Art and Design

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AUCTIONEERS OF FINE ART

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With more and more galleries exploring the idea of online viewing rooms, Artsy looking to pivot toward being a middleman connecting galleries and collectors in this sector, and auction houses increasing the number of online-only sales on their calendars, it has never been more important to understand the potential effect that online sales could have on the art world.

Conventional wisdom dictates that there are essentially three tiers of galleries that have the combined social media following, email lists, and brand recognition necessary to bring enough visitors to their websites to sell a meaningful amount of artwork through online viewing rooms. They include the mega-galleries: Gagosian, David Zwirner, Hauser & Wirth, and Pace; the legacy galleries: Marlborough, Barbara Gladstone, Paula Cooper, and Marian Goodman; and the next-gen mega-galleries: Lévy Gorvy, Thaddaeus Ropac, Perrotin, and White Cube. And while that’s not to say that others can’t succeed – just read this issue’s insightful interview with The Journal Gallery co-founders Michael Nevin and Julia Dippelhoffer – for the most part, the largest galleries have the best shot at flourishing in this particular corner of the art market.

This is precisely why we were so eager to speak with Sam Orlofsky, a director and member of the 24-person advisory board at the biggest of the bigs, Gagosian. Traditionally, it’s all eyes on Larry, so it’s highly unusual for a Gagosian director to be as publicly linked to a specific gallery initiative as Sam has been linked to the behemoth’s Online Viewing Room. (Editor’s note – the capitalization is theirs, but we’ll go along for the ride.). However, Sam is clearly the exception. He’s become inextricably linked to the gallery’s Online Viewing Room concept through his close proximity to Gagosian’s stable of primary-market superstars, his refreshing willingness to question long-held conventions that have dictated the process of selling multi-million-dollar works to persnickety collectors, and his nuanced sense for what will sell in an online platform.

As we approach the gallery’s forthcoming Online Viewing Room timed to coincide with Frieze London, now seemed like the perfect opportunity for Gagosian to make its Canvas debut. The OVR, as we’ve taken to calling it, will feature seven primary market works from the personal archive of Sterling Ruby, ranging in price from $45,000 to $600,000. It will also feature several secondary market
works that Ruby chose from artists he considers to be influences.

Speaking to us between studio visits via phone from Los Angeles, Orlofsky offers an unprecedented look inside Gagosian’s online sales strategy. Whether you’re a competing gallery in Gagosian’s weight class, a small- or medium-sized gallery just beginning to contemplate your options with online sales, or merely a certified Gagosianologist thirsty for the latest details inside the billion-dollar behemoth, you’ll be delighted as Orlofsky takes us step by step through the gallery’s game plan. In a roughly one-hour conversation, we discuss everything from how the concept was initially launched, the gallery’s internal process for deciding which artists to feature and what criteria impact those decisions, and that record-breaking Albert Oehlen sale, to what’s in store for the Online Viewing Room in the future. It is, in essence, a master class in online sales for galleries.

The Canvas: I have a list of questions to get to, Sam, but I was hoping to start off with why the gallery decide to start doing online sales last summer in the first place. What was the initial catalyst? Was Zwirner’s room a factor in the decision-making process at all?

Sam Orlofsky: It was not. I don’t think we had any awareness of Zwirner’s room when we first started working on ours. Gagosian’s Online Viewing Room really grew out of three converging factors. First, I had always been the gallery’s liaison with Artsy, and I had a lot of insights and experience through that relationship. Second, we were getting a lot of anecdotal evidence that there was art fair fatigue. The art media was promoting that idea, but on the ground, we were actually seeing it up close. The people I used to see at fairs, I wasn’t seeing anymore. Attendance was up, but it was more of a public audience, and less of a collector audience. The third factor – and it’s a particularly important one to keep in mind – is that Larry always wants to do more business. The one thing I know that I’ve always got a green light to do is bring him ideas that could generate and drive more business for the gallery.

So, with the idea in the back of my mind that the gallery always wants to do more business; and with the recognition that the fairs were increasingly likely to generate less and less business going forward; I wanted to use the insights I gained from my experience with Artsy to offset some of that lost business. My sense was that all the people who were expressing art fair fatigue were still just as committed as ever to collecting – they just didn’t want to go to the fairs themselves.

“My sense was that all the people who were expressing art fair fatigue were still just as committed as ever to collecting – they just didn’t want to go to the fairs themselves.”
The Canvas: In the past, galleries have been reticent to wade too deeply into online sales out of a fear of sharing public pricing. Was that not a concern for the gallery at the beginning?

Sam Orlofsky: Yes, that was a concern at the beginning. People have traditionally been so conservative and felt so protective of pricing. This experiment is about asking which barriers or obstacles we can remove that will result in the greatest increase in business activity. When we talked it out internally, we agreed to publish the prices to see if the end result would lead to increased business activity.

The Canvas: The general assumption used to be that whatever money could be made in the short term through online sales was outweighed by the possibility of pissing off a Tico Mugrabi type collector – someone who’s very heavily invested in the market of individual primary market artists...

Sam Orlofsky: Right. But my counterargument is that collectors are increasingly offering works at auction in much quicker time frames than what used to be the norm. So, all of a sudden, the standard that a collector may have been privately holding you to gets thrown out the window when they put the work up at auction and the pricing becomes public. At the end of the day, as long as we can hold ourselves to the standard that the artists feel their work is being protected and presented in a way that benefits them, and the collectors who are invested in their markets feel the same, then we feel confident in what we’re doing.

The Canvas: What’s the internal process at the gallery for deciding which artists to feature in the Online Viewing Room? Is there a large discussion with different directors weighing in?

Sam Orlofsky: In the beginning, it was really just me and Alison McDonald, who oversees all of the gallery’s publications and content. I had the experience from the sales side of things, and she brought her experience with producing content and designing the website. Later Gareth O’Loughlin was hired as CTO, bringing additional expertise to the team. It was really a dream collaboration because our skill sets were complimentary to each other.

The Canvas: It was just the two of you? Other directors weren’t involved?

Sam Orlofsky: Other directors helped later with aspects like sourcing works, but in the beginning, it was just Alison and me. When we started thinking about the Online Viewing Room, we tried to look at it through the prism of being a collector. I am a collector myself, so I understand that a collector who loves art always has multiple objects at any given time that he or she might want to buy. Ultimately though, you have to decide which one thing to allocate your resources to at that moment, and how to prioritize your wish list accordingly. We wanted the art in the Online Viewing Room to be works we felt other
collectors would prioritize and commit to in the face of all the other art they were being offered that week during a fair. The best way to achieve that, from our perspective, was to offer primary market work by artists for whom there’s a waiting list – especially if the work in question is a primary piece priced below recent secondary market comps.

So, it’s about a) featuring artists whose work is in demand, specifically artists who have bodies of work that are in demand on the secondary market; and b) offering specific pieces that are relatively fresh to market and priced competitively. Those were the ideal criteria. Certain things may deviate from that criteria as we fill out each iteration of the Online Viewing Room, but that’s where we started from.

The Canvas: I understand the idea behind tying the Online Viewing Room to fairs, or times of increased buying activity in the market. At the same time, though, I’m wondering if the gallery is potentially leaving money on the table by not turning it into a year-round initiative, almost like a completely separate online gallery space...

Sam Orlofsky: Outstanding question. 18 months ago, it wasn’t a question we were even considering. But going forward, we are very interested in asking that identical question. For now, our current thinking is that diluting or oversupplying the market will have negative consequences that outweigh the positive benefits. But we are definitely interested in finding the right balance that allows us to have our cake and eat it too.

The Canvas: This whole interview sort of stemmed from a twitter thread wherein I posited that only the biggest brands – i.e. the mega-galleries and a few other legacy and sizable galleries – could hope to succeed with the online sales model as they’re the only entities that can attract large enough audiences to make the numbers work. However, based on what you’re telling me about how Gagosian’s Online Viewing Room started, I sense that you may not necessarily agree with my premise...

Sam Orlofsky: I would reword it. My version of that premise is slightly different, but I agree more than I disagree. I think that, as in other industries, the largest entities enjoy the luxury of being able to extend the allocation of resources into these types of experiments that are meant to develop and grow the business. The Online Viewing Room is much less disruptive to the daily workflow here at Gagosian than it would be in a smaller place that has fewer hands on deck to help manage the process.

For instance, I was reading those recent pieces on Artsy that advocated for price transparency across the market...
and encouraged galleries to offer works online, and the author seemed to be saying that it’s the only way for smaller galleries to survive. Essentially, he was saying that dealers can save time by putting the work up on the site, displaying the price, and moving on to other things in their day. I actually think that’s upside-down. That thinking doesn’t account for the time and energy required for those galleries to convince their artists that this is an appropriate way to handle and present their work. Those are time-consuming conversations.

At Gagosian, we have the luxury of testing to see if this will work. And just as importantly, we have the infrastructure to do it well. We can produce the content, streamline the online experience, and analyze the requisite data. Our artists understand that we’re presenting their work in a way another gallery might not be able to; that we’re generating interest in their work that we are uniquely positioned to vet and satisfy; and that whatever we do, it will end up being a net-positive on their behalf. But to get back to your original question, I think that once we have succeeded in establishing online sales as a universal component to the gallery business, then smaller galleries will be able to more easily adopt it as a strategy for themselves.

_The Canvas:_ It’s interesting to hear you approach the question from a perspective of resources. What about from a marketing perspective or the sheer ability to attract enough potential buyers to the website in the first place?

_Sam Orlofsky:_ I think you’re right in that sense, as well. It’s a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy in a way. The largest galleries that have larger audiences have a much better chance of finding buyers in that pre-existing audience than smaller galleries that barely attract visitors to their websites. That’s inarguable. But that doesn’t mean that online sales won’t ultimately be a great way for smaller galleries to sell art to the collectors they already have. Or for those galleries to be discovered by a potentially much larger audience online. I think putting yourself out there is the best way to be discovered. And online sales are a way to put yourself out there as a gallery.

_“I think that in general, we as a business are in competition with the auction houses for consignments. So, it makes sense for us to offer our clients every possible comparable service.”_
Sam Orlofsky: I think the auction houses know that they’re able to up-sell people. My speculation is that up-selling is a massive part of their business strategy. They want to get someone in through a watch, a handbag, or a wine bottle, and hope that once they’re inside the door of the house, the right person can then convince them to buy something more expensive. That’s not the strategy we’re pursuing with the Online Viewing Room at Gagosian.

The Canvas: The gallery has previously stated that the Online Viewing Room during Art Basel 2018 brought in 537 new collector contacts, 25,000 total unique views, and 117,000 page views. What does the gallery count as a “new collector contact?” What does that term actually mean? What criteria does an inquiry have to reach in order for it to be counted as a new collector contact versus a unique view? And once the gallery has identified those “new collector contacts,” what do you then do to convert them into the traditional client development funnel or process? What’s the next step?

