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L.A. Galleries Face Big Challenges. These Dealers Are Making It Work

Despite the fires, rising costs, and limited demand, some emergent spaces are growing.

Parker Gallery, Exterior view. Courtesy Parker Gallery, photography by Paul Salveson.

It has been a rough few years for Los Angeles's art industry. In early July, Blum, né Blum and Poe, which defined contemporary art in the city for decades, said that it would close. Soon after, New York dealer Tanya Bonakdar said she was shuttering her branch there after seven years. Earlier this month, Sean Kelly announced his retreat from L.A. Last November, my colleague Katya Kazakina reported that at least 10 galleries of various sizes had closed in the city since 2023, including UTA Fine Arts, Praz-Delavallade, Smart Objects, and Lorin Gallery. Not so long ago, galleries were rushing to open outposts in the city.

But amid that decline, there is another story. Several young Los Angeles outfits have been doubling down and expanding locally, refining their programs and rethinking their models for a post-boom market. They include Château Shatto, Chris Sharp, Parker Gallery, Sebastian Gladstone, and Sea View Gallery, which have all moved or grown, despite the tough playing field, and Hannah Hoffmann, which just merged with New York dealer Bridget Donahue.

Everyone is talking about adaptation, and some are even extolling the benefits of the chastened business environment. As Olivia Barrett, the co-owner of Château Shatto, said, "When the market noise quietens, it's always easier to hear what is really being said by practitioners in every sense."

A Decentralized Scene Under Pressure

In New York, clusters of galleries in densely packed neighborhoods draw out a deep bench of buyers for evening openings. There has long been a consensus that Los Angeles would benefit from similar concentrations, not least because its pool of collectors is smaller and more diffuse. The city's sprawl makes that

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difficult, but gallery hubs have been forming. Melrose Hill, a nook in Hollywood, is now home to David Zwirner, Morán Morán, and Château Shatto, which moved to a larger, breezy space there last fall, after 10 years in Downtown Los Angeles.

"We wanted a certain density of galleries, businesses, and general civic vitality when imagining a destination for our new space," Barrett said. The move was worth the cost because the gallery now has space for new employees, and it's able to have work by all its artists available on-site, for more spontaneous viewings. "We moved when we were bursting at the seams, so the risk was counterbalanced by a feeling of necessity," she said.

After a few years in Mid-City, Chris Sharp also recently joined the migration, finding a larger space earlier this year in Melrose Hill, which he described as "the Tribeca of L.A."

"Foot traffic matters," Sharp said. "Being isolated wasn't working for us. Now we're part of a real community, and that visibility helps."

Clusters are also coming together elsewhere in Hollywood. Local dealer Sebastian Gladstone just moved to a larger space in the area, after adding a New York spot in January. He's now near Jeffrey Deitch, Castle, Regen Projects, and Sea View Gallery, another transplant. Around the corner is young powerhouse Matthew Brown, who opened in 2019 and expanded his program to New York in 2024.

The Rise (and Fall) of the Outposts

Los Angeles dealers face major obstacles right now. They include, Sharp said, a "relatively limited collector base, recent fires, increasingly high overhead, and a weak economy." It is, in his words, "not a winning combination."

Despite such challenges, the city became a magnet for dealers from New York and further afield in recent years, who were drawn by its institutional scene and its reputation as a haven for artists. Large, breezy properties, which are hard to come by in some other art capitals, were easy grabs for well-capitalized galleries. Heavy pandemic buying in 2021 and 2022 helped fuel the space race. Barrett described it as a "helium-filled" environment.

Clearing, which started in Brooklyn in 2011, expanded to Beverly Hills in 2020, then moved to East Hollywood in 2024. Sean Kelly moved west in 2022, and Hauser and Wirth opened its second L.A. location, in West Hollywood, in 2023, the same year that Marian Goodman Gallery and Lisson Gallery arrived. Perrotin came in 2024, as did Zwirner, christening its jaw-dropping Melrose Hill venue.

Ambitious local galleries were also developing, like Sam Parker, who opened in his home in Los Feliz in 2017, focusing on under-recognized artists from the 1960s and '70s working in the Bay Area. "Our gallery was born during the early stages of what became a wave of openings in L.A.," Parker said. He thinks that "the broader attention to the landscape has certainly helped raise awareness of our program."

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As the market cooled and speculation collapsed, some galleries were left overextended. Clearing shuttered this summer, and as my colleague Annie Armstrong reported, Nino Meier closed all four of his L.A. locations in 2024, amid allegations that he underpaid artists. (The gallery said it is investigating, while declining to comment on the claims.) New York-based Harper's and Half Gallery also closed their L.A. outposts.

