

Lower art side

A slew of galleries have abandoned West Chelsea and reopened in the shadow of the spanking New Museum. Bowery bums, make way for starving artists.

By Howard Halle

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The rest of the country may be sweating out a wave of layoffs and foreclosures precipitated by the subprime-mortgage crisis, but we New Yorkers are doing just fine, thank you very much. Especially in two key areas: the art and real-estate markets.

You could argue that there have been setbacks. Over the past several months, Red Hook has seen a flurry of for rent notices as trendy eateries and bars shutter, leading many to reclassify the formerly red-hot zone as *floundering*. Meanwhile, at recent auctions, Christie's bidders dissed a Van Gogh expected to fetch \$30-something million, and at Sotheby's, Warhol's portrait of Liz Taylor went for a few mil less than its \$25 million low-end estimate.

But the boom is going full blast in another area, once considered just as unlikely for a glamour makeover as the Hook: the Bowery and the Lower East Side. It's also where a new gallery neighborhood (that intersection of art and real estate) is picking up steam, thanks in no small measure to the arrival of the sleek new New Museum building on Bowery—it opens Saturday 1 with a nonstop 30-hour party and an inaugural exhibit, "Unmonumental," that surveys today's hot artists making sculpture out of, well, junk.

In the past year or so, as the silvery stack designed by the architectural firm Sejima + Nishizawa/SANAA took shape, more and more galleries began hanging out their shingles in the neighborhood. Today they number at least 25. "Of course it's a factor," says Envoy Gallery's Jimi Dams, of the New Museum's looming presence. "Not for me, but for the people planning to be part of a new It area."

"We were drawn to the Lower East Side in large part because of its character as an art neighborhood," says Lisa Phillips, the museum's director. "[It's] a creative center, home to generations of artists and writers and musicians. Galleries who are opening spaces on the Lower East Side are coming to the neighborhood for the same reasons we did."

The influx isn't limited to neophyte dealers looking to use the cachet of the neighborhood to brand themselves and the artists they represent. There are also established galleries relocating from other areas, like Janos Gat Gallery, formerly of the Upper East Side, and Feature, Inc., which used to be in Chelsea. These venues are now on the Bowery, near the New Museum, but as both Dams and Philip Grauer of Chinatown's Canada gallery allow, the cool factor isn't the only reason people are moving.

"Leases are up in Chelsea for a lot of places," notes Grauer. "It's getting expensive there. I think there's an urgent need for people to relocate." Miguel Abreu, who has had a gallery on Orchard Street for about two years, agrees: "The problem with art in New York City is that there's no more space to make it in."

Despite the obvious need, all of the Lower East Side dealers seem ambivalent about their nabe becoming the next Chelsea. Dams, for one, has doubts, because the area has much smaller spaces than those farther west—and besides, rents are getting to be as expensive as those in Chelsea. This trend can only escalate with the arrival of the New Museum. Talking to these dealers, one notices how they all point out that they're located below Delancey Street, as if that geographic demarcation provides some kind of fire wall against their new neighbor. Still, they're realistic, even resigned to what's coming: Grauer has spotted a sure sign of the apocalypse. "I've noticed that some of the guys that have moved in lately are putting maps together showing where all the galleries are. I mean, with maps come people."

Yeah, those damned maps ruin it for everyone.



Photograph: Pinar Yolacan, *Untitled*, 2007.

1. Rivington Arms

4 E 2nd St (646-654-3213)

The young founders of this collective recently moved their berhip stable to the lower East Village; at least half the gallery's artists are under the age of 30.



Photograph: Pinar Yolacan, *Untitled*, 2007.

2. Participant Inc

253 E Houston St (212-254-4334)

This organization was founded to consider art's potential for social change. The space (right) is dedicated to producing artists' projects, publishing writings and sponsoring performances that might have difficulty finding support in a traditional gallery setting.



Photograph: Reena Spaulings, "The One & Only," January 2005. Installation view.

3. Reena Spaulings Fine Art

165 East Broadway (212-477-5006)

The founders of Reena Spaulings—named for a fictional artist--dealer—collaborate with the artists "she" represents, dividing the labor between artist and gallerist.



Eileen Quinlan, *Yellow Goya*, 2007.

4. Miguel Abreu gallery

36 Orchard St (212-995-1774)

The shows at this space tend to feature either gorgeous abstraction or highly formal work.

Among the highlights

5. Number 35

39 Essex St, 212-388-9311

6. Rental 120

East Broadway, sixth floor, 212-608-6002

7. SUNDAY L.E.S.

237 Eldridge St, 212-253-0700

8. Thrust Projects

114 Bowery, suite 301, 212-431-4802

9. Thierry Goldberg Projects

5 Rivington St, 212-967-2260

10. Gallery Onetwentyeight

128 Rivington St, 212-674-0244

11. Invisible NYC

148 Orchard St, 212-228-1358

12. Bottom Feeders Gallery

195 Chrystie St, studio 203A, 917-974-9664

13. Mark Miller Gallery

92 Orchard St, 212-253-9479

14. CUCHIFRITOS

The Artists Alliance Art Gallery at Essex St Market

120 Essex St, 212-598-4124

15. Museum 52

95 Rivington St, 212-228-3090

16. Never Work

191 Henry St, 212-228 -9206

17. Lisa Cooley

34 Orchard St, lisa-cooley.com

18. Woodward Gallery

133 Eldridge St, 212-966-3411

19. Canada

55 Chrystie St, 212-925-4631

20. Envoy

132 Chrystie St, 212-226-4555

21. Janos Gat

195 Bowery, 212-677-3525

22. Feature, Inc.

276 Bowery, 212-675-7772