Sam Orlofsky: To clarify, these numbers are for the first OVR only, which took place during Art Basel 2018. We define “new collector contacts” as people who engaged with us via the Online Viewing Room who were not already in our database. The 25,000 unique views refers to the number of people who visited the gallery’s first OVR. And then from there, the 537 “new collector contacts” refers to individuals who were not already in our database who initiated conversations with a sales director to inquire about a specific work or to request future updates.

Regarding what we then do to convert them into our traditional client development process, I’m afraid I can’t share any details, as this process is constantly changing and evolving. This has really been one of the most exciting aspects of the project. We’ve been experimenting with a variety of solutions, so it’s premature to share any particular technique or strategy, as we are still learning what works best.

“The Online Viewing Room has really been a great way for people to access work of their own volition. People like to do things at their own pace, feeling like they’re in control of the process. The OVR allows people to do that.”

The Canvas: I was wondering if we could talk about the Albert Oehlen work that the gallery offered in the Online Viewing Room during this past Art Basel Hong Kong. With a listing price of $6 million, the work was guaranteed to break Oehlen’s world record of $4.7 million as long as it sold. To me, it was a particularly interesting case study because it almost allowed the gallery to front-run the auction houses in a sense and set a new world record for the artist’s work. So, if a common refrain from consigners used to be that auction houses are able to bring in a greater number – and greater variety – of bidders to a work than a private sale brokered at a gallery could, it seems that in certain situations, the Online Viewing Room can fill that same need for select secondary market works. Even the mechanics of the sale – making the painting the sole work offered during the fair – echoed auction house strategies such as featuring a work on the cover of a sale’s catalogue. At a time when the biggest galleries increasingly find themselves in competition with Christie’s, Sotheby’s, and Phillips, do you view the Online Viewing Room as a way to compete for consignments?

Sam Orlofsky: I think that in general, we as a business are in competition with the auction houses for consignments. So, it makes sense for us to offer our clients every possible comparable service. The Online Viewing Room is not the only, or even the best, weapon to compete or retaliate with. It’s simply one tool in our arsenal.

But in the case of the Oehlen in particular, we made a short list of works that we thought would do especially well in both
Asia and the West, based on our knowledge of market appetite at that specific moment. We thought about which works would carry a global appeal, appropriately reflect the Gagosian DNA, and would simultaneously be able to drive traffic at a whole new price point. This artwork by this artist ended up on that list. And, at that point, we knew we had to do something special to persuade the consigner to give it to us, rather than to an auction house. Saying, “We will set a record for you” was the most persuasive thing we could do.

*The Canvas:* The Oehlen ended up selling to a known collector/client of the gallery. Have the other pieces offered in the Online Viewing Room sold to preexisting Gagosian clients, or have pieces sold to new clients as well?

Sam Orlofsky: It’s been a mix. Interestingly, what’s been typical is that works have ended up selling to people who were known to us already, but with whom we hadn’t actually done business with yet. So, sales have been to people who have a relationship with the gallery – they’re on our mailing list, for instance – but for one reason or another, it wasn’t clicking. That’s been a pretty typical scenario this past year. The Online Viewing Room has really been a great way for people to access work of their own volition. People like to do things at their own pace, feeling like they’re in control of the process. The OVR allows people to do that.

*The Canvas:* That’s a great point. And to go back to those recent Artsy articles for a moment, I think that idea was really the thrust or main premise of the pieces. At the end of the day, there’s a group of potential collectors out there who are not making contact with galleries because they’re intimidated by the entire process of buying art. But by making the pricing visible, it allows them to regain control of the process and be less intimidated.

Sam Orlofsky: One million percent. A lot of people don’t want to be at the mercy of someone just lobbing things at them. They want to go down the path of discovery in their own way, at their preferred speed, in a setting in which they feel comfortable. The more barriers or obstacles there are along that road – and opaque pricing is certainly a barrier – the less likely they are to get to the destination of actually acquiring a work. ■

*ALBERT OEHLN*
*Untitled, 1988*
*Oil on canvas*
*110 1/4 x 149 5/8 in*
*280 x 380 cm*
© Albert Oehlen. Courtesy Gagosian.
sculpture objects functional art and design

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There are genuine quibbles one can make when assessing Pace’s new, gleaming, eight-story flagship space on 25th Street. Why, for instance, only reserve roughly 16,500 of the building’s approximate 75,000 square feet for dedicated exhibition space? How can the mega-gallery ever work with emerging artists again when it needs to generate so much revenue on such a consistent basis just to pay its rent (a rumored $700,000 per month, by the way)? And why, in God’s name, would you ever spend such a stunning sum of money on a building you don’t even own?

But when you step out onto the 4,800 square foot sixth-floor terrace, all of those questions drip away like a Pat Steir waterfall painting. Because as you make your way across the solid black locust wood block floor and peer out over the edge of the railing, the surrounding galleries in Chelsea appear to take on a mere “mini-me” stature in the shadow of Pace’s giant edifice.

And while it may be difficult to imagine Arne Glimcher, Pace’s founder, former leader, and current spiritual patriarch, ever devoting so much time, resources, and money to what is essentially a super-sized version of four white walls and some northern light, it is at the same time not at all surprising that his son Marc would place all his chips on red, and bet on a bold, sweeping vision of what the gallery’s role in the art world should look like in the 21st century.

After roughly five years of intensive planning, zoning, construction, and marketing, Pace’s sparkling Bonetti/Kozerski-designed headquarters is now open. It is, without a doubt, the personal crowning achievement of Marc’s tenure thus far at the helm of the original of the mega-galleries, and acts as a physical manifestation of the transfer of power from father to son. Indeed, if the selling of art in Pace’s first 60 years was fashioned in the image of Arne, it’s a safe bet that the next 60 years will take its cues from Marc, and, by extension, this building.

Walking The Canvas through a personal private tour of the building one month to the day of its opening to the public, Glimcher is positively beaming as he answers question after question from the minute and pedestrian – How many bathrooms? Will it be open on Sundays? – to the broad and philosophical – How will this building help sell art? And are galleries increasingly in competition with museums? As we make our way through the active construction zone, he answers these questions, and more, as he explains why a ballooning global audience for contemporary art requires a gallery that matches its grand ambitions.
The Canvas: Thanks so much for taking the time to walk me through the new building, Marc. I know how busy you must be with the opening only a month away. How long have you been waiting for this moment? When did this idea begin gestating in your brain? And, what spurred the initial idea of opening a gallery space of this magnitude?

Marc Glimcher: I first started thinking about this in 2014, so it was about five years ago. Our original space here was a one-story building designed by Robert Irwin. We had moved in back in 2000 and had a 15-year lease which was coming up. Our landlord – Sam Weinberg of Weinberg Properties – told us that they were going to knock down the building to increase their FAR (floor area ratio) to better capitalize on the real estate. We offered to buy the land ourselves, but he wasn’t interested in selling.

So, at first, we were going to just take space in the building and be one of many occupants. But once we really started thinking about our options, I began dreaming about what having our own building could actually mean. The thing that initially excited me was the idea of having everyone at Pace in New York under the same roof. And once you’ve convinced yourself that it’s okay to have 75,000 square feet of the most expensive real estate in New York, you start to get really creative. Eventually, we offered to take the entire building through a 20-year lease, and when those 20 years are up, we of course plan to renew.

The Canvas: Now, was this before David Zwirner and Hauser & Wirth started making their big, splashy, real estate plays? Or were their moves a factor in your decision?

Marc Glimcher: This was before, but keep in mind that they had already built pretty spectacular galleries themselves. David had that beautiful space designed by Annabelle Selldorf, and while that space wasn’t necessarily on this scale, the idea of creating an entire building to use as a gallery had already been put out into the universe. Now, of course, they’re planning that five-story building on 21st street, designed by Renzo Piano.

The Canvas: Some people have compared Pace’s new building with Hauser & Wirth’s space in Los Angeles in the sense that it’s sprawling in nature and designed to be enjoyed by the general public. Do you agree with that comparison? And how do you view what Iwan is doing with Somerset and Menorca in comparison to what you’re trying to do with this building?

Marc Glimcher: I would happily take that comparison. I think it’s accurate in the sense that there’s a lot the general public can do and enjoy in Hauser
& Wirth's LA space, and similarly, there's a lot they can experience in our building. I think Iwan and Manuela and the whole team there are amazing. I don't know how they do it. I know that the last time we spoke, I was somewhat derisive about their aspirations to be a lifestyle brand. But that was a mistake on my part, borne out of jealousy more than anything else.

Fundamentally, we're all making the same bet that we need to increase our capacity to fill the general public's ever-increasing desire for contemporary art programming. And while there might be slight variations in the ways we each approach our strategy, the end result is ultimately very similar. Someone asked me the other day if we needed to open this new building in order for our gallery to survive. No one opens this kind of space – or makes the kind of moves that Hauser & Wirth has been making – out of a need to survive. We make these decisions because we want to, because we're excited about the future, because we're aspirational about what's possible, and because we can.

The Canvas: How do you think the general public will end up utilizing this space? If the idea behind the building is this vision of a few thousand people enjoying the gallery's exhibitions on the weekend, then will the gallery be open on Sundays going forward?

Marc Glimcher: No, we're not going to be open on Sundays. To start, we'll be open Monday through Saturday; but it's definitely open for discussion and on the table for the future. I don't want to stir an outright revolt amongst the wonderful people who work so hard at the gallery. But look, we've created a space that's super flexible. We have all kinds of great plans to start, and if, down the line, we come up with other awesome ideas, then we're still able to incorporate them into how this building ends up being used.

The Canvas: Here's a nitty-gritty question for you: what about bathrooms? I'm guessing that a building of this size, with so many people projected to flow through it, needs to have a lot of publicly available bathrooms...

Marc Glimcher: Oh my God, great question. There are so many bathrooms. The requirements for bathrooms are enormous and many of them will be open and available to the public.

The Canvas: Now for a deeper question. How does having a 75,000-square-foot space meant to appeal to the general public – replete with the requisite number of bathrooms – translate into the concrete sale of art necessary to sustain Pace's business model?

Marc Glimcher: The artists that we work with today are attempting to communicate with very large audiences. They're not merely trying to communicate with each other or with a tightly concentrated group of collectors, which may have been the case back in the '60s and '70s. At the end of the day, that's the real reason so many galleries are growing. The pressure for growth in the art world stems from this massive new audience that's interested in contemporary art. Yes, the artists, the dealers, and the overhead all contribute to the growth. But the initiating party is the audience.

The Canvas: Do you really think every artist is trying to communicate with such a large audience, though? How do you think Agnes Martin would have felt about the audience driving such expansive growth? Do you think she would have cared how large the audience for her work is?

