

Night Gallery Opens a New Space Downtown, Transitioning From Feisty Alternative Space to a Full-Fledged Art Experience

By Carol Cheh Thursday, Jan 24 2013



Since Night Gallery opened in a shabby Lincoln Heights strip mall in February 2010, it has carved a singular niche for itself in the Los Angeles art landscape. More than just an art gallery, more than just an artist-run space, Night Gallery, which in its old incarnation was open only very late on weekday nights, had a mystique and an ethos all its own.

The art shown there was unlike anything else you'd see around town. Individuals like Abigail DeVille and Samara Golden transformed the space with daring installations, while group shows featured themes like "Group Shower" (works by interns that included an elaborate re-creation of a school gym shower) and "Darkroom" (a collection of hypnotic, photo-themed pieces so dimly lit as to be barely visible).

The old gallery's cavelike, black walls made for a viewing experience that felt secretive, intimate and tribal, and film screenings and poetry readings spiced up the offerings.

A dynamic social scene also was integral to the experience, with a varied network of artists and friends regularly gathering in the lounge and spilling out into the parking lot during openings.

Artist Davida Nemeroff founded Night Gallery shortly after receiving her MFA from Columbia. After more than a year of running it by herself, she took on as a partner dealer Mieke Marple, formerly of 1301PE Gallery. Instead of meeting the early but glorious demise that typically awaits scene-making ventures like this, Night Gallery has thrived under the women's symbiotic partnership, which is a perfect marriage between Marple's shrewd business sense, Nemeroff's soulful vision and an unerring mutual instinct for what's cool.



PHOTO BY SEAN TEEGARDEN
Davida Nemeroff, left, and Mieke Marple hope to turn their Night Gallery into a place like the Hammer Museum.

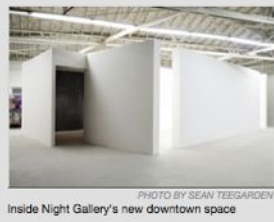


PHOTO BY SEAN TEEGARDEN
Inside Night Gallery's new downtown space

The past year and a half has seen them increasing their sales and expanding their presence in the art world at large, participating in prestigious art fairs such as NADA and Frieze and throwing elite parties at venues like Bar Marmont.

Now, almost three years after its inception, Night Gallery finds itself at a major turning point. Eager to take their venture to the next level and tired of the limitations imposed by their old space, Marple and Nemeroff are moving their operations to a 6,200-square-foot warehouse on the southern edge of downtown L.A., opening Jan. 26. They have enlisted well-regarded architect Peter Zellner — known for designing the Matthew Marks gallery in West Hollywood and the LAXART and Susanne Vielmetter spaces in Culver City — to reinvent the space for them. And they will be introducing daytime viewing hours to the gallery's schedule.

Is Night Gallery growing up? With this big, bold move, some might worry that the two Eastside impresarios are selling out or going corporate, or, at the very least, becoming less fun.

Over the course of a sunny afternoon, we toured the under-construction new digs and discussed Night Gallery's place in the art world and the partners' vision for its future.

I was intrigued to find not two aspiring moguls preparing for blue-chip status but rather two creative individuals struggling to remain true to their vision while striving for greater mainstream recognition.

"We still are who we are," Marple assured me. "Our dream is to sustain our vision, and to win over more hearts and minds to it. You can't just stay off the grid forever — I mean, you can, but that only changes your world, it doesn't change the larger world."

I asked Nemeroff about her original vision for Night Gallery. Was it a punk-rock conceptual space in the beginning, or was it always a gallery from the get-go? "I thought of it as a possibility for anything," she said. "I would say that I thought of it all the way to this point."

The two partners obviously are adept at getting serious business done: The new space is funded primarily by gallery sales, with some pro bono or heavily discounted help from people like Marple's father, who served as their general contractor.

It became evident after talking to them, however, that their approach is highly organic and intuitive, subject to evolution from moment to moment, depending on what feels right.

While Night Gallery is still for-profit, like most galleries, when asked what institution they would consider as a model for future growth, they cited the nonprofit Hammer Museum.

"Their programming is more experimental, it's educational, it's open," Marple observed. "It's like a social space — you meet up with your friends there and you go see a lecture. And it's run by a woman! It's very female-positive, but it's also relatable to everybody."

Hints of Hammerlike programming can be seen in Night Gallery's extracurricular activities. For the past year, they've been publishing *Night Papers*, an occasional newspaper of artists' writings. They also organize Night Comedy, evenings of offbeat stand-up comedy held at the gallery.

They hope to continue these and other similar projects in the downtown gallery. "We want to put out more publications, like catalogs or even novels and poetry, and maybe produce videos," Marple said. "Maybe we'll have lectures, panels, symposiums."

This flexible, multidisciplinary approach is reflected in the innovative structure of their new space, which is being built out in phases over the course of the coming year. The unusual design resembles something like a small, utopian city: Within the large space of the warehouse, a series of smaller structures is being built.