

ART &amp; DESIGN

# 10 Galleries to Visit in SoHo and TriBeCa

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER APRIL 16, 2015

IN SoHo, the real estate casualties just keep coming: Last year Pearl Paint, the venerable art supply store on Canal Street, closed. This month Pearl River Mart, the Chinese department store where you can buy everything from paper lanterns to cheap ceramics, announced its departure. Rent on its Broadway space is reported to exceed a heart-stopping \$500,000 a month. Yet, amazingly, despite the growing glut of flagship stores, SoHo remains a great place to see art; its nonprofit spaces are thriving. And few things are as satisfying as braving the consumerist hordes, ducking into an art space that is hidden in plain sight, and having your consciousness altered without spending any money at all.

## SOHO

### ARTISTS SPACE

Founded in 1972, this remains one of New York's best alternative spaces. The current survey of work by the German artist and writer Hito Steyerl at the Artists Space site at 38 Greene Street is a stellar example. Here you can watch "Liquidity Inc." (2014), a video projection by Ms. Steyerl, while lying on a curving platform. The arc of the video moves laterally — as the poet Rainer Maria Rilke once said art should — connecting wildly disparate phenomena: tsunamis and the radical organization Weather Underground with financial markets, martial arts competitions, and the flow of people across borders and cultures. Ms. Steyerl's work itself is liquid, gliding between design and documentary and borrowing from formats familiar in our digitally saturated lives. Her work has grown

increasingly slick and seductive, as advertising and mass media have, which is sort of the point. In Artists Space: Books & Talks, an adjunct location at 55 Walker Street, Ms. Steyerl's "performance lectures" can be viewed on video monitors while the audience sits on sandbags. Books accompanying the exhibition add intellectual heft to an already substantial survey.

## TEAM

This gallery's primary space on Grand Street is showing two videos by the French artist Pierre Bismuth that originate from an absurd but hilarious premise inspired by another artist. At a news conference, Edward Ruscha once revealed that a sculpture titled "Rocky II" had never been shown: Mr. Ruscha had buried it in the Mojave Desert in the 1970s. Following this lead, Mr. Bismuth hired a detective and went into the desert to find the work. The resulting videos feature a cameo by Jeffrey Deitch and the baritone of the conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner, who performed the fake movie trailer for this art caper. (Mr. Bismuth himself shared an Oscar for original screenplay in 2005 with Michel Gondry and Charlie Kaufman for "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.") At Team's auxiliary space at 47 Wooster Street, a performance series is continuing: The last segment features the great video artist Alex Bag.

## SWISS INSTITUTE

Cultural institutions devoted to national patrimonies are out of step with today's art world, which argues for global unity (even if that is illusory). But the Swiss Institute, in a space once occupied by Jeffrey Deitch on Wooster Street, is an exceptional case. In "Work Hard," Valentin Carron, who represented Switzerland at the 2013 Venice Biennale, continues to probe the question of "Swiss-ness" with a range of curious and fabulous objects (in other words, who cares if they are actually Swiss). A small kinetic installation by Jean Tinguely hangs opposite bunny ears carved from wood by Claudia Comte, in the style of Henry Moore; watercolor drawings by the visionary artist Marguerite Burnat-Provins look like gruesome fairy-tale illustrations, while Denis Savary's "Alma (After Kokoschka)" (2007) riffs on the life-size doll that the artist Oskar Kokoschka had made of Alma Mahler after she left him for the architect Walter Gropius. Kokoschka lived with the doll for a year, then beheaded it.

## RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS

Vitaly Komar is best known for his collaboration with Alexander Melamid, but his exhibition at Feldman, a landmark SoHo gallery, explores his interest in allegory and justice. Paintings of brown bears, symbols of Russian power, and the balancing scales of justice dominate the show. Works from the '80s by Komar and Melamid in the rear gallery prove the artists were in top form when critiquing the Soviet Union and its abuses, particularly against artists. Mr. Komar has lived in New York since 1978, but the Komar and Melamid oeuvre, with its intrepid critiques of totalitarianism — as well as Stalin's friendly ties to Western leaders like Churchill and Roosevelt — could be perfectly reapplied to the Putin era.

## CLIFTON BENEVENTO

On the sixth floor of one of SoHo's classic 19th-century cast-iron industrial spaces — a similar setting to many of the places mentioned here — this gallery is an oasis in the shopping mall of Broadway. The current show, by the Mexican artist Martin Soto Climent, includes rough, expressionistic ink drawings and suspended plaster sculptures inspired by Bao Jingyan, the fourth-century anarchist philosopher. Mr. Soto Climent extends Bao's musings on the warrior facing death to the demise of his own artistic persona, told through classic Mexican art emblems like human skulls and skeletons.