Marc Glimcher: Honestly, I think she would have felt great about it. Agnes was trying to project the inspiration of perfection which results in the experience of beauty. As she would say, she received these inspirations as tiny little postage stamps in her head. The reason she painted on canvases that are five or six square feet was so that others could receive that same inspiration. In those days though, 99.9% of people didn't care or take notice. Now, the rise in the percentage of people who care about Agnes Martin is astronomical. We see contemporary art becoming more and more important to more and more people. And if it is getting more important to more people, our job, then, is to respond. We have to represent the artists – not just connect them to buyers – but represent them to the entire audience. Now, will that ultimately result in the sale of more art? Absolutely! Art used to get sold because there was this element of secresy. There were so few people who knew about it, that when you acquired a work it was a representation of how sophisticated and refined you were. Now, when a collector purchases a work, it shows how connected he or she is to the cultural community, and how much they care.
The Canvas: Is there a feature of the building that you’re most excited about?

Marc Glimcher: Definitely the top-floor space set aside for Pace Live, which Mark Beasley will be in charge of. We’ll have performances and symposiums in there. We can host film screenings and talks in there. We’re going to have music at least four times a year in that space. And there will be artist shows there, but they’ll be programmed to last for two weeks each. They won’t be programmed with a typical five weekend show. It will be completely separate from the exhibitions we put on throughout the rest of the building. The space we designed for Pace Live is about doing things in ways that have never been done before with traditional gallery spaces, and I’m really excited about that.

The Canvas: Much has been made about the building’s three terrace spaces. What are you envisioning for the main terrace space?

Marc Glimcher: I’m envisioning having lunch here every day. The food truck will be on this terrace and we’ll have tables set up. Other than that, we can have installations here, we can have collector dinners and barbecues here – we’ll never again have to rent out a restaurant! We can even have music performances up here. Legally we’re allowed 170 people, but we can get special use permits that can expand that capacity up to 500.

The Canvas: I can’t even begin to imagine what the monthly rent is here.

Marc Glimcher: It’s insane; absolutely insane. If we don’t keep on selling a lot of art, then we’re in trouble.

The Canvas: My thinking exactly. So, in order for the business model to succeed, the art being sold has to be priced fairly high. And, the gallery has to be offering works from pretty established artists in order to justify those prices. So, where do emerging or young and new artists fit into Pace’s roster going forward?

Marc Glimcher: They fit in when they’re genuinely amazing and talented. That’s how it’s always been. James Turrell was a young and emerging artist once upon a time. So was Robert Irwin. Believe it or not, we have a relatively low average price for our works. It’s probably around $150,000. But your point is well taken. The overhead for this building can drive the whole operation to a very bad place. The danger if we miscalculate – and if this isn’t a stable proposition – would then be hyperinflation. And I’m proud to be able to say that that’s not something in which Pace engages. We don’t do it with Adrian Ghenie, we don’t do it with Loie Hollowell, and we don’t do it with Yoshitomo Nara. We are very conservative with our pricing, and we’ll continue to be in order to protect the longevity of the careers of our artists. So yes, to bring it back to your original question, we believe 100% in the value proposition that this building brings to our overall business.

The Canvas: How do you think the relationship between galleries and museums will be impacted by the opening of these large, museum-style type spaces? For instance, take a hypothetical 22-year-old ingénue; someone completely new to the art world, but who’s interested in and passionate about someone like KAWS. In that person’s mind, do you think there’s any difference between...
Pace and the Whitney when he or she decides how to spend a Saturday?

Marc Glimcher: I think we’re filling a curatorial niche that the museums themselves aren’t able to fill. Relatively speaking, we put on small shows that museums, by their very nature, can’t do. They need massive exhibitions that draw hundreds of thousands of visitors in order to succeed. So, to answer your question, yes, there’s absolutely still a difference between what we’re doing and what museums are doing, but we’re blurring the line.

At the end of the day, our mission is to advocate on behalf of our artists. Over the years, the museums have verged into our territory just as much as we’ve verged into theirs. You now see museums themselves advocating for artists. That didn’t used to be the case. Traditionally, museums had an arms-length relationship with the artists. Now, you have curators and museums actively championing individual artists. There are museum shows now that are totally commissioned by the artists (as opposed to approaching collectors to borrow the art for the show). That’s a huge change in the relationship between museums and the artists. So, in the past, museums had a relationship with the public, and galleries had a relationship with the artists. Now though, museums and galleries each want to have relationships with both.

The Canvas: Will this be a marker in the sand for a new era in the art world?

Marc Glimcher: Yes. We’re interested in integrating the various ways that artists pursue their goals, and those are more diverse and ambitious in all respects. As a result, we’re doing the same. This building has a diversity of spaces and the subsequent diversity of inter-disciplinary approaches and possibilities that come with it. This is a response to the evolution of art as a whole. We’re not causing it, but we’re definitely responding to it.
ARTIST REPRESENTATIONS

• Team Gallery now represents Michael St. John
• André Hemer joins roster of Hollis Taggart
• Perrotin adds Genesis Belanger, Gabriel de la Mora, Claire Tabouret and Emily Mae Smith to its growing roster
• Going forward, Nina Katchadourian will show with Pace as well as her longtime San Francisco gallery, Catharine Clark
• Ali Banisadr joins roster of Kasmin
• Luxembourg & Dayan and Salon94 announce joint representation of Derrick Adams
• White Cube now represents Dóra Maurer
• The estate of Simon Hantaï jumps ship from Kasmin and Timothy Taylor and will now be represented solely by Gagosian
• Sprüth Magers will now represent the estate of Hanne Darboven going forward
• Fraenkel Gallery and Luhring Augustine will now collaborate on the representation of photographer, Lee Friedlander
• Zhang Enil joins roster of Xavier Hufkens
• Miles McEnery Gallery announces representation of Roy Dowell
• Tschabalala Self joins roster of Galerie Eva Presenhuber
Navigating the Shark-Infested Waters of the Art World with Marianne Boesky

Marianne Boesky is feeling good. For the first time since her eponymous gallery opened its doors in 1996, the chic and savvy dealer credited with nurturing the careers of Takashi Murakami and Lisa Yuskavage doesn’t feel as if she needs to be constantly looking over her shoulder to see what her competitors might be up to. At a time when many dealers are seeking additional space in an attempt to capture a greater market share amid a booming interest in contemporary art, Marianne feels no such need to be ‘keeping up with the Gagosians.’

In the ten plus years since Murakami and Yuskavage each left the gallery in what was a stunning blow delivered just as Boesky took on a series of construction loans to buy and build her Chelsea space, the gallery has opened and closed spaces on the Lower and Upper East Side. Now, though, Marianne finds herself comfortably ensconced in her sizable 13,000-square-foot space situated across two adjoining buildings in Chelsea – one of which she owns and the other she leases. In addition to that substantial perch, in 2017 the gallery opened the doors of a delightful Annabelle Selldorf-designed outpost in Aspen through which it hosts four shows per year – two in the winter and two in the summer.

With a roster of artists that boasts such varied names as Jennifer Bartlett, Pier Paolo Calzolari, the Haas Brothers, John Waters, and Frank Stella, Marianne Boesky Gallery provides an interesting case study of a medium-sized gallery that’s thriving at a time when some of the others in its cohort have stumbled. Providing a refreshingly frank perspective on the issues and trends currently dominating the art world, Boesky invited us into her world as the gallery prepped for the upcoming installation of the now-open Haas Brothers show ‘Madonna.’ In a wide-ranging discussion that lasted close to 90 minutes, Marianne shared with us the inside details behind the Murakami and Yuskavage departures; explained why she chose Aspen as the location for a satellite gallery; discussed her innovative partnership with Lévy Gorvy to jointly represent Frank Stella; offered her current thinking about which fairs she intends to participate in; and gave us a peek inside the skyrocketing practice of the aforementioned Haas Brothers.
The Canvas: Thanks so much for taking the time to sit down and talk with me today, Marianne. We’re currently sitting in the gallery’s space in Chelsea, but I wanted to begin our conversation talking about the outpost in Aspen which opened in 2017. Obviously, a large number of collectors spend a portion of their summer in Aspen with the popularity of events such as ArtCrush and the Anderson Ranch’s summer talk series. What’s interesting to me though, is that it’s become clear over the past five years or so that collectors tend to eschew actively buying over the summer. That’s one of the reasons the fairs people have tried to establish in the Hamptons haven’t really worked. Once Art Basel closes up shop in June, collectors don’t want to be in buying mode during their summer vacations, and for the most part prefer to keep that aspect of their lives compartmentalized in other seasons. So, to start, what led you to Aspen?

Marianne Boesky: I’ve been going to Aspen since I was born. It’s sort of my second home. My parents had their honeymoon there, and I’ve had the opportunity to watch the community develop into this wonderful international group of intellectuals, sports fanatics, passionate art lovers, and music aficionados. So, for me, the decision to open a space in Aspen was very much driven by my love of the community itself.

But I do agree with your premise. For the most part, people aren’t in “buying mode” when they’re relaxing in Aspen. This wasn’t a case where I said, “There’s a bunch of rich people in the city, so let me rent a space for a month or two and sell some expensive art.” We do four shows a year there – two in the winter and two in the summer – so it’s really not a pop-up space. I spend as much time as I can in Aspen, and believe I’ll grow old continuing to live a part of my life there.

That’s why putting down roots with the gallery building itself was so important to me. Aspen is tiny and there weren’t a lot of options. I have to credit Allison Kanders for spotting the for sale sign one day and immediately texting me to come look at it. It was a dumpy, ugly little building, but I was able to renovate it with the help of a friend, the amazing Annabelle Sell-dorf who I’ve known for 20 years and who did a spectacular job. I need venues that allow me to explore, almost like little laboratories, where I can do projects out of the New York spotlight. And this gallery has allowed me to do that. We’re not a gallery with a big enough staff – or even the desire – to be global. We’re not looking to open eight spaces around the world. I want to keep art an intimate experience.

The Canvas: In a past interview a few years ago, you stated “There’s always more art, there’s always more real estate, and there’s never really peace of mind” as a gallery owner. With the biggest galleries now beginning to open these gigantic, flagship spaces – and with your own gallery currently occupying a combined 13,000 square feet of space in Chelsea – do you think a gallery constantly needs to grow in order to thrive in today’s art world? And “grow” could be in terms of square footage, it could be in staff size, or it could be the expansion of the artist roster.

Marianne Boesky: I feel a gallerist of any kind, working at any size or scale should never have peace of mind. Being a gallery owner is about having a voracious curiosity that never stops. In terms of square footage, I think we know which galleries...
are winning that game at this point. And that's great for what they're interested in doing. But I look more at Marian Good-
man, Paula Cooper, and Barbara Gladstone, and I think they have pretty great businesses and probably pretty great lives.
I'm sure they have stress – we all have stress – but they probably don't have as much stress as they would if they had a dozen
spaces spread throughout the world. The people who run these mega-galleries have mega-aspirations. And that's not to say
that it's better or worse one way or the other. Look at David Zwirner—he's killing it. He's doing an amazing job. But do I want
to be David Zwirner? It exhausts me to even think about it.

