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Weekend Arts II

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Art Trek: Chelsea

Holland Cotter

Where Blue-Chip Brands Meet Brassy Outliers



DEALERS AND SCENE STEALERS
Clockwise from left: the artist Mark Chu and his girlfriend, Nell Perle, taking his canvases to the Green Project Gallery in Chelsea; Joel Osteen's sculpture "TV Vanity" from 1992; at Elizabeth Day: Anne Chu's "Eaves" (2011); at Tracy Williams; and Eric Devlin, right, and Jeff Hernandez viewing Jordan Wolfson's "Tropical Figure" from 2014; at David Zwirner; Bottom, paintings by Michel Majerus on display at Matthew Marks.

WITH upward of 200 galleries, Chelsea is still the largest and, comb-wise, the richest of the city's art districts. It's also a microcosm of the art industry, offering a range of current product, a ton of junk and some stimulating work. Apart from a few outlier galleries, its main boulevards have stayed consistent: 10th Street to 27th Street, 10th to 11th Avenues. Here, you'll find some of the largest commercial art spaces in town, possibly on earth; multisite franchises (Gagosian, Matthew Marks, David Zwirner); and a handful of reliably ambitious small galleries, which show some of the best work. Art district, not art neighborhood, most accurately describes this area, though that's changing. Apartment buildings are going up along with the new Whitney Museum. And the High Line is bringing a fringe of green to clear streets. Painting is everywhere, but the most interesting work I saw was in sculpture, photography and video, with a continuing performance piece my attraction of choice.

DAVID ZWIRNER Jordan Wolfson, making his solo debut at Zwirner's West 19th Street outpost, is the latest in a line of young male artists to shoot to the top of the New York career hoop with relatively little buildup, and his accession feels more plausible than others. The show has two attractions, one being the 3D2 video "Raspberry Pops," a mélange of animation, live action and music. Computer-generated images of H.I.V. viruses invade design stores and nurseries; condense H.I.V. with Valentine hearts waltz down SoHo streets. Mr. Wolfson himself appears in track-park drag, as if to broose (broose about art's connection to some mystically resistant underground. In what is by now a time-worn move, "Raspberry Pops" takes a hit at an erudy consumer culture by adding yet another expensive bubble to the erudite pile.

More gripping, because it's gay-levied weird, is the anatomical sculpture of a dirty-dancing woman with roving eyes and reptilian face. She intones: "My mother is dead. My father is dead. I'm gay. I'd like to be a poet. This is my house." Like misogyny, the combination of anatomics and art is far from new, but Mr. Wolfson makes theoretical use of it, and enhances the drama by restricting viewing to by appointment only. Call 212-727-2070, or check out the piece on YouTube.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY The painter Michel Majerus was just 23, a year or two older than Mr. Wolfson is now, when he died in a plane crash in 2002. He already had a significant career, which is surveyed in all three of Matthew Marks's West 23rd Street spaces. Mr.



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Majerus was based in Berlin and spent some time in Los Angeles. Like Mr. Wolfson, he had distant roots in 1960s Pop, filtered through the commercial-obsessed art of the 1980s, and through the wave of digital culture that followed. His paintings, in tuff-truff colors and often on a grand scale, are composed of film grabs, computer games and art old and new: Basquiat, de Kooning, Gerhard Richter, Caravaggio. He added words — "Depressive Nearsia," "Purgatory Needs You," "Somebody Wants to Buy Your Paintings" — which seem pitched to give the work some focus, but don't. They're just images, too. Mr. Majerus was capable of concentrated postures, as when he installed a life-size photograph of a Berlin slum directly in front of the politically hatted Brnoenberg Gate. But the work here feels unfocused and random — a habitat of our digitally addled, amnesia-diluted present, but too much a part of it.

Where They Are

- MICHEL-ANNE & NASH** Leigh Ledare began drawing notice in 2008 when he exhibited sexually explicit photographs of a woman he identified as his mother. Because of their implicitly Oedipal content, he became their real subject, as he continues to be in two more recent series at Mitchell-Innes & Nash. Both are products of complicated ground rules. For the first series, from 2011, he spent four days in a cabin in upstate New York, photographing his ex-wife, and he commissioned her new husband to photograph her in the same location here. Mr. Ledare then arranged the two sets of pictures side by side, inviting viewers to detect in them different emotional attitudes, meaning, in effect, to read into them what they will. The second series was a commission from "an unidentified European woman
- ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY** 543 West 20th Street; elizabethdee.com.
- GREENE NAFTALI** 584 West 26th Street; greennaftali.com.
- THE KITCHEN** 322 West 20th Street; thekitchen.org.
- MATTHEW MARKS GALLERIES** 502, 522 and 526 West 23rd Street; matthewmarks.com.
- ANDREA ROSEN** 525 West 24th Street; andrea-rosen-gallery.com.
- DAVID ZWIRNER** 513 West 19th Street; show runs through April 18. Viewing of "Tropical Figure" by appointment only: 212-727-2070.
- DEREK ELLER GALLERY** 615 West 27th Street; derekeller.com.

