



Non-commercial galleries

Another way to show

Artist-run and not-for-profit spaces form a Los Angeles counter-culture that is less obsessed with sales

Since the economic crisis of 2008, artist-run and non-profit spaces have flourished in Los Angeles, and now are taking on commercial galleries at their own game. This new generation of artists, curators and writers are not necessarily opposed to the market; they just think they can do a better job with a cheaper model.

Night Gallery, which this month will reopen as a fully-fledged commercial venture, is the exception. Other artist-run spaces such as Latned Atsár, Weekend, Favorite Goods, Actual Size and Paradise Garage prefer to run programmes that are not beholden to a roster of artists, have negligible overheads and that treat sales as windfalls rather than necessities.

When the recession hit, says Eve Fowler of the roving Artist Curated Projects, it was paradoxically empowering for many artists: "They said to themselves, 'My gallery doesn't do anything for me, so I might as well leave and do it myself.'" She also notes that the market in Los Angeles is unfairly weighted towards young male painters. The programme of Artist Curated Projects – predominantly exhibitions in people's homes – provides the opportunity for "artists to say what they think is good".

Staying home

Artist Nathan Danilowicz, the founder of the south LA gallery Latned Atsár, turned over part of his live-work space to an exhibition programme named after the building's previous occupants, Rasta Dental (the name is reversed). Danilowicz aims for the aesthetic of a "white cube gallery", but he is happy not to have to get his hands dirty with lengthy press releases and the other minutiae involved in marketing art.

Young Chung, of the Koreatown space Commonwealth & Council, "wants to imagine a place between a non-profit and commercial gallery. We want sales to be based on some sort of honouring system where money is a form of gratitude and motivation for the artist and space to continue." Nevertheless, he adds, "sales

Night turns to day for cult gallery



When it opened in 2010, Night Gallery (above, left) quickly established a unique identity among Los Angeles artist-run venues. It was remarkable both for its eccentric opening hours (10pm to 2am, Tuesday to Thursday) and the sepulchral mood of its dimly lit, black-painted space. It was an artists' hang-out as much as a gallery. Experimental shows by artists including Samara Golden (*Rape of the Mirror*, 2011, above, right) and Spencer Sweeney were unlike anything else in the city. Now Night Gallery is reincarnating into a fully-fledged commercial enterprise with daytime hours and nine represented artists. Its directors, Davida Nemeroff and Mlekn Marple, are nevertheless determined to retain the original outlaw spirit. Architect Peter Zellner, who has also designed galleries for Matthew Marks, Laxart and MacCarone, has modelled spaces on the original gallery's layout, building them inside a warehouse south of downtown. The gallery will reopen on 26 January. J.G.

are not the driving force." Instead, "we are more interested in artists, who they are, and what they believe." Chung mistrusts the "notions of ingenuity and talent that are often the criteria for commercial galleries."

Also firmly on the side of the artist community is Human Resources, one of the few alternative spaces in Los Angeles that has 501(c)(3) non-profit status. It was set up in 2010 as a place for different constituencies within the art world to mingle: their founding board included a lawyer and a private investigator. Current board

member Chiara Giovando, a curator and artist, notes that many artists are more interested in engaging with music, film or literature, for example, than they are with visual art. Most commercial galleries – especially in these straitened times – are unable to reflect this diversity in their programmes. While Human Resources' tax-exempt status does not prevent the organisation from selling art on occasion, most of its funding comes from private sources or grants.

Los Angeles' alternative spaces are not only for those overlooked by the market. Painter

Laura Owens, who is represented by three galleries worldwide, has chosen an empty church in East LA's Boyle Heights to mount her first solo major exhibition in the city for ten years, opening this month.

Small and unusual

In fact, Owens has had a recent solo show in Los Angeles: it was at The Finley, a space run by the writer Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer and her partner Jeff Hassay in the stairwell of their apartment building. Most of the time, the art on show is only visible through the windows. The Finley is one of a number of exhibition spaces that make resourceful use of unusual locations for showing art. The Vanity, operated by Asha Schechter, is a cupboard in the artist's home; Tif's Desk is the glass-topped desk of Thomas Solomon Gallery's director Tif Sigfrids.

Many people view setting up an art space of their own as an effective means to nurture community in a city often criticised for its alienating size. The curator and graphic designer Lauren Mackler arrived in Los Angeles in 2010, and began The Museum of Public Fiction in one of the many empty storefronts she saw while driving around Highland Park. Fellow newcomer Davida Nemeroff founded Night Gallery the same year.

The curator Cesar Garcia agrees that "most alternative spaces have historically been concerned with cultivating the scene here". By contrast, his institution The Mistake Room, due to open in 2013, will concentrate on establishing an LA hub for international curators and artists. Spaces run by artists with international connections – Favorite Goods and Paradise Garage for example – bring artists to the city who may not even have shown in the US before.

When asked about their ambitions for the future, artist-gallerists are usually vague. Most see running a space as secondary to their work as artists. As Mackler notes, it may be a positive thing that, unlike a commercial business with contracts, investments and debts, an artist run space lasts "only as long as the enthusiasm and excitement is there, and not a moment longer".
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