The Canvas: That leads me to my next question, which is about how the mega-galleries have completely altered the gallery eco-
ystem over the past decade. Or even since 2000...

Marianne Boesky: I know exactly when those changes started to happen. It was when John Currin left Andrea Rosen. Not long
after that, in 2005, I bought this land, was building the gallery, and had all of this debt to pay off. The opening shows were
supposed to be Lisa Yuskavage and Takashi Murakami, and then they both left the gallery. That was part of the beginning of
some serious shifting for the art world. While I managed to get through that time period, it felt like the paradigm, in terms
of loyalty, between artists and their dealers changed.

“In the end, I’m a gallerist. That’s my whole existence. When artists get to a certain price point and have these grand ambitions – and
I’ve brought several artists from zero to a million – you’re suddenly swimming in shark-infested waters. And I didn’t want to swim with sharks! ”

The Canvas: I have another quote here from an interview you gave in 2014 where you said that before that happened, your goal
was “to grow old with my artists. That’s what I always wanted to do.”

Marianne Boesky: It’s true. That was my goal. But looking back, it was naive of me to think that way. The thought that some of
my artists might leave me never even crossed my mind when I was taking on those construction loans. I was really deliv-
ering for them and willing to grow with them. But shame on me, because I wasn’t aware that there were others tapping on
their shoulders, beckoning them to switch galleries. Philippe Ségalot orchestrated Murakami’s defection to Gagosian. And
Philippe and I were friends! We were literally at dinner together while he was plotting behind my back. But look, he was
making his own play for his own position and career, which I have to respect, in a way. And of course, Larry saw the mone-
tary opportunity as well.

My separation with Takashi was friendly and supportive until it eventually wasn’t. And what he explained to me in the
period when we were still friendly was that it wasn’t even about the money for him. He wanted to open a live action film
studio. He wanted a radio show. He wanted to do animation. Takashi wanted fine art to be just one aspect of what he did.
If he were an octopus, then the art was merely one tentacle. He knew that I could sell his artworks and get him money. But
Gagosian was a burgeoning brand and could help develop a much bigger platform for him. After going through the whole
LVMH project with him – which at the time was fun, exciting, different, and had never been done before – I had to accept
that he was right and that it wasn’t what I wanted to do every day.
In the end, I’m a gallerist. That’s my whole existence. When artists get to a certain price point and have these grand ambitions – and I’ve brought several artists from zero to a million – you’re suddenly swimming in shark-infested waters. And I didn’t want to swim with sharks! Could I have handled it if I tried? Maybe. Could I have tried to match what Larry was offering him? Perhaps in the very short term. But that wasn’t my life.

*The Canvas:* That’s completely understandable. But then what about Lisa Yuskavage? If Murakami is on one end of the spectrum in terms of an artist’s ambitions, then certainly Lisa would be on the other. She’s purely a painter but ended up moving to David Zwirner.

*Marianne Boesky:* Yes. Lisa is the aberration. We were super close and had this wonderful personal connection. But then she decided to leave the gallery for personal reasons between us.

*The Canvas:* It was reported that she felt that the context of the gallery wasn’t the right fit for her at the time...

*Marianne Boesky:* No. You’ve read that and you’ve seen that, but it’s not the case. Some of Lisa’s closest friends were also represented by the gallery, and I’m sure she would hate to think they believed those reports. Some of the things that have been printed just aren’t true. For instance, people said that Murakami left the gallery while I was pregnant. That’s just patently false. I was pregnant in 2003-2004 and he didn’t leave until 2006. I mean, it’s true in the sense that Murakami left the gallery because I had a baby and he couldn’t see me as his business partner anymore. That’s true. But he might have been able to put up with it had Philippe and Larry not had a bigger, better “bro” offer already on the table.

There’s a lot of nuance to these things. And we can talk about the gallery’s context all you want, but Lisa and I were extremely close, and I only have serious respect and admiration for her. I don’t think there’s a person on the planet who will ever love her work as much as I do.

“*I feel a gallerist of any kind, working at any size or scale should never have peace of mind. Being a gallery owner is about having a voracious curiosity that never stops.*”

*The Canvas:* This is all by way of saying that the mega-galleries pose a somewhat existential threat to medium-sized galleries if they’re constantly tapping on the shoulders of rising artists.

*Marianne Boesky:* But that’s the thing. David didn’t poach Lisa. Lisa needed to leave for her own reasons, and I had to accept that. It was about a year later that she called to tell me that she’d be going over to Zwirner. At that point, graciously, David called me and even sort of asked for my blessing. Remember, this was in 2006. David wasn’t ZWIRNER yet, back then.

*The Canvas:* What about the representation of an artist in partnership with another gallery? Let’s use, for instance, the gallery’s deal with Lévy Gorvy to represent Frank Stella. To me, that’s incredibly interesting, as I feel like it was a conscious acknowledgement on both your and Dominique’s parts to recognize that you each have very different types of clients, but that the appetite for Frank’s work is so large, that it could withstand two galleries in the same city operating separately to represent the artist.

*Marianne Boesky:* But it’s not separate. People seem to have trouble absorbing that. Every single Stella deal that we do is in collaboration. So, if you go to Dominique and try to game me on the price, her first phone call will be to me, and vice versa.
We really are doing it together and bringing different strengths to the table. That was the initial impetus in jointly representing Stella in the first place. Dominique is really strong in the secondary market and Post-War department in general and also specifically with Stella. I’m really focused on the new work. Frank Stella is a living, breathing artist, who’s 83 years old. He wants to show his newest works. He’s still in the studio creating.

Lévy Gorvy hasn’t done a show of the new work but it could certainly happen. I also knew that working with the new work was going to be expensive. Just mounting a show can be hundreds of thousands of dollars. A gallery my size can’t afford to do that alone – let alone also support the auction market, put out the inevitable fires, and get the ball rolling on the catalogue raisonné one day. Dominique immediately understood all of that and jumped on board.

**The Canvas:** Do you think that those types of partnerships are the future for medium-sized galleries in a way?

**Marianne Boesky:** When we started this five or six years ago, I definitely thought that collaborative representations were going to be the only way we’d be able to compete with the big guys. And I’ve since partnered with Paula Cooper on Jennifer Bartlett. So, it’s by no means a one-off scenario. But I’ve been surprised that more of these types of partnerships haven’t happened. Now, of course, these partnerships aren’t easy. Dominique and I are both incredibly busy running our own galleries, managing our staffs, and working with so many artists all over the world. And the clients aren’t always quick to understand a same-city collaboration. But we’ve stayed true to each other, and we’re old, long-time friends, thank goodness, because if we weren’t, we probably would have killed each other by now. I do think there will be more of these types of partnerships in the future. But if I thought six years ago that my future was having a co-gallery for all of my biggest artists, I definitely don’t see that now.

**The Canvas:** Let’s talk about fairs for a bit, if that’s okay with you. You mentioned that around 2015 the gallery was participating in 12 fairs in a given year which is a crazy number for a gallery this size. Can you walk me through which fairs you plan to exhibit at this year (September 2019- June 2020) and why you chose those specific fairs?

**Marianne Boesky:** Sure. We’ll be featuring the Haas Brothers in a solo booth next month at Frieze in London. After that, we’ll of course be showing at Art Basel Miami Beach. We’re applying to TEFAF New York in the spring as part of a special joint project with Paula Cooper at which we will show Jennifer Bartlett and Sol LeWitt. And then we’re also applying to Art Basel in Basel hoping to exhibit there again, as well.

**The Canvas:** So, no Armory Show for you guys this year?

**Marianne Boesky:** Correct. For the first time in my life as a dealer we won’t be doing the Armory Show. We’re actually going to be doing Independent instead. Our decision is by no means an indictment of the Armory, by the way. I was on the selection committee for years, and it will always hold a special place in my heart. But ultimately, this time around, I felt that Independent was a better fit.

**The Canvas:** So, Frieze London, Art Basel Miami Beach, Independent, TEFAF NY Spring, and Art Basel in Basel is the plan. What about any regional fairs such as Expo Chicago, the Dallas Art Fair, or Zona in Mexico?

**Marianne Boesky:** We’ve done Chicago and Dubai before. I like regional fairs, and we’ll continue to do them on a case-by-case basis. In fact, we might also apply to an Asian fair in the spring, but it’ll depend on how many fairs we’ve already confirmed. I really don’t want to do more than five fairs in a year going forward.

**The Canvas:** By the time this edition is published, the gallery’s fall show with the Haas Brothers will be open to the public. They’ve had a tremendous few years and have gained a fairly wide following. How did you first begin working with them? And to what do you attribute their significant success and growth these past few years?

**Marianne Boesky:** I first saw their work in a couple of friends’ homes about six years ago and was immediately enamored. I like creatures. It’s exactly the kind of thing that makes me uncomfortable in the best way pos-
sible. And at the same time, I had seen their works with R & Company, which was representing them. Eventually, there was an opportunity about three years ago to go visit their studio in LA. And even though Simon wasn’t there at the time, I ended up spending hours and hours talking with Niki.

To be quite frank, I left the studio with a feeling similar to the one I had when I first started working with Murakami. Murakami had just begun growing his practice beyond himself into a kind of a communal studio – almost like a production company. And the Haas Brothers were doing something very similar. They had a handful of people in the studio who were working with them, and they were sharing the credit for everything. We started talking about the project they did in South Africa, for which they collaborated with local women to make a series of beaded sculptures. They had gone down there for about six months and realized that what they particularly loved about that work was that these women were gaining autonomy and financial independence through their practice. I walked away from that visit and just immediately saw that, in a similar way to Murakami, their work was much bigger than just them. It was commercial for a purpose, and also beautifully executed, informed, and thoughtful.

**The Canvas:** At the same time, their work is also similar to Murakami in that it’s perfect for social media. It’s in your face and very attention-grabbing.

**Marianne Boesky:** Absolutely. It’s also endearing and dark, in a sense. But to me the difference is that these guys are genuinely community-minded and born of a generous spirit. Murakami was motivated by a very specific and different set of ambitions. First and foremost, he was driven to elevate otaku and manga culture to the level of respectable art. He was hungry for a new kind of art to be accepted in Japan. The Haas Brothers do share an ability to cross over and bridge the commercial with the high-minded. They also believe in sharing the credit all around.

**The Canvas:** That’s another interesting point. It used to be that design collectors and art collectors were completely siloed from one another. Design collectors weren’t necessarily art collectors and art collectors weren’t necessarily design collectors. The Haas Brothers definitely bridge that gap as well.

