



Style

Meet the Downtown Gallerists Trying to Make the Art Scene Less Wack

From the ashes of Marlborough, three galleries challenge Chelsea with buzzy new shows.

BY SAMUEL HINE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RAFAEL RIOS

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For Pascal Spengemann, who opened the new gallery **Broadway** with business partner Joe Cole in October, the decision to hang his shingle during the covid era came down to a need many New Yorkers felt after a six month museum and gallery closure: “I’m, number one, very excited to be in a room with artwork again,” Spengemann said. So were a dozen or so people who arrived at the Tribeca space (located on, of course, Broadway) on a recent Saturday for the opening of the gallery’s show of Meg Lipke’s monumental, sculptural canvases, a number that eventually required Spengemann to apologetically enforce an occupancy limit.

In good times, galleries exist in a ruthless market. Covid has blown up whatever little predictability there was—with the suspension of art fairs and a months-long ban on indoor viewing that appears likely to go back into effect in the coming weeks, galleries of all sizes have battled for survival. The storied Gavin Brown’s Enterprise, for one, closed for good as Brown went to the larger Gladstone. Many others have followed the collector class to Los Angeles or Miami for the winter, or relied on a combination of online viewing rooms and sympathetic landlords to stay afloat.

And yet, in the wake of the **dramatic implosion** of Chelsea mainstay Marlborough Gallery, three of that gallery’s alums have established new spaces that point toward an exciting trend: an art world populated by risk-taking galleries, operated with a human touch. A revolutionary concept? Not exactly, but when we stopped by these three galleries in the past month, it was hard not to feel optimistic that what’s next for the art world looks a lot like the community-building being done in Tribeca, the arrival of art on St. Marks Place, and a hyper-independent project in Chinatown.

For Spengemann, a former vice president of Marlborough Gallery, and Cole, a collector and businessman, the goal is to establish a place friends and strangers alike can hang out at, at least *after* the pandemic—an atmosphere you don’t often find in the relatively icy blue chip Chelsea galleries they once inhabited. “For me it’s pretty important that the vibe is right—that it can be a place where people can come in, start a conversation,” Spengemann says. “The big galleries in Chelsea sometimes feel like an extension of the high line, but we want to be much more part of the neighborhood.” At Broadway they’ve picked up a tip or two from the homiest retail stores—beers and, crucially, merch are on offer, specifically excellent hats made by Spengemann and his frequent collaborator Andrew Kuo that look pilfered from a Little Italy souvenir shop.

Marlborough, which once represented Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock, and which more recently was home to a roster of buzzy young artists like Kuo, spherical sculptor Lars Fisk, and avant-garde collaborators Jonah Freeman and Justin Lowe, was poised to become the next Chelsea mega-gallery before it was derailed by a series of internecine lawsuits. During his tenure there, Spengemann helped build out the gallery’s emerging talent bench, and at Broadway he’ll be bringing some artists with him, as well as working with friends who didn’t fit into Marlborough’s programming. (The Lipke show, which features the Hudson-based artist’s Seussian paintings, is the culmination of a 20-year friendship.) “We can do whatever we want here, and that just wasn’t the case at Marlborough because there was higher overhead, and more cooks in the kitchen. Certainly we got to do a lot of exciting stuff there, but now we can try more things,” Spengemann said.

One such show marked the gallery’s debut: an exhibition by the Ho-Chunk nation artist Sky Hopinka, anchored by a 16-mm short film installation. (It was a hit: *Times* critic Holland Cotter says Hopinka’s work at Broadway—and a concurrent survey at Bard—“rivals in visual and linguistic beauty any new art I’ve seen in some time.”) A sprawling group “homies” show featuring friends of the gallery like Devin Strother, Adrienne Rubenstein, Andrea Marie Breiling, Kuo, and many more is next.



Lipke installing her work. Cole and Spengemann found the space on Broadway by calling a number listed on an empty storefront.

Opening a gallery during a global pandemic is not without its difficulties. “The challenge is getting the collector base through the door,” says Spengemann, noting that many fled the city in the spring and tend to be on the older side. But the Palm Beach class is still buying—even this year’s mostly online Art Basel saw [healthy action](#). “I think the art market, versus something like retail, is getting through this,” said Cole.