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Tuesday, September 28th, 2010

LES GALLS

by David Cohen

It was always on the cards, when the New Museum announced it was relocating to the Bowery, that the Lower East Side would see a proliferation of new spaces. The LES phenomenon of small, funky off-beat galleries was already well underway by the time the New opened its doors, witnessing a more intimate gallery-going experience than that afforded by Chelsea with geographically greater convenience (for Manhattanites afraid of the L-train at least) than Williamsburg. The LES siphoned venues from both locales while spawning its own.



Sperone Westwater's new premises on the Bowery, with the New Museum to the right. Photo: Nigel Young, Foster + Partners

The opening of a branch of Lehmann Maupin in late 2007 on Chrystie Street signaled that big guns were on their way. Now a battleship has moored on the Bowery in the form of Norman Foster's spectacular design for the new Sperone Westwater. The gallery, which has been active since the 1970s, relocated from premises in the Meat Packing District. The new space responds with spectacular verticality to a footprint of 100 by 25 feet as a rectangular black box with a dynamic glass front, recessed at the point where the façade lines up with its neighbors. Until 2008 the previous building on the site had housed a company that rents vintage machinery and fixtures to the film industry.

The inevitable point of comparison with Lord Foster's design will naturally be the New Museum itself, just a block away, where Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa solved the same problem of highly restricted ground plan with an irregular, offset stack of gallery cubes. Seeing the two venues sparring with one another could bring to some art historians' minds the great ideological/architectural contest between the German and Soviet pavilions at the 1937 world exhibition, though which recalls which is a speculation that is better not entered into.

Hopefully, more galleries will attempt similar feats, to make the Bowery a 21st-century San Gimignano—a much more edifying comparison.

Sperone's new building accommodates three floors of exhibition space, with offices and showrooms above, and one particularly striking, and no doubt rather costly feature: an elevator room that can be parked on different floors. For the inaugural exhibition of recent works by Argentine painter Guillermo Kuitca this peripatetic room houses a 1992 installation, *Le Sacre*, of tightly fitted-together mattresses on which the artist has imprinted miscellaneous maps from around the world, which here becomes a moving padded cell.

The neighborhood, meanwhile, welcomes two architecturally more conventional, though artistically adventurous new additions this month. Dodge Gallery at 15 Rivington Street

boasts fabulous top lit space in its double-volume rear gallery. Principal Kristen Dodge has signed up seven artists for initial representation and anticipates developing a stable that reflects her bias towards art of conceptual rigor with a high degree of craft, with an emphasis on 3-dimensional work. Dave Cole's installation, Unreal City, her first solo presentation opening October 2, is billed as a somber meditation on history, war, and industrialization.



The Dodge Gallery under construction, New York City, 2010

Around the corner at 195 Chrystie Street the relocated Hendershot Gallery (formerly on West 27th Street) launches with a group show organized by gallery director Jessica Shaefer, Digression, of seven women under 40. These include Kenya (Robinson), the parentheses part of her exhibiting name, a self-taught artist whose sensibility fuses pop imagery and black identity. Shaefer worked previously for Vito Schnabel where she developed a taste for projects that entail dialog between generations.

Kuitca's work, meanwhile, is to be one of the subjects discussed at The Review Panel in October. The artist's nationally touring retrospective makes its final stop this month at the Hirshhorn Museum, opening October 21 in Washington DC.



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