**Marianne Boesky:** I think that Adam Lindemann also helped bridge that gap and helped it become cool and hip to have both elements in your collection. Look at what’s happened with ceramics, and pottery, and fiber art. All these mediums are mixing. And then the Carpenters Workshop Gallery exhibition at Ca d’Oro in Venice was, for me, one of the absolute high points during this last Biennale. I don’t know who decides what anymore. ■
• Dealer’s Assistant - Pace
• Registrar - Pace
• Administrative Assistant - Andrea Rosen Gallery [NYFA]
• Senior Administrative Assistant: Estates, Appraisals & Valuations - Christie’s
• Logistics Manager: Fine Art Operations - Christie’s
• Junior Specialist: Decorative Arts - Christie’s
• Communications and Marketing Coordinator - Selldorf Architects
• PR Account Executive - Cultural Counsel [NYFA]
• Press Coordinator - Gagosian
• Digital Communications Manager - The Studio Museum in Harlem
• Director, Public Programs & Community Engagement - The Studio Museum in Harlem
• Senior Exhibitions Coordinator - Sotheby’s
• Books Coordinator - David Zwirner
• Bookkeeper - David Zwirner
• Gallery Associate - Alexander Gray Associates [NYFA]
• Director of Marketing - Brooklyn Museum
• Director of Publications and Interpretation - Brooklyn Museum
• Budget Analyst - Brooklyn Museum
• Client Development Manager - Phillips
• Sales Associate - Perrotin
• Press & Communications Associate - Galerie Lelong & Co [NYFA]
• Events Coordinator - The Metropolitan Museum of Art
• Executive Assistant, Development - The Metropolitan Museum of Art
• Executive Assistant, Exhibitions Office - The Metropolitan Museum of Art
• Front End Developer - The Metropolitan Museum of Art
• Gallery Associate - Sean Kelly [NYFA]
• Registrar - Sean Kelly [NYFA]
• Researcher - Hauser & Wirth
• Graphic Designer - Hauser & Wirth
• Senior Designer - Whitney Museum of American Art
• Senior Marketing Coordinator - Whitney Museum of American Art
• Assistant to Director - Gladstone Gallery [NYFA]
• Social Media Producer - Guggenheim Museum
• Publicist - Guggenheim Museum
• Assistant/Associate Curator - Guggenheim Museum
• Personal Assistant to the Executive Director - Lisson Gallery [NYFA]
Exploring Tennis Elbow with The Journal Gallery Co-Founders, Michael Nevin and Julia Dippelhofer

Despite its identity as a tiny, one-room gallery nestled in the heart of Tribeca that focuses on emerging and mid-career artists, The Journal Gallery, in an ironic and somewhat circuitous way, has grown to encompass many of the features that some of the largest galleries have increasingly looked to adopt in recent years, as they each battle for market share and attempt to cultivate a younger generation of collectors to carry them through the next generation of art collecting.

In essence, Michael Nevin and Julia Dippelhofer, the co-founders of The Journal Gallery, can be viewed, in that sense, as the ultimate early adopters. They published a magazine before it was de rigueur for galleries to have their own in-house editorial operations. They opened their former gallery space in Williamsburg prior to the neighborhood’s rise as an epicenter for hipsters and poseurs, and the corporate real estate development that quickly followed. They aggressively promoted their shows on Instagram before that was standard practice across the industry. And, they first started experimenting with alterations to the traditional gallery model in 2017 with their innovative ‘Tennis Elbow’ concept.

The Tennis Elbow concept, along with the gallery’s recent move to Tribeca last spring, is what brought The Canvas to the doorstep of The Journal Gallery’s charming space on White Street as they readied their opening “show” of the season – six works by fashion designer/artist Helmut Lang, available to collectors both in person at the gallery’s physical location, as well as online through the Tennis Elbow portal. At a time when so much ink has been spilled – potentially too much ink – on the struggles of small and medium-sized galleries, Nevin and Dippelhofer have managed to carve out a flourishing niche for their gallery that proves there’s still a place for small, thoughtful galleries that approach the business of exhibiting and selling art with fresh ideas.

The ultimate cool kids, Nevin and Dippelhofer look and talk the part as they sit with The Canvas and walk us through their thinking in setting up shop in Tribeca versus other gallery neighborhoods; take us step by step through how the Tennis Elbow concept works; and explain why artists and some of the largest galleries that represent them have been so open to the idea of making works available online.

Interview begins ▼
The Canvas: Thanks very much for taking the time to sit down with me on a Sunday. To begin with, the gallery moved to Tribeca earlier this year from its former space in Williamsburg. I was wondering if you could perhaps walk me through your thinking in terms of what led you to Tribeca vis-à-vis other gallery neighborhoods in the city.

Julia: For a long time, we were on the outskirts of where everybody else was located – and that worked well in the sense that we were a destination in Williamsburg that people had to consciously choose to make time to visit. But we were really looking to be more a part of the community and align ourselves with galleries that we’re friendly with and with whom we’ve worked together on joint projects.

The Canvas: And you felt that for the most part those types of galleries were in Tribeca?

Julia: Yes, or they were in the process of moving here.

Michael: When we first opened in the East Village and then in Williamsburg, those neighborhoods were really different than they are now. We were part of this group of people who inspired us and drove us to show art. That was really the catalyst for opening the gallery. But over time, Williamsburg changed. We had two spaces there in succession, and the second one was huge and really our dream space. But the neighborhood became so hot for corporate commercial tenants, and our building was sold to a developer. We were given notice that at the end of the lease, we’d lose the space. At that point, we had to decide where to look next. And believe it or not, we were priced out of Williamsburg, in a way.

“At first, it was just an experiment, but we increasingly fell more and more in love with the model. We really enjoyed doing the shows and the energy, freedom, and creativity it brought to what we do.”

The Canvas: I believe it. So, you started looking at Chelsea and Tribeca almost immediately?

Michael: Well, we started thinking about where to go where we could be around a group of like-minded people. Our immediate reaction was to try and find an even bigger space than the one we had in Williamsburg. But as we thought about it some more, we realized that the climate in the art world, and the traditional gallery model, was in the process of changing. It didn’t make sense for us to open a large space for a number of reasons.

Julia: At the same time, we had started the Tennis Elbow concept in the back room of our previous space. It was about the size of the current gallery that we’re sitting in. At first, it was just an experiment, but we increasingly fell more and more in love with the model. We really enjoyed doing the shows and the energy, freedom, and creativity it brought to what we do.

The Canvas: So, the Tennis Elbow concept was already firmly in your mind when you chose this space?

Michael: Yes, 100%. We had so much fun – and success – running Tennis Elbow in the other space, that we just started envisioning what the concept would look like if we did it somewhere else for a while or even long term. One of the things that we were intent on with this iteration of Tennis Elbow was that it be in a central location for visitors and in the proximity of other galleries. At first, we considered the Upper East Side and looked at some spaces on Madison Avenue. But it just didn’t feel like the DNA of the gallery. Eventually, we came to Tribeca through a real estate broker and felt it was a great fit.
The Canvas: I’m guessing it was Jonathan Travis of Redwood Property Group?

Michael: Yes. There were other galleries that we identified with here, and the neighborhood felt vibrant.

Julia: There’s a nice mix of old New York and fresh energy in the neighborhood, and we’ve really felt very welcomed. People who live nearby come and visit every week. There’s a genuine feeling of community.

Michael: If we opened in Chelsea, we would have been anonymous in the context of that neighborhood. Here, people make the effort to come by and tell us how much they love and appreciate the galleries that have moved into Tribeca these past few years.

The Canvas: Let’s switch gears for a bit and talk about Tennis Elbow itself. How does the concept actually work?

Michael: It’s important to keep in mind that we started Tennis Elbow as an experiment. We didn’t anticipate it being its own gallery and its own business. We said, “What happens if we take this little space and we have fun with it?” From there, we would essentially deconstruct all the elements of a typical gallery show. We would take one-month shows and turn them into one-week shows. We wouldn’t have openings, just open a new show at noon every Saturday. We wouldn’t do show titles or press releases. And we wouldn’t even announce the shows until the day before.

The Canvas: Is there a curatorial aspect to the shows?

Michael: There is a curatorial aspect in terms of the artists we choose and how they fit within the context of the other artists and the gallery. From there, we’re pretty hands-on with what work is actually being shown.

The Canvas: Now, the gallery doesn’t have a roster of artists. So how do you decide which artists to work with?

Julia: At one point we did have a roster of artists. But I think for us, one important aspect of Tennis Elbow is really just working with artists whose work we believe in and with whom we enjoy collaborating. And also, we have a record that spans 15 years. So, there are artists who have shown with us several times, and who may have shown with us when they were starting out, but then went on to be represented by other galleries, or who already were represented by other galleries. In that sense, I see it more as a community rather than a traditional roster.

The Canvas: What were the reactions from some of the artists you initially approached about featuring their works in the Tennis Elbow concept?

Michael: Honestly, at first, I was bracing myself for a lot of resistance from the artists. I thought they might consider it too commercial. But the response has actually been very positive. I think that many artists have legitimate issues with some of the traditional aspects of a gallery. There is a lot of pressure that comes with doing a big solo show. With Tennis Elbow, we’re trying to offer a new proposal for artists to show in a solo context, and a lot of artists have found that idea really refreshing.

The Canvas: Okay, so now let’s talk about the actual logistics of how Tennis Elbow works. How many Tennis Elbow shows take place within the year? How many pieces are offered in each show? And what’s the process like for the gallery’s clients?

Julia: There are approximately 40 to 45 shows in a year, taking into consideration the holidays. Each show is generally up for a week and most shows feature between three and five works. And there is also a window display that allows the artist to do something a bit different or show an additional work. Each Friday night at 6:00 pm, a show is uninstalled. As soon it’s uninstalled, the next show goes up at noon on Saturday.

The Canvas: One aspect of Tennis Elbow that I’d like to explore a bit more is the online component. While people can of course still come to the gallery and look at the pieces and purchase work in-person, each show is also offered for sale online. How do the online sales work?

Michael: The way we set up the online sales was by establishing a membership program. The collectors with whom we’ve worked over the past 15 years were automatically added to the membership. And from there, we also accept applications from people who want to become members, which we approve on a case-by-case basis.

The Canvas: And what’s the criteria that a person needs to meet in order to be approved as a member who can buy the works in a show?

Michael: We ask ourselves questions like whether we know the person, do we think they’d be a responsible collector, would we sell them almost anything that we have in a show? And while we reserve the right not to put certain works for sale online, for the most part, every Friday at noon members get a login for that week’s exhibition which opens in the gallery the next day. From there, they can then go on the website and buy work that’s in the show which is available online for one week until the exhibition closes.

The Canvas: So, they don’t have to actually contact the gallery at all?

“With Tennis Elbow, we’re trying to offer a new proposal for artists to show in a solo context, and a lot of artists have found that idea really refreshing.”
Michael: Right. And, as far as we know, we’re the only gallery that has set up online sales in that way.

The Canvas: I’m pretty sure you’re correct. The online viewing rooms at Gagosian and Zwirner both require collectors to make contact with a human sales rep at some point. They may list the prices online, but there’s no “Buy Now” option.

Michael: Exactly. The way we set up Tennis Elbow, our filter is in advance. Once you’re a member, you can buy any works in the show for the duration of the show. That being said, we do reach out to members at regular intervals and reevaluate relationships. We also reserve the right to revoke membership status, which, as of now we haven’t had the need to do.