## MUSEUM OF CHINESE IN AMERICA

The most engaging personal art story in the city at the moment is perhaps that of Tyrus Wong, a 104-year-old artist born in Guangdong province, China, and raised in Sacramento and Los Angeles. Mr. Wong came to the attention of Walt Disney in the late 1930s and '40s when his Sung dynasty-style landscape paintings provided inspiration — later serving as “visual development” — for the animated film “Bambi.” The revelation, of course, is the profound debt mainstream American animation during this period owed to Asian art. Equally charming are the handmade kites Mr. Wong has been making for decades and flying on the beaches of California, a selection of which is on view in the back room at this Chinatown museum, along with photographs of the kites alight. (Admission: \$10.)

## STOREFRONT FOR ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Amie Siegel, a participant in the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale, made “The Architects,” on view here, for that international exhibition. Filmed in New York offices and workrooms, it aims to show how architecture, often treated as the creation of a singular Howard Roark-like genius (more recently, the globe-trotting starchitect) is actually the product of many hands, brains and eyes before large-screen computers. Long, gorgeous tracking shots of open-plan offices mixed with the sound of murmured conversations show how this often-mythologized field, when examined, resembles a glamorized factory.

### After Gallery-Hopping, Drinks

**MOTHER’S RUIN** Artisanal (and startlingly delicious) slushies are the specialty of the house at this laid-back, lively haunt, but you’ll do well by whatever liquid specials are on the board. The food is several notches above average bar grub. 18 Spring Street, near Elizabeth Street, SoHo; no phone, [mothersruinnyc.com](http://mothersruinnyc.com).

## TRIBECA

### POSTMASTERS

The shows of Ernesto Klar and Rafael Rozendaal are apt representations of this gallery, which just celebrated its 30th anniversary. (It started in the East Village, moved to SoHo, then to Chelsea and finally to TriBeCa.) Mr. Rozendaal’s paintings include cryptic haiku-inspired phrases (“once again/staring/at a screen”) placed within giant, pastel rectangles of color painted on the wall. In Mr. Klar’s videos, he traveled the world, collecting dust from famous cultural sites with a hand-held vacuum. The dust was then mixed and fired into a small, meteorlike sculpture displayed here. Both shows demonstrate the globalized and technology-driven program of the gallery. (Through Saturday.)

## KANSAS

Opposite Postmasters, this younger gallery is showing the sculptures and video of David J. Merritt. The sculptures in “Flesh of My Flesh” are made with

polyvinyl acetate and pigments that change color over time — relatively quickly, during the exhibition. From sunny yellow to bright orange to dried-blood red, the acetate material, which looks a bit like skin, serves as a surrogate for the human body and the sculptures' creator.

## THE NATIONAL EXEMPLAR

Of all the venues here, National Exemplar best recalls the gallery world of yore. Above Shoegasm in a low-rent office building, this feisty three-year-old upstart is showing the paintings of Matt Kenny. In three large vertical canvases, Mr. Kenny reimagines nearby One World Trade Center, the country's tallest building, as a comic monster — part Godzilla, part SpongeBob SquarePants — looming over New York. One-note but funny and obnoxious, the paintings are a visceral and pleasurable response to the onward-and-upward post-Sept. 11 development of the neighborhood.

## After Gallery-Hopping, Drinks

**BÂTARD** You can't eat at the bar of this acclaimed Drew Nieporent restaurant, which is just as well, because the drinks are enjoyment enough. Any cocktail with the word Bâtard in it is a safe bet, including the Inglorious Bâtard, a refined mezcal take on the margarita. 239 West Broadway, near White Street, TriBeCa; 212-219-2777, [batardtribeca.com](http://batardtribeca.com). If the bar is full, walk a few doors down to the roomier **DISTILLED**, below, which, in addition to cocktails, wine and beer, has an intriguing selection of meads. 211 West Broadway, near Franklin Street, TriBeCa; 212-601-9514, [distilledny.com](http://distilledny.com). *ROBERT SIMONSON*

## DON'T MISS

Despite the small size of **APEXART**, a TriBeCa outpost, its curators often have big ambitions. "Feel Big Live Small," organized by Elan Smithee, is a satisfying roundup of dioramas and photographs based on miniature models. (At 291 Church Street, near White Street, through May 16.) The gallery **PETER FREEMAN INC.** is presenting Thomas Schütte's ceramics and banners, his first show here since 2012. The ceramics feature vaguely absurdist "Eggheads," while the banners are from the more poetic "Low Tide Wandering" series. (140 Grand Street, through May 30.) **THE DRAWING CENTER** is offering "Portraits From

the *École des Beaux-Arts Paris*,” a grand historical sampling of over 400 years of art, including works by Ingres and Matisse, and a contemporary take on Grimms’ fairy tales — the unexpurgated, grisly ones — illustrated by Natalie Frank. (35 Wooster Street, near Grand Street, through June 28.)

Robert Simonson contributed reporting.

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