curtis Talwst Santiago's beguiling show "Drawings and Miniatures." Expressive charcoal drawings explore the artist's Trinidadian upbringing in Canada, while tiny, hand-held sculptures show his meticulous attention to detail. Joanne Greenbaum's series of untitled oil paintings are a perfect expression of geometric expression and seem to grapple with the mysteries of the universe.

170 Suffolk St

Y Gallery

Inside Y Gallery (Photo: Y Gallery)

Y aims to spark a dialogue among a wide range of communities with striking exhibits like Irving Morazan's "Xolo Yawning," named after the only dog indigenous to the Americas. The solo exhibition explores the author's Mayan heritage, with intricately imagined bronze sculptures, each expressing a multitude of ideas at war with themselves. Most arresting is a castle with a shark bursting out of one end and a dragon roaring through the other.

319 Grand St

Kerry Schuss

The eponymous owner of this shoebox, storefront gallery has a reputation for discovering obscure gems. His shows are not hewed to any gathering trend, but to a visceral appreciation for unlikely beauty. Of many standouts is "The Sun Spoke," a solo exhibit

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by the inventive Anna Rosen, who uses found materials like rope, fabrics and bicycle tubes to create intricately dense tableaus. “Easy Breezy Death Wagon,” a portrait that hides behind a colorful veil of abstraction, is particularly memorable.

34 Orchard St

James Fuentes Gallery



The green entrance of James Fuentes Gallery (Photo: James Fuentes Gallery)

Tucked inside a windowless dense, dark green façade, this gallery owned by Lower East Side native James Fuentes represents the diversity of the neighborhood. One recent highlight was Queens native Lizzi Bougatsos’s red-hued exploration of the pageantry of Catholicism, entitled “Work Habits.” Another was Benjamin Senior’s colorful multicultural portraits of life in motion, entitled “Black Sun.” Inspired by classicists like Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Senior paints people into the picture who have long been left out of the frame and does so in a regal manner.

55 Delancey St

Cuchifritos Gallery + Project Space



Inside Cuchifritos Gallery (Photo: Bill Massey)

This unique endeavor offers gallery space to hundreds of independent curators inside the Essex Street Market. The recent exhibit “Nom Nom Ohm: When Life Gives You Lemons, Make Chandeliers” featured two ornate chandeliers: one hung high, with lemons dangling majestically from its arms, and another low, with electrical wires leading down to a scattered group of root vegetables. Another thought-provoking exhibit, “On the Subversion of Opacity,” drew on a quote by noted novelist Italo Calvino to create a site-specific installation that explored reality as a fictional myth.

120 Essex St

Lesley Heller Workspace



Inside Lesley Heller Gallery (Photo: Lesley Heller Gallery)

This contemporary gallery is interested in creating a cross-generational conversation among artists, critics, curators and collectors, while also engaging the general public with a series of lectures, poetry readings and live performances. The exhibitions themselves explode with a sense of vibrant urgency. A recent exhibit of video art, “A Room Behind a Room,” featured a chunk of earth being propelled through the sky.

54 Orchard St

Spencer Brownstone Gallery

Formerly located in SoHo, this venerable gallery is now in the heart of the Lower East Side. Exhibitions cover a wide range of artists from across the globe, with works in sculpture, installation and video, as well as painting. “Control Over Nature” brought together Amon Tobin’s acoustic installation with Tessa Farmer’s sculptures of eerie nature scenes, resulting in a show that indulged the senses.

170B Suffolk St