The Canvas: And how many members does the gallery currently have in the Tennis Elbow program?

Julia: Between 300 and 400, and it’s growing pretty rapidly.

The Canvas: Do you include any kind of editorial context alongside the works, such as essays or videos?

Michael: Potentially, we may in the future. Honestly, at this point it’s just an issue of resources and staffing. Since we’re doing such a fast turnover, it would be difficult to regularly add those types of features. Right now, we’re including the bio and CV for every artist alongside the works to provide the basic information to collectors. One thing that we have been doing since we opened the Tribeca space is to publish video trailers introducing each artist on Instagram and on the website every week.

“The galleries are looking for opportunities for their artists to show their work and share their ideas; and we offer a non-competitive, collaborative venue to do that.”

The Canvas: And what are most of the works priced at? Is there a general range that you’ve found works well in terms of online sales?

Michael: The prices really range. The most expensive work we’ve had in Tennis Elbow was a Rita Ackermann painting priced at $120,000. And probably the least expensive – although I may be misremembering – were some small sculptural works by Hein Koh.

Julia: I would like to go back to something we touched on earlier. Collectors don’t necessarily have to buy the works via the website. They can still receive the preview and call us over the phone or visit us at the gallery. Depending on the price of the work in question, I think there are many collectors who prefer that method. So, there’s still a very personal connection. We also follow up with every collector after an acquisition. So just as the prices vary since we’re showing a range of emerging and mid-career artists, the actual sales method can vary from show to show as well. The online sales component is just an option that’s always there and collectors really appreciate having that additional resource.

The Canvas: What have the conversations been like with some of the galleries that represent the artists you’ve featured in Tennis Elbow? For instance, Rita Ackermann is represented by Hauser & Wirth, and Helmut Lang – the subject of the gallery’s current Tennis Elbow show – is represented by Sperone Westwater. Have those galleries expressed any kind of reticence to The Journal Gallery making the pricing of their artists publicly available online?
Michael: I’m glad you asked this because I think this idea sometimes gets lost when talking about the business side of things. At the end of the day, artists have ideas. And what they want more than anything is to share those ideas and get them out into the world. When an artist is represented by a big gallery with locations in all the major cities, there are often limitations on how much they can actually show an individual artist’s work. Those galleries often have so many artists on their rosters, and many of those artists sell for millions of dollars, so it’s easy to get lost in the shuffle. When we’ve approach galleries about showing artists they represent, the response has been very positive. Galleries are looking for opportunities for their artists to show their work and share their ideas; and we offer a non-competitive, collaborative venue to do that.

The Canvas: Would you ever consider offering secondary market works through the Tennis Elbow concept?

Michael: We’re open to exploring that idea. As a gallery, that’s good place to be, as it helps with sourcing issues. There’s often more money to be made than with just primary market works alone, and as a gallery that’s been around for a while, we’re increasingly finding ourselves in situations where collectors approach us to ask if we can find them works from artists we showed 10 years ago.

The Canvas: And finally, what’s the current situation with the magazine? Is it published quarterly or biannually?

Michael: We look at it almost like an album where we “drop” it when it’s ready.

Julia: This year is also our 20-year anniversary for the magazine, so we’re really excited for what’s in store.

network #2, 2019
Cotton, wax, resin, and tar on canvas
67 x 52 1/4 x 1 1/2 inches
Courtesy: The artist and The Journal Gallery

network #0, 2017
Paper, tar, and resin on canvas
58 1/2 x 33 1/4 x 1 1/4 inches
Courtesy: The artist and The Journal Gallery
A New Era at Marlborough Gallery Emerges with Max Levai at the Helm

Max Levai has a lot of responsibility resting on his 31-year-old shoulders. The grandnephew of Marlborough Gallery co-founder Frank Lloyd, and son of longtime leader Pierre Levai, Max has been tasked with bringing the 73-year-old gallery firmly into the 21st century, as it looks to finally adopt the organizational model more commonly used by today’s large, multinational galleries.

His father’s transition into the chairman role and his appointment as president are just a few in a slew of changes the gallery announced over the summer. Others – some previously announced and a few revealed in the context of this interview – include the shuttering of the gallery’s longtime home on 57th Street in January; the expansion in Chelsea into the space next door (currently occupied by Blain|Southern and formerly by Cheim & Read); the elimination of the gallery’s disparate names by putting all locations under the unified ‘Marlborough Gallery’ banner; a downsized and streamlined artist roster; a consolidated and consistent approach to the gallery’s programming; a revamped website; the promotion of director Pascal Spengemann to vice president; and the hiring of art world veteran Jay Gorney.

Those changes might sound overwhelming – and believe us, they most decidedly are – but if Max is feeling the pressure, he’s certainly not showing it. Perhaps his persona as the kind of carefree, ultra-cool, downtown dealer is simply masking the type of strategic, calculating, operationally minded decisions he’s now being forced to consider in his new role at the gallery, but we doubt that. Max
is the real deal, and while it’s safe to assume that Marlborough will increasingly put on shows that challenge the art world’s traditional perception of the gallery, Levai and his Chelsea-based team will also most assuredly look to honor the gallery’s history and legacy while ushering it into the future. As he rightly points out, “We’re in a time where David Zwirner can show Joan Mitchell one month and then show Jordan Wolfson the next. We can adopt that same type of freedom in programming from month to month as long as the caliber of work exhibited is consistent.”

Perhaps the best example of this dual contemporary/modern approach is evinced by the gallery’s concurrent shows in London and New York this September. The New York show in Marlborough’s Chelsea space, which over the past seven years has become known for the kind of hyper-contemporary artists to whom Max personally gravitates, instead features an historical show with 78-year-old artist Joe Zucker, highlighting the artist’s ‘100-Foot-Long Piece’, a mammoth panel work created in 1968-1969. Meanwhile, the show in London, the gallery’s venue long known for its work with more historical modern artists, has been transformed into a spectacularly cool immersive installation, ‘Colony Sound’ by Jonah Freeman and Justin Lowe, two contemporary artists in their mid-40s. This latest show represents the next chapter in the duo’s San San Universe, a fictional 1970s megalopolis. But in a way, it also represents a full circle for Levai as the first exhibition he organized when he joined Marlborough in 2012 was with the pair.

Sitting in the gallery’s minimalist viewing room upstairs at the Chelsea space, and then walking through the gallery to get a sense of the changes yet to come, Levai takes The Canvas through a marathon three-and-a-half-hour journey of all the changes in store for his family’s gallery. We parse the gallery’s modus operandi up to this point and why that needed to change; the decision to close the 57th Street space and double down in Chelsea at a time when other similarly-minded galleries are decamping to Tribeca; the gallery’s updated approach to both programming and fairs; and all the staffing changes taking place at the 70-person-strong gallery. It’s a fascinating case study into the kinds of decisions and factors dealers must consider as we continue to enter a new era of the art world.
to show only in New York and not in London and vice versa. But obviously today, the art world is built on a very different model which is predicated on establishing international markets for artists of all different backgrounds. Art fairs, the internet, and the general fact that collectors travel more than ever before are three key factors that have led to collectors being more diverse in the types of art they collect. Galleries today are branded very consciously, and often sport artists lists that are the same in multiple locations. They pay real attention to ensuring that small and large decisions are uniform – whether those decisions are being implemented in Hong Kong, New York, or London – in order to cater to their clients, who frequent all of their galleries rather than just one outpost.

Up to this point, we haven't really concentrated on these principles and have run more in line with the model that Frank Lloyd initially implemented all those years ago. While that doesn't mean that our various galleries haven't collaborated successfully over the last 50 years, I think it's fair to say that each has retained its own regional identity. This model has its advantages and disadvantages, but we've decided that adopting a consolidated international approach is the best way forward for us. The biggest disadvantage was that the artists we have relationships with have essentially been managed and represented by a local team of directors at each gallery location rather than by an international group of directors who are motivated by the same short- and long-term goals at hand. Adopting this new model will allow us to increase the resources we can devote to each of our artists.

The Canvas: Okay, there's a lot to digest there. So, it sounds like the gallery was operated in a very siloed fashion without much communication between the various spaces in Chelsea, 57th Street, and London...

Max Levai: “Siloed” is a great way to put it. And yes, streamlining the communication between the different galleries is very much a focus going forward. Frequent and efficient communication wasn't really a priority in a model where each gallery was responsible for its own exhibition schedule. Overall, reorganizing the gallery behind the scenes has been something I have been quite focused on over the last few years. This reorganization – or consolidation – really takes form in the creative and programming decisions but has ripple effects in all aspects of the business. But, as I'm sure you would suspect, how information is organized is integral to creating an environment that is conducive to success for each show we organize. Standardizing systems, image drives, and general protocol will make it easier for our international team to access the information they need to be as effective as possible. This goes hand in hand with efforts made on our rebranding, web presence, and overall look, as up to this point each of the galleries has had its own style, identity, and even its own name.

The Canvas: Right. So, there’s Marlborough Contemporary (formerly Marlborough Chelsea), Marlborough Fine Art in London, and Marlborough Gallery on 57th Street. The 57th Street space is closing in January, correct?

Max Levai: Yes, that space will close in mid-January and there are three exhibitions left on the schedule. The first is a show of sculptures by Tom Otterness which opens in September. The one after that will be an important show of works by Jacques Lipshitz, which is an estate we’ve been working with for years. And the last exhibition at 57th Street will be a show of Kenneth Snelson’s works.

The Canvas: Well, let me ask you this. I think that there’s a certain segment of the art world here in New York that associates the Marlborough name with Marlborough Contemporary – the Chelsea space. But I know that the gallery caters to a lot of Upper East...
Side collectors, and you can make the argument that the 57th Street space is a better venue to service those types of collectors.

Max Levai: It’s interesting to hear your perspective, and that might be the case for a younger demographic of collectors and enthusiasts who have been following the programming since Marlborough Chelsea was conceived about seven years ago. In London, I feel like this recent history is much less known. Personally, I’m very excited about introducing some of this more contemporary programming to our clients in London. This already started in the summer with a group show curated by Maurizio Cattelan called ‘The Smiths;’ and with ‘Colony Sound,’ an immersive installation by Jonah Freeman and Justin Lowe which will open in September and spans our entire London space.

But when I started working for the gallery, the Chelsea location was really operating as a secondary space to the 57th Street location. It was designed so that big works can come in and out really easily, which is a luxury that we don’t have on 57th Street. This changed when I was hired, as my job was to follow the former model and develop a new program called Marlborough Chelsea that was independent from the 57th street gallery. Hurricane Sandy gave me the opportunity to make some important changes to the space to do this more effectively, and we worked really hard to build something interesting from scratch. It was challenging, as our goal was to create something new within the context of a gallery with a long, rich history. And yet, while we never really had a completely blank slate, we did have many other advantages which smaller operations don’t necessarily enjoy.

