

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

2009 in Review: Gallery Exhibitions

Published: December 29, 2009



There's no denying that each of this year's gallery exhibitions, from the museum-worthy to the modest, was considered through the veil of the precarious market and the dozens of closings it wrought. But though sales may have been slow, dealers remained optimistic, at least where the art itself was concerned, presenting a cornucopia of rich offerings, particularly this fall. Here are some that most stuck with us.

"Picasso: Mosqueteros" at Gagosian Gallery, March 26 – June 6, 2009

"Picasso: Mosqueteros," a show of paintings and prints circa 1962–72, looked better than most museum shows, installed in Gagosian's elegant, light-filled 21st Street space. The 50 or so paintings and 40-odd prints challenged a common (and unfair) analysis of his last works, proving that his works during the last decade before his death in 1973 did not in fact fall into a crevasse of incoherent nonsense and skittishness. The partly comic, partly erotic works were inspired by masters like **Rembrandt**, **Velázquez**, and **Manet** and are tinged with Shakespearean references. The exhibition opened in an especially poignant, perhaps favorable, time, when the art market — and its woolly notion of what it takes to be an artist — had been ripped apart at the seams. This was one of the most refreshing shows — full stop — of the year. — Marina Cashdan

Caragh Thuring: "Assembly" at Simon Preston, Sept. 9 – Nov. 1, 2009

I was reminded of this exhibition recently, while reading **Manohla Dargis's** review of the excellent new **James Cameron** flick *Avatar* in the *New York Times*. Of the actor **Stephen Lang**, who plays, as Dargis colorfully puts it, “a military man turned warrior for hire. A cartoon of masculinity,” she writes: “Mr. Lang, who until this year had long been grievously underemployed, tears into the role like a starved man gorging on steak.” That was the sort of effect Caragh Thuring's show seemed to have on fans of good, smart painting this past fall. I went to visit it with two whip-smart colleagues, **Daniel Kunitz** and **Ben Davis**, both of whom went on to praise Thuring's work rather effusively (in the *Village Voice* and on Artnet, respectively). Kunitz: “Thuring...dissects paintings in order to reanimate the medium. ... Some of the shapes are hard-edged, some soft; some of the drawing is precise, some gestural. The resulting mix is a complex melody without stuffiness or nostalgia.” True. Davis: “Thuring's [paintings]...are... arresting, and possess a certain mystery. ...To say that these are the best paintings one has seen in a long time is, in the end, perhaps true — but that statement also has a melancholy ring to it, because in their way, Thuring's paintings are about what a lonely thing it is today to take painting seriously.” I agree, I agree! I can't put it better than these two, and so am not going to try. Except to add this: In an interview in the *Paris Review* recently, poet **Frederick Seidel** says, “I like poems that for all the power of the sentiments expressed, and all the power to upset and offend, are so well made that they're achieved things.” These Caragh Thuring paintings are achieved things. — Sarah Douglas

Piero Manzoni at Gagosian Gallery, Jan. 24 – March 21

As *LA Times* art critic **Christopher Knight** tweeted recently, *New Yorker* writer **Calvin Tompkins** has indeed bestowed upon two of megadealer **Larry Gagosian's** megagalleries in New York's Chelsea art district the status of museums. It was a subtle move: Slipped in among Tompkins' [newyorker.com feature](#), “The Best Museum Shows of 2009,” where shows at the **Hammer**, the **Met**, the **Whitney**, and the [New Museum](#) also figured, were the “Picasso: Mosqueteros” show at Gagosian's 21st Street space and the Manzoni show at his sprawling space on 24th. I mention this because, while museums get everyone's knickers in a twist over ethics disputes and layoffs and admission prices and

whatnot, Gagosian just keeps casually and seemingly effortlessly putting on these quiet little free-to-the-public blockbusters. (Remember the dazzling **Ferus** show in 2000?) The Manzoni was a stunner, and brought to light much of his little-known work, and Manzoni's mug on the show's [poster](#), where, true to form, he looked like a mischievous kid, was alone worth a visit. — SD

Tauba Auerbach, "HERE AND NOW/AND NOWHERE," at Deitch Projects, Sept. 03 – Oct. 27, 2009

While Op Art's original purveyors aimed to mesmerize and enchant eyes, painter Tauba Auerbach was intent on tricking them this year, discovering new paths in a supposedly déclassé style. Her folded paper, leather, and linen paintings revealed themselves as trompe l'oeil constructions close up, nothing more than acrylic on canvas. Similarly, two white canvases gridded with black dots looked wrinkled from a distance, though a careful inspection revealed no such imperfections. Here, Auerbach's secret techniques remained hidden. Nearly as mysterious was her *Auerglass*, a large, wooden organ that Auerbach and a friend pumped to life each evening in a performance that provided a soulful counterbalance to her precise visual science. — Andrew Russeth

Charles Ray, "Ink Line, Moving Wire, Spinning Spot," at [Matthew Marks Gallery](#), May 8 – July 10, 2009

Gagosian's late-Picasso and Piero Manzoni shows were deservedly labeled "museum-quality" this year, but Matthew Marks's exhibition of three rarely displayed pieces from the 1980s by genius prankster Charles Ray was just as worthy. The gallery looked nearly empty at first glance, except for a single black string stretched from floor to ceiling. It glistened and swayed almost imperceptibly, ink dripping down to a tiny pool before being recycled up through the wall. Nearby, a quarter-ton circle of stone floor spun like a record, and two ends of a metal wire slid slowly in and out of a wall. The three works suggested a brand of minimalism developed on another planet or in an alternate reality. Ray's installations are one-liners of the best kind: biting, multilayered,

and unforgettable, intensely pleasurable reminders to look and think carefully in- and outside of art galleries. — AR

