

Fine Art Is Fair in NYC

New York is not only a city of famous art museums, like the Metropolitan, Guggenheim, and Museum of Modern Art. It also has plenty of smaller galleries, which exhibit contemporary artists.

Many of these may not be famous yet, so their paintings and prints are listed at more reasonable prices. However, there are some prominent artists in a small amount of gallery inventories, like Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Jeff Koons. One of the best things for the average visitor, though, is that there is no entrance fee.

As in other large cities, the galleries of New York are clustered around some major areas. Many of them are in Soho and Chelsea. The latter district, which was named after the London neighborhood, is said to have about 170 art expositions in different places. It is located between 19th and 23rd streets and 9th and 10th avenues. Nowadays, many galleries are moving to Chelsea from Soho because of the lower rents uptown, while clothing companies are expanding into the more central area. There are also galleries situated around 57th street and around 23rd and 7th Avenue.

Get Real Art

It is possible to find galleries at some other locations, too. An interesting exhibition located on Fifth Avenue is the newly launched Get Real Art, which, over the past few years, has made itself a name by bringing together contemporary works by professional artists with both novice and experienced collectors in an exciting environment. According to the owner, Susan Jarrell, a young woman with intense dark eyes, the location was inspired by the salon tradition of old French galleries. You could also say that it is reminiscent of a painter's atelier. Jarrell chooses all works herself, mainly by looking at color slides sent to her.

"But we are full-stored right now," her male assistant adds.

On the first floor, there are samples from the gallery's collection of about 1,000 works by over 50 artists, representing both avant-garde and more traditionalistic styles. If you consider the number of works, Paul Richard, with his blend-technique of photography and oil painting, seems to be one of Jarrell's favorites right now.

Downstairs, at the "project room," which is reached through a winding staircase, the gallery usually exhibits a single artist at a time in a "solo-show," which, according to Jarrell, is renewed "every three months." Right now, at the beginning of March 2002, Get Real Art is showing the exhibition "Dress Codes" by New York artist Pam Gaslow, who works entirely in "mixed media." She has collected a lot of different textures and other items, as well as fresh flowers for her collages on canvas. The artworks are lined up along bare cement walls and inside an old money vault with a wide-open metallic door, where the visitor, close to the interior, can watch the mechanism of the combination lock.

Jarrell's watchdog, the Schaeffer Charlie, seemingly disappointed with his lonely life in the gallery, stares from a corner of the cellar, when he's not taking a stroll on the first floor. Get

Real Art also promotes and hosts happenings. These include concerts, film screenings, theatrical performances, lectures, corporate events, parties and wine tasting. Maybe Charlie prefers one of those activities instead of the ongoing exhibition.

The Gracie Mansion Gallery

At the foot of a giant steel structure of an abandoned high line, built in the 30s in order to bring goods through the West Chelsea neighborhood, the Gracie Mansion Gallery resides on the second floor in an old stone building at West 22nd Street, close to some industrial buildings at the Hudson River. Behind the large wooden entrance and an old squeaky staircase, there are two small rooms with art on white walls.

Gracie Mansion, a middle-aged gray-haired painter, also known as Joanne Mayhew Young, has had this gallery for seven years, she says. It exhibits "sort of the same art all the time." She started in this business by showing other artists' work in her own apartment, before she moved the gallery to St Mark's Place, East Village, Broadway, and Chelsea, respectively. During the art boom in the early 80s her gallery was one of the best known in East Village, according to a gallery guide online.

This month, there is an exhibition of pastels by James Romberger, who, in deep colors, depicts the every day life of the Lower East Side neighborhood. His artwork has been compared to social realists like John Sloan, George Bellows, Reginald Marsh, Thomas Hart Benton, and Max Beckman. It contrasts different kinds of people and cityscapes in the changing light during the seasons of the year and during night and day. The motifs range from wet asphalt to nocturnal snow, from homeless recycling cans outside the supermarket to enlightened skyscrapers beneath a starry sky, sometimes on the same canvas.

J. Cacciola Gallery

Also situated in Chelsea, on the ground floor of a low avant-garde building on the corner of Tenth Avenue and 23rd street, is the J. Cacciola Gallery. Architects G. Phillip Smith and Douglas Thompson designed this remarkable dwelling with its steel façade in the 80s. According to an article in New York Times' House & Home section (Nov. 18, 1999), the building, which also contains the architects' design studio and living space, was "inspired by the projecting balconies and walled courtyards of a 17th-century Cairo house."

A hole has been made in the brown steel to let a branch from a tree in the street reach into the outdoor garden, which is decorated with grayish pebbles and stalagmite-like painted granite sculptures by artist Jesús Bautista Moroles. Pedestrians can look into the courtyard through some vertical slots in the barrier. However, J. Cacciola Gallery soon is moving to West 25th Street between 10th and 11th Avenues.

In a statement by John and Judy Cacciola, their art collection "represents many of the finest contemporary realist painters and sculptors at work today." Their outspoken intention is to bring works by both "established artists such as Dan Namingha" and "emerging painters such as Gloria DeArcangelis" to an audience of prospective collectors. On the first floor, there usually is an ongoing exposition, while the lower level exhibits a panorama of painters from the

gallery inventory. During March 2002, J. Cacciola Gallery features new paintings by the Canadian realist artist James Lahey as their main attraction.

Jim Kempner Fine Art

On the second level, in the same building as J. Cacciola Gallery, Jim Kempner Fine Art resides. While the former gallery focuses on oil paintings, Kempner, according to a statement on the company's home page "specializes in contemporary prints and works on paper with an emphasis on American Masters." Recent exhibitions at the gallery have included works by Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Motherwell, and Howard Hodgkin.

The inventory includes newly established artists such as Ross Bleckner, Christo, Richard Diebenkorn, Sam Francis, Helen Frankenthaler, Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, Ellsworth Kelly, Sol Lewitt, James Rosenquist, Kiki Smith, Pat Steir, Wayne Thiebaud, Kara Walker, and Terry Winters, but also legendary names like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. Print prices range from \$700 (Tony Fitzpatrick) to \$48,000 (Lichtenstein). Moreover, Kempner sells the porcelain sculptures "Balloon Dog" (1995) and "Puppy" (1998) by well-known kitsch artist Jeff Koons for \$500 and \$1400, respectively. Significant for the sculptor is his blend of simple topics and high-quality material.

Jim Kempner, a busy man behind a desktop computer, says he has spent a total of 15 years in the art trade, out of which the last five years have been here in Chelsea. He doesn't want to emphasize a special artist or comment on the conjuncture, but assures that "the art commerce is steady." On a question about how many visitors they usually have and which days are most important, he hurriedly just answers that "weekends are our high days."

A stream of well-dressed people, strolling into and out from the many galleries in Chelsea this Saturday, seems to give a special meaning to his latest words. It also reminds of the introduction to a recent Alex Kanevsky exhibition at the J. Cacciola Gallery downstairs: "We are living in a visual age, an age of images that dart past our eyes, dance in and out of focus, demand our attention and barely register on our consciousness. The simple act of stopping and looking has become something of a luxury."

These people know how to celebrate their holiday.

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