The Canvas: And now the plan is to take over the Blain|Southern space next door, which previously belonged to Cheim & Read. It’s an interesting time to double down in Chelsea.

Max Levai: I personally think it’s a great time to double down in Chelsea. While there’s been a clear migration of galleries away from Chelsea – many of which I see as the real pioneers in this area – the reality is that New York real estate is what ultimately drove their decision making. Some of these New York institutions that have recently moved out of the area did so not because they weren’t doing well, but simply because they didn’t own their own real estate. And, the fact is those
galleries that have stayed do own their real estate. That’s just the way it works these days. Real estate rules the roost in New York, and luxury residential buildings are the priority for retail developers in this city. Marlborough bought this space in the Chelsea Arts Tower before it was hyper-developed, and we watched it evolve into the residential area it is now. So for us, the fact that we own this space and had the opportunity to buy the space next door, just led us to make some basic, practical decisions.

Furthermore, the opportunity to expand our ground floor square footage – and specifically the horizontal façade – in the name of better-quality exhibition space (as opposed to an abundance of fancy offices) is what appealed to us. Currently, we have about 60 feet of frontage, but when we add the space next door, we’ll move up to 130 feet. I would estimate that 80% of our new space will be used for exhibitions. And I hope that when we’re finished, it will be the best-feeling and best-looking space Marlborough has ever had.

“Some of these New York institutions that have recently moved out of the area did so not because they weren’t doing well, but simply because they didn’t own their own real estate. And, the fact is those galleries that have stayed do own their real estate.”

**The Canvas:** And the plan is to have the newly combined and renovated space ready for fall of 2020. So basically, one year from now?

**Max Levai:** Correct. The plan is fall 2020. We’ll begin the redesign on our second floor first and focus on combining the spaces over the summer of 2020. We’ll need to move out of our office space and work remotely for a while, but the plan is built around allowing us to keep our ground floor exhibition space operational throughout the process.

I’m particularly excited that this opportunity came when it did, as it’s ideal to be able to have a physical manifestation of change to go along with the overarching changes we’re making to the way we approach our programming. And, having everyone in New York working under one roof will naturally help with the efforts to streamline communication and protocol within the organization.

**The Canvas:** How does the team in London feel about all these changes?

**Max Levai:** I think there’s a misconception that because of my age, and because of what I’ve done at Marlborough Contemporary, the gallery going forward is going to disconnect from the important history of Marlborough as a whole. But I think the team in London is really excited about the idea of having a program that is more internationally minded and generally more diverse.

**The Canvas:** I think it would be a reasonable assumption on the part of most people to think that contemporary programming will have a greater emphasis in the gallery’s program going forward...

**Max Levai:** In a way, you’re assuming correctly. From the outset we’ll be making exhibitions that will surprise people’s classic understanding of the gallery. However, I view this opportunity as an entirely new job for me, and it will be obvious through
the programming that I am clearly dedicated to continuing the legacy of what most people associate with the gallery. When I was brought in and Marlborough Chelsea was created, the idea was basically to bring new blood into the gallery and position it for the future in terms of its relationships with the artists and cultivating and catching up with what was happening outside Marlborough’s traditional domain. That went hand in hand with showing a lot of younger material and different types of material than the gallery had in the past.

Now, you can expect to see this continue alongside museum-quality exhibitions by artists who have, in some cases, shown with the gallery for more than half a century. We’ve been quietly testing this model and have seen great results from recent shows of Beverly Pepper, Red Grooms, Allen Jones, and RB Kitaj in the context of Marlborough Contemporary. And, I’m particularly excited about the opportunity to make significant exhibitions in New York with Frank Auerbach and Paula Rego, after our renovation is complete and under the auspices of the new brand. New York deserves to get to know these master artists better.

Many of the new initiatives we are introducing this season are focused on artists who are in their 70s and 80s, such as our show with Joe Zucker which opens in September. I think we really have a great opportunity to look at our schedule holistically and create a very distinctive exhibition program from month to month which will, in turn, define our consolidated identity. Now, obviously the manifestation of all of this will reflect my interests which will continue to incorporate young artists throughout the program. But we’re in a time where David Zwirner can show Joan Mitchell one month and then show Jordan Wolfson the next. We can adopt that same type of freedom in programming from month to month as long as the caliber of work exhibited is consistent.


**The Canvas:** The gallery’s website doesn’t currently feature an artist roster. Do you mind explaining the story there? Will the gallery still be representing artists or are you moving to a more project-based model?

**Max Levai:** We’re still building the website and are very much in a transitional period, but the artist page will soon be live and we’ll 100% be representing artists going forward. We will be downsizing the number of artists we represent and will be focusing on relationships that we think are internationally viable and make sense in the larger context we want to put forward; making sure that we have the bandwidth and physical space to properly represent the artists we commit to.

**The Canvas:** I want to talk a bit about some of the staffing changes expected at the gallery. In The Art Newspaper announcement about the changes happening at the gallery, it said that the “New York operations will be consolidated with new additions to the creative development and sales teams, along with additions to the senior directorship.” So, in addition to your father transitioning to the position of chairman, you being named president, and Pascal Spengemann being named vice president, are there any other staffing changes we can expect?

**Max Levai:** Yes. This consolidation is giving us the opportunity to rejig the way the gallery will be organized from the top down. The senior directors will be responsible for the programming and controlling how each show is put together; the exhibition design, the messaging, and all of the forward-interfacing aspects that are going to bring this whole package together. And while there will be a separate, dedicated sales team, just by the very nature of things, the senior directors will
also be responsible for selling much of the work. Additionally, because I don’t really believe in assigning one director to a
given artist, the senior directors will be in charge of a lot of the base-level liaising with the artists and will then be assisted
by other members of the staff.

**The Canvas: Between 57th Street closing and the overall changes taking place in London, will any positions be eliminated?**

Max Levai: Yes, because there's a lot of redundancy. The way the gallery functioned before, Marlborough Contemporary,
Marlborough Gallery on 57th Street, and Marlborough Fine Art in London each had its own registrars. Now, there'll just be
one international team of registrars who will deal with everything. Before, there were people designing ads on 57th Street
and people designing ads here in Chelsea. Now, all the ads will be designed from one place and there will be one creative
director who will be responsible for the look and brand of the gallery.

The Canvas: Are there any new positions for which you’re still looking to hire? I know the gallery recently announced that Jay
Gorney will be joining...

Max Levai: There are a lot of positions we’ll be hiring for in the near future. Right now, the focus is really on getting everyone
assimilated and used to the new system. But going forward, we’ll be focused on bringing in new sales-oriented staff mem-
bers both in New York and London as well as many other new positions that are being created in line with our new priorities.

In terms of the senior directors and the ‘brain trust’ of the gallery, what’s really important to me is finding people who have
substantial experience in the art world, but who are equally motivated to learn and stay on the current edge. Jay Gorney is
such a great fit for exactly that reason. He’s got his finger on the pulse, but he also has a deep rooted, fundamental, histor-
ical understanding of the history of art post-1900 that continues to develop, not only because he was there in the 80s, but
because he’s equally interested in keeping up with museum shows and staying current. He has relationships on both ends
of the spectrum. And someone like Pascal Spengemann who joined Marlborough from a contemporary perspective, has
become an expert on a lot of the material that predates him by being in close proximity to it over the years.

The Canvas: Before we wrap up, I was hoping we could discuss fairs for a bit. What will be the gallery’s thinking going forward under this new model regarding fairs?

Max Levai: The rise in the importance of fairs was particularly important for me with regard to acknowledging how important it was that we dedicated ourselves to the changes we are making. There were many times when clients would approach our booth at a fair and have questions that were specific to the programming at one gallery location that couldn’t be answered as the wrong staff was present. It was clear that our clients were often confused and unsure of what to expect when it came to Marlborough’s participation in various fairs.

The whole point of having an international business is to cross-pollinate and share information across locations. If I have a client in New York who’s traveling to London – or vice versa – the idea is to share that information so that he or she is being fully serviced around the different galleries, as well as at the fairs which take place around the globe. That culture of communication just wasn’t being prioritized. It felt like we weren’t taking advantage of a lot of the upside of having an international operation.

Going forward, we’re actually going to be cutting down our fair schedule a little bit and prioritizing the three Basel and three Frieze fairs. And, our audience should expect more consistent presentations now that creative decisions are coming from one place. ■
REVOLVING DOOR

• Allison Underwood, formerly of Hauser & Wirth, joins the Drawing Center as director of communications
• Christy MacLear named CEO of PaceX
• Guggenheim Museum names Leah E. Heister deputy director and chief advancement officer
• Simon Preston joins Pace as a senior director
• Bonhams appoints Wang Zineng head of modern and contemporary art in Asia
• Amy Sadao steps down as director of the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania
• Frieze London appoints Eva Langret as artistic director
• Diane Solway, formerly the features and culture editor at W Magazine, has been named editor in chief of Surface Media
• Katherine Martin will become the new chairman of Asia Week New York in 2020
• Lehmann Maupin appoints Amira Gad to the newly created position of artistic director
• Oliver Shultz and Michaëla Mohrmann join Pace as curatorial director and associate curatorial Director
• The Tate Modern in London has appointed Nabila Abdel Nabi, Osei Bonsu, Valentina Ravaglia, and Devika Singh each to the position of Curator, International Art
• Jeffrey Yin joins Artsy as general counsel as the platform’s new CEO, Mike Steib continues to flesh out his senior team
• Nate Freeman joins artnet News as senior art business reporter
Talking Shop with the Inimitable Kenny Schachter

Kenny Schachter is an enigma. A perennial thorn in many an art world influencer’s side, and yet trusted and confided in by a who’s who of major collectors and dealers, he straddles the line between indignant ombudsman, calling balls and strikes from the outside, and in-the-know insider, operating and kibitzing from the art world’s very core. He’s also a world-class gossip and raconteur as he narrates 30 years’ worth of anecdotes at a dizzying pace, be it over coffee at Sant Ambroeus on the Upper East Side, a piece of halibut at Abaita in Midtown, or on the terrace of Les Trois Rois in Basel.

So, we at The Canvas, in our enduring benevolence, wanted to share with you, our loyal readers, what that experience is like. Because even though he carries a reputation for occasionally playing somewhat fast and loose with the facts; and despite his artnet columns sometimes reading a bit peripatetic, the man himself is a delight, a treasure, an unpolished diamond that glints in just the right light. Artist, dealer, curator, collector, journalist, teacher, and man-about-town, Schachter is exactly the type of multi-hyphenate that could only exist in the curious little world of art we’ve all built for ourselves.

Speaking to us via phone from the Hamptons, where his show at Joel Mesler’s Rental Gallery recently opened, Schachter and I wax eloquent about our shared concerns over uncovering the identities of buyers of major works at auction; discuss his recent move back to New York from London where he’s lived with his family as an expat for the past 15 years; and hash out some pesky little details that have cast just a hint of shadow on his infamous Salvator Mundi scoop.