with high-profile to political and media worlds" (a gallery statement), who asked Mr. Ledare to photograph her nude at home. He superimposed the images, the face obscured, on a front page of The New York Times, placing her made body beside articles about a mass murder, same-sex marriage and Luciano Pirelli's death. Mr. Ledare brings the outside world into the psychosocial interior he's been locked in, and it's a relief. It was getting too stifling in there.

303 GALLERY Colker Schorr, another distinct behind-the-camera presence, has long surveyed the fluid borders of gender and eroticism. Her best-known pictures are of androgynous adolescent boys or young men as self-consciously bonding through contact sports or military camaraderie. And the intimacy of her approach has suggested identification with her subjects. She has photographed women, too, often in the context of fashion shoots, and two dozen examples from the past 15 years are at 303 Gallery. Desire, now seen from a same-sex perspective — Ms. Schorr's gay — is a mutable emotion, as are ideas of glamour or a photographic style. Ms. Schorr is one of our most complex figure photographers, and we see here that she's always been, to some degree, self-portraitist.

TRACY WILLIAMS Ms. Schorr is one of a handful of estimable midcareer artists with Chelsea space. Anne Chu is another. Ms. Chu's rough-cut and painted wood and ceramic figures of half-human animals, inspired by Chinese totem sculptures, have proposed versions of the natural world simultaneously real and surreal. The extraterrestrial takes over in her new pieces at Tracy Williams, most models made from leather scraps and porcelain casts of human and animal heads. Whether they are about a world shattering or cohering, they're based on a disheveled beauty that was only hinted in her art before.

ELIZABETH DEE Another sculptor, Jod Osteen made a splash in the East Village in the 1980s, but left for Los Angeles and has been missed since. So it's great to have major work by him both in Chelsea space, and left for Los Angeles and has been missed since. So it's great to have major work by him both in Chelsea space, and left for Los Angeles and has been missed since. So it's great to have major work by him both in Chelsea space, and left for Los Angeles and has been missed since.

DEREK ELLER GALLERY Rob Fischer's work is also based on recovering the lost and the old, and site-specific between sculpture and architecture. He constructs shelters from, among other things, the remains of derelict buildings across the country. "Good Weather (Glass House)," which fills the main gallery at Derek Eller, was originally assembled in Texas. Made of sheets of glass, it's equipped for living, with a left bedroom, and a kitchen. It is, however,

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Palate Pleasers

EL QUINTO PINK COMEDIAN At last, this tapas bar has a real dining room with real tables, so diners can eat Boy of Biscay anchovies without looking like one. The Chef, Eder Montero and Alex Rial, pair a modern sensibility with a traditional respect for Spanish seafood cooking. 401 West 26th Street, (212) 206-6960, elquintopink.com.



PHOTOGRAPH BY THE NEW YORK TIMES

unstimulated, and the painted windows afford almost no privacy. On the upside, their colors are mostly red, yellow and blue, Mondrian's utopian palette. If you moved it, you'd not only live with art; you'd also live in it.

THE KITCHEN A performance called "Timekeeping" at the Kitchen, was the single best thing I saw on this Chelsea walkabout. Conceived and scored by Benjamin Genet and Ryan Kelly, dancers and visual artists, it is a kind of ritualized recasting, working backward of the histories of paired relationships. The performers I saw, a gay male couple, R. B. Schläpfer and Adam Weinstock, referred to their lives, separate and together, in terms of personal memories and historical events as they circled the gallery, side by side. Occasionally, one would break stride, but the pairing always resumed until the men sat down to await the arrival of new visitors, when the performance would start again. Organized by the Kitchen's director, Tim Griffin, "Timekeeping" is intended to be costumed by its performers — complex, gay and straight; ex-lovers; a mother and a daughter; twins. With Mr. Schläpfer and Mr. Weinstock, the piece was very moving. I didn't want to leave, and what can easily be a hour of duty in Chelsea became a pleasure.

Don't Miss
CHRISTINE MEISNER, at the Walker Collection Project Space, 525 West 26th Street, Suite 718.
ALEXANDER THE GREAT: THE ISOLAS GALLERY, 1905-1907, at Paul Kasmin Gallery, 293 10th Avenue, at 27th Street.
TAMARA NORRIS, a solo debut with videos of herself as an ex-rap singer; at Landmark Pevak, 518 West 19th Street.



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