"Coming from L.A. to New York, I think, is actually easier than the opposite, because you are starting with such a smaller collector pool at typically a lower price point," Gladstone said. "Having an identity as an L.A. gallery has allowed us to align with a community of artists in a way that feels more generative and less competitive."

The closing of Blum, a homegrown native, was "seismic," Sharp said.

"With Blum, there was a deep emotional resonance," Barrett said. "It was part of the city's DNA. Its closing revealed just how delicate the balance is between rarity and volume in this industry."

But Gladstone distinguished Blum from the previous Blum and Poe partnership. "The project of Blum was essentially new, and didn't work as the core ethos of the gallery majorly shifted into something the market didn't respond to," Gladstone said. "Hopefully, we are all so lucky as to sit in our nice modernist home, griping about how the art world doesn't work as we drive off into the sunset in our sports car."

Expansion Amid Contraction

The half-dozen Los Angeles dealers I spoke with all said that growth is essential for survival, but they're intent on growing carefully. Even as he has expanded to New York, Gladstone moved to a flagship gallery in Los Angeles, doubling down on his roots. The city "is core to the gallery's identity," he said. "If I was going to stay here, I felt I needed to make a further commitment—to the city and to the artists we work with." The new space is not only bigger and more striking, it also offers a key advantage: better parking. "That might sound trivial," he said, "but in L.A., it's huge."

Parker, Barrett, and Gladstone all mentioned decreasing their fair participation of late, which reduces the strain on gallery finances and puts less pressure on artists to produce new work, according to Gladstone. "Being present in Los Angeles, rather than constantly on the road, allows us to pursue deeper research and relationships," said Barrett. At fairs, Parker has emphasized one- and two-person presentations, instead of group presentations, which have "begun to feel rather stale."

Others are experimenting with new formats. Sharp has been organizing intimate, low-cost "satellite art fairs" in Paris (Place des Vosges) and Los Angeles (Post-Fair) as alternatives to the traditional model. "It mitigates the risk and creates a more human-scale experience," he said.

And there is a new cohort of buyers emerging. Matthew Brown said that, as some longtime L.A. collectors begin to step back, a new generation has been stepping forward. "I've watched a younger group become increasingly serious and intentional about living with art, which is amazing to see," he told me.

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Rethinking Operations

Some are pursuing long-term collaborations. This fall, Hannah Hoffmann merged with Bridget Donahue, saying in a press release that "pooling resources" allows them to remain committed to their roster of 43 artists. "We both came up in the early 2000s, when galleries looked and operated differently—when even a 'big gallery' could still feel personal—and we carry that perspective forward," they said in a statement.

Dealers are also being judicious about pricing. Sharp said that works under $10,000 are moving, while anything above that requires "a lot more chin rubbing." Gladstone has found success by focusing on artists whose work sits below $80,000. At a larger gallery, they might have to cost two or three times as much, he said.

And they are courting collectors differently. Sharp is offering more payment plans than in the past, and Gladstone and others have been working with older artists and estates, drawing collectors "into the fold who perhaps don't collect emerging art."

What's Next

Despite all the closures, there are new sprouts in Los Angeles. Ehrlich Steinberg is among them, a young gallery focused on emerging artists that opened in 2023. Tim Blum's son August Blum has opened a gallery in a storage unit in Echo Park. Castle, which began in 2022 in former music industry executive Harley Wertheimer's living room, now has a new home around the corner from Deitch.

New frontiers continue to be found. Gladstone plans to publish monographs, following the model of galleries like Karma that invest in career-building projects, he said. Barret's ongoing researching on Western Desert painting will be the focus of an exhibition this fall, with artists from the late 1990s and early 2000s, like Galya Pwerle. Sharp is in Paris this week, with an expanded version of Place des Vosges. And Parker's plan is to "stay true to our idiosyncratic program" and the gallery's relationships with Black artists from the South, such as Joe Minter and Thornton Dial.

"There is, without a doubt, a rising phoenix in L.A.," Sara Lee Hantman, Sea View's founder, said via email. She is an Altadena resident, and her home was seriously damaged in the Eaton Fire. She said that she feels like proof that it is possible to move beyond that tragedy, towards new endeavors. "The curators and collectors are out there with us, collecting and operating a little differently this time around," she said. "I think everyone is ready for a new chapter, and that is exciting."

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