You know exactly who you’re dealing with when you speak to Kenny. There are no coy games, shrouded innuendo, or Machiavellian plots. And in an art world that’s teeming with two-faced players ready to sell you out for a shot to purchase the nearest Avery Singer painting or Gagosian dinner invite, knowing who you’re dealing with counts for a lot.
Kenny Schachter: You just said it. Historically, a dilettante used to be a good thing in the art world. And for me, teaching, writing, buying, selling, and creating art is one continuous thread. These days, everyone loves to pigeon-hole people and say, “You’re either this or that, and you can’t be more than one thing.” It’s used as a way to dismiss people. But as long as you’re passionate and committed, then I don’t really see what the issue is. I’m all of those things that you just listed. It’s just who I am and what I do.

The Canvas: Is there a role in which you identify most, or do you consider them all equal?

Kenny Schachter: Writing would probably be number one. I’m the worst art dealer that ever bought or sold a painting in history. I couldn’t sell crack to a crackhead. I love the writing process, and I love incorporating videos and computer-manipulated photography into my writing. So that’s really what would define me in the most succinct way.

The Canvas: Your artnet column is filled with the kinds of insider, art world details that are often passed around certain dinner tables but are rarely publicly reported in the press (with the exception of The Canvas, of course). When people share unreported news with you, do they think they’re confiding in you? Are they aware that what they say might end up in your next column? Or do you think people selectively leak to you for their own strategic purposes?

Kenny Schachter: It’s funny, because you’d think no one would ever say a thing to me anymore. Sometimes I’ll be a bit naughtly with something that has been told to me quote unquote “off the record”, and if I have some kind of moral reason where I think it’s okay to write about it, I’ll do so. But a lot of times I’m just in agony and dying to write about the things I hear. I think, in a way, people just can’t help themselves talking to me. I’ve become like Ann Landers or Dear Abby – someone you could write letters to who will voice an opinion one way or the other which is so rare in today’s art world. People incessantly complain about fake news nowadays, but the art world fears the truth more than it fears lies!

“I’m the worst art dealer that ever bought or sold a painting in history. I couldn’t sell crack to a crackhead.”

The Canvas: So, you definitely feel – at least to a certain degree – that people want to see the things they tell you in print?

Kenny Schachter: I have to be very careful nowadays because I’ve had so many threats – from legal threats, to fistcuffs thrown at me, to death threats, believe it or not. Of course, there will always be people who are deceitful or manipulative. That’s why I only get information from a small coterie of people I trust. I don’t take information from random people. I do get scared sometimes that someone would lead me on with a bit of news that I would find very enticing but ultimately wasn’t true, just to undermine me, so these things do make me a little bit queasy.

The Canvas: What’s your reaction when people come out and publicly call you out on a scoop? Interestingly, this even happened between you and me. I reported that Rauschenberg’s ‘Buffalo II’ was bought by Alice Walton based on three very reliable sources, but then you reported that it was purchased by Ken Griffin. And on the inverse side, when I reported that Hasso Plattner was behind the purchase of Monet’s ‘Meules’ – despite other reporters casting doubt on my reporting – you came out and said that I was 100% right. And now, artnet included that purchase as a matter of fact in its ‘Intelligence Report’ a few weeks ago. How do you walk that line? Does it stress you out?

Kenny Schachter: I mean, I deal with that all of the time. Phillips wrote a two-page letter to artnet with bullet point after bul-
let point complaining about various articles I’ve written over the years, claiming I had some sort of vendetta against them, and arguing that I shouldn’t be allowed to cover their sales anymore. But every single thing I had written about them was true. And the owners of Frieze did the same thing. They literally tried to get me forbidden from covering any of their future fairs based on past things I’d written. But everything I write is written because I believe it to be true. No journalist can ever be 100% certain, but we really do strive for near-perfect accuracy.

The Canvas: How do you walk that line specifically in regard to the identities of buyers at auction? It feels like this past year that has been a particular area of focus. Is there any part of you that feels that the buyers of major works at auction are entitled to some sort of privacy or shielding of their identity if you’re confident you know who they are and have cleared those thresholds necessary to go to press?

Kenny Schachter: Personally, I’m a very transparent person in my life and practice. One of the big complaints of our time socially and economically is that these giant corporations—Facebook, Google, Amazon—don’t respect the notion of privacy and that everything you’re saying is being recorded and listened to. But I think that people so willfully and of their own volition give up so much of their right to privacy, that I find it hard to take at face value when people complain about their privacy being infringed upon. In this day and age where we are all complicit in pulling our virtual pants down and exposing ourselves on social media, can anyone really legitimately claim a right to privacy (and/or copyright) anymore?

Even major collectors like Aby Rosen and David Geffen are so open about posting pictures of their holidays on Instagram. But then there are some cases—like when I wrote about Steven Cohen buying the bunny—where his advisor wanted to slay me and was very unamused by my making that public. But truth is the only defense to those kinds of complaints. Many people complain about how veiled in secrecy and opaque the auction process is, and how it’s a cesspool for corruption. I don’t know, that kind of stuff really doesn’t bother me. Maybe it should, but it doesn’t.

The Canvas: For the past 15 years or so you’ve lived in London. But then, this year, you decided to move back to New York and re-immersing yourself in the New York art world. What were some of the factors that led to that decision? Why did you feel it was a good time to come back to New York?

Kenny Schachter: Honestly, I just got really bored and realized I was becoming complacent in my own activities in the art world. When I first moved to the UK, it was a great way to reinvent myself and have a sort of empty cabinet, if you will. It was such a vivacious and exuberant scene. At the time, there was even talk in the press about London surpassing New York as the art capital of the world. I had a great 10-year run that really defined me as a writer at a time and age when the internet and smartphone was becoming ubiquitous and my audience grew exponentially. For the first three or four years, I didn’t go back to New York for more than a week or two in a given year. I just totally immersed myself in what was happening in London.

As Americans, we forget how cut off we are from the rest of the world. But living in London, I was able to go to Paris, Zurich, and Brussels for an art fair and be home by dinner. I really availed myself of all those different art world centers. But recently, Europe has just had such a hard time macro-economically and socially. Even before Brexit, things just got so much worse in the UK. Now, they have over-regulation, over-taxation, increasing crime, political infighting and instability, and just a completely racist Labour
party that’s in disarray. Can you blame me for wanting to leave?

The Canvas: Well, when you put it that way... You mentioned art fairs. I’m wondering what the current Kenny Schachter take is on art fairs. Do you have a favorite? Is there such a thing as a good art fair? How do you expect fairs to distinguish themselves going forward?

Kenny Schachter: I love art fairs. It annoys me when everyone speaks so badly of them.

The Canvas: You do as well. I read your past 15 columns in preparation for this interview and you can be pretty brutal in your criticism. Especially when it comes to the Frieze fairs.

Kenny Schachter: Well, yes. I just find Frieze to be so exclusionary. Everything about Frieze is “You can’t do this; you can’t do that.” They never want to mix design and art. And I just find the rigidity of some of the rules, and the political nature of the selection committees to be absolutely stifling and awful. But Art Basel in Basel is one of the best visual experiences that a person could have, period. New Yorkers take for granted that you can hop in a taxi and see 75 galleries in Chelsea in one afternoon. London is very much like LA in that it’s so spread out and diffuse. I’m a maximalist and love to be able to see as much as possible in the shortest time. So, in our hyper-shortened Instagram-defined attention spans, I just think the ease and convenience of art fairs are fantastic.

Going forward though, I think art fairs are going to be under a lot of pressure, as people don’t realize that we’re really in a down market for art. Once the supply far exceeds the demand, which is the phase I believe we are entering, then the fairs will become more interesting. Fairs should be experimental and open up the criteria necessary in order to exhibit. The only time you ever see a fair like Frieze try to do more curated projects, or open up to female artists, or work with galleries that are under pressure and struggling, is when they have to, and not because they want to.

I do love Frieze Masters, though. And I love FIAC. And Basel in Basel, as I mentioned above. People don’t realize that attending fairs is like going to galleries. They’re the last free lunch in the world. Why wouldn’t you take advantage, you know?

“In this day and age where we are all complicit in pulling our virtual pants down and exposing ourselves on social media, can anyone really legitimately claim a right to privacy (and/or copyright) anymore?”

The Canvas: I totally agree. Though I don’t necessarily agree with you when it comes to Frieze. I think they tend to experiment with curated sections more than some other fairs on the circuit. But before we finish up, I wanted to talk about your Salvator Mundi scoop. I don’t want to get too into the weeds here, but you did tell me that you wanted me to approach the interview with “gloves off.” Disregarding MBS, and the yacht, and all of that, you reported that there was a third-party guarantee in place for $130 million made by Pierre Chen, the Taiwanese businessman, and that he made $135 million on the deal. However, when re-watching the auction, Jussi Pylkkänen (who was the auctioneer for the evening) very clearly said that he could sell Salvator Mundi for $90 million. How would that work if there was a $130 million third-party guarantee in place? Is there any way to marry those two facts in your mind?

Kenny Schachter: I mean, I can’t really answer that question. But I 100% stand by what I said. It’s not even like it was hearsay. I was told that information firsthand. There was definitely a third-party guarantee in place, and it was absolutely paid.
Either Christie’s didn’t think there was enough interest and they were trying to gin up bidding...

The Canvas: So, you’re saying it was a bluff?

Kenny Schachter: Yeah. I mean, I’ve sold things at auction before, and put a small reserve on the work in question in the hope of inciting a pissing match between two testosterone-fueled, machismo dudes who have a lot of money – which is exactly what happened here. The only real way to succeed at auction is to have a below-the-market estimate so that people think they’re getting something for a steal, and then before they know it, they’re caught up in the heat of the moment.

The Canvas: But again, this wasn’t really about having a below-the-market estimate. Jussi very clearly states that he could sell it at $90 million.

Kenny Schachter: I think he was trying to incite bidding. If the guy’s committed to pay at $130 million then it doesn’t really matter if it’s a bluff. It’s not like they can open the bidding for Salvator Mundi at $130 million. It would seem contrived.

The Canvas: But he’s saying he could sell it at $90 million. What if there was a bidder at that price and then interest dried up. How would that work with the third-party guarantee?

Kenny Schachter: But he obviously knew that there was interest on the books. So yeah, it was either a mistake or a bluff. But almost definitely a bluff.

The Canvas: Last question – what are you most looking forward to in the art world this coming year?

Kenny Schachter: I’m going to have a show of my work at Blum & Poe in Tokyo this spring. That, to me, is the apotheosis of my life. Besides that, I have another article that’s due next week. And every time I write an article, I feel like I get to have a one-person show. I have a tiny audience of the most extraordinary people in the world – like you do – so I feel incredibly lucky. It’s been a hard-fought 30 years that I’ve been in the art world. But I feel like every article I write – as long as it doesn’t suck – gives me great hope.

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