Philip-Lorca diCorcia, “Thousand,” at [David Zwirner Gallery](#), Feb. 27 – March 28, 2009

This show of a thousand Polaroids shot over 25 years presented a strong case that Philip-Lorca diCorcia, long championed as a master of the intricately composed streetscape, might also be one of America’s great, straight photographers, following in the tradition of **Walker Evans** and **Robert Frank**. His work has always contained some of the pathos of those giants though his conceptual interests sometimes worked to obscure its presence. Here, perhaps because of the immediacy of the Polaroid process or the intimacy created by viewing such tiny images, the melancholy of contemporary life bleeds through. Men sit in bars and booths, usually alone, staring blankly into the distance. Plates of food remain uneaten on checker-clothed tables. Watches appear, freezing seconds. There are surreal moments as well: a group of topless women lined up across a banquet table as a suited man surveys them from his chair, a blurred group of bureaucrats at work on long desks. Some of those photographed even look familiar, caught before or after their star turns in diCorcia’s staged images, going about their business like everyone else. — AR

“Venice. 3 Visions in Glass,” at Barry Friedman Gallery, through Jan. 16, 2010

Glass gets no respect in the contemporary-art world, dismissed often as “decorative,” no matter how revelatory the work or acclaimed the artist. But this ten-year retrospective, featuring three of the boldest innovators in the medium — **Cristiano Bianchin**, **Yoichi Ohira**, and **Laura de Santillana** — challenges preconceptions about glass art. All three work on Murano, where they collaborate with glassmakers immersed in the island’s age-old techniques. Bianchin resurrects out-of-fashion techniques and using unusual materials to create heady, nostalgic works; Ohira, a native of Japan, conjures intricate Asian-inspired complexities in rich Venetian hues; and de Santillana, who worked for more than a decade as a designer for Murano’s glassworks, has begun asserting her own artistic vision in vessels, slabs, and convoluted ovoids that meld

sculpture and painting, recalling Rothko but even exceeding his color effects. — Marisa Bartolucci

“Lisa Kirk: House of Cards” at Invisible-Exports, Feb. 20 – March 29, 2009

Just when you thought that the real estate market and the economy couldn't get any worse, Lisa Kirk encouraged us all to embrace the absurdities of our current predicament with her installation *Maison des Cartes*, at Invisible-Exports. Kirk constructed a shack inside the gallery, and pushing the idea of “shabby chic” to its most absurd, had real estate agents found through Craigslist to walk one through the structure's “amenities,” ending the conversation with a pitch to buy a time share in the artwork's reincarnated location in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The ramshackle nature of the shack — sporting amenities like “running water” generated by collecting rain water and a toilet consisting of a bucket — stood in stark contrast to the sales personnel's polished, comedic performance. The exhibition invited viewers to take a step back and have a good laugh at some of the anxieties generated by the dilapidated market, while also questioning what led to the bust to begin with. — Amber Vilas

Matt Keegan “New Windows” at D'Amelio Terras, February 28 – April 25, 2009

Visitors to Matt Keegan's “New Windows” at D'Amelio Terras were greeted by an awkwardly placed tall vertical slab of drywall looking like the remnants of a partially constructed wall. The barrier bore phrases from the 1989 film *Field of Dreams*, in which Kevin Costner's character is haunted by a voice saying “If you build it, they will come.” Matt Keegan did indeed “build it” for his exhibition, which tackled ideas of construction and deconstruction, memory, and interior versus exterior space. Six photo collages collectively titled *New Windows* featured images taken in Keegan's apartment as his super repaired a window. He altered the photos to change the location of the tools in the room and position the figure both inside and outside of the window he's repairing. Other interventions into space manifested themselves in the form of a hole cut into the gallery's wall and revealing a photograph of the sun coming through foliage and an aluminum-mounted picture of the artist's cat Neptune unassumingly resting on the floor.

Done by anyone else, Keegan's conceptual logic may have seemed heavy-handed and dry, but given his playful yet considered choices it was the perfect balance of conceptual grounding and whimsical intervention. —AV

Troy Brauntuch at Friedrich Petzel Gallery, Sept. 10 – Oct. 17, 2009

Coming on the heels of "The Pictures Generation" at the Met, "Troy Brauntuch" at Friedrich Petzel Gallery was a comprehensive survey into the work of one of the exhibition's featured artists. Spanning 30 years, the exhibition not only offered a collection of meticulously executed, conceptually driven pieces, but also exposed Brauntuch's working practice through the display of his reference materials and handmade rubber stamps. Brauntuch's monochromatic conte-and-cotton paintings of everyday objects and images of extreme violence, with their subtle shifts of gradation, are compelling on their own, but the sketches, paintings, notes, and photographs used as source materials help flesh out the media-driven work. Exposing the objects influential in the work's construction demystifies Brauntuch's haunting, mist-veiled final products. — AV

"Allan Kaprow: Yard" at Hauser and Wirth, Sept. 23 – Oct. 24

This fall, the global blue-chip gallery enterprise Hauser & Wirth opened its highly anticipated New York space with a decidedly noncommercial exhibition: an interpretation, by performance artist and interventionist **William Pope.L**, of commodification-defying artist Allan Kaprow's seminal *Environment Yard*, first presented at the same location in 1961. Visitors to the tony new space on East 69th Street were invited to pick their way through an incongruous-seeming maze of precariously arranged automobile tires in the dark before moving upstairs, where they would be treated to a survey of documentation of various interpretations of the work, as well as other projects. The, exhibition, which also included further (offsite) interpretations, by **Josiah McElheny** and **Sharon Hayes**, was a welcome happening in a season of uncertainty: a celebration of work created well before the boom, by an artist who embraced participation and experience over cash and commerce. — Kris Wilton

