

Henry, Artist Nancy Shaver's Collectibles Shop in Hudson, New York, Is Closing After 30 Years



By Anne Doran
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Henry, artist Nancy Shaver's collectibles store in Hudson, New York, is closing after 30 years. Its demise marks the end not only of a beloved retail enterprise, but of a singular, long-running art project.

As a shop, Henry is an ever-changing compendium of objects, generally showing the effects of time and use, selected and arranged with purpose. As an artist, Shaver is now perhaps best known for her wall sculptures built up from fabric-covered wooden blocks ("Blockers"), containers filled with objects ("Boxes") and fabric-covered panels ("Spacers").

Of importance in both Shaver's art making and her retail activities is how things look together, how they speak to one another, and how their narratives intertwine. Items from her studio have been known to migrate to Henry, and stock from Henry frequently makes its way into her sculptures. Shaver's bent toward inclusivity has extended in recent years to incorporating works by fellow artists in installations such as her project for the 2017 Venice Biennale, which featured the contributions by friends, students, and cohorts.

ARTnews traveled to Hudson in May to say farewell to Henry, which will shut its doors on July 15, and to interview its owner about her future plans.

This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

ARTnews: How did you get started in retail?

Nancy Shaver: I moved from Brooklyn to Schoharie County, and there was no way for me to make a living in Schoharie County. My eye is my only skill. Hudson was becoming a place for antiques, and I've always loved old things—or rather, things, just things.

What do things—particularly the kinds of things you have for sale at Henry—mean in terms of your art?

History, use, and desire.

Thinking about the idea of display, is there a relationship between your retail activities and your art making?

Absolutely. Henry has become the laboratory for understanding how to put objects next to one another in ways that might not make sense, let's say commercially, but that make sense to me visually and intellectually because of what is released by doing that.

So having Henry has been helpful to you as an artist?

The shop has, without any kind of doubt, taught me a skill, the skill of looking.

Why are you closing it?

My landlord has been more than generous—it's been like having a grant for this number of years—and he wants his space back. Ideally, I'd have liked to have gone on with it until I was a little more infirm, but I also, in some small way, appreciate having this chance to make a change.

I think maybe it is time for a change, and maybe it's a time when people recognize the visual importance of objects and how they are worthy of being looked at and thought about in the way that art, if it is worth looking at and thinking about, is, and I'm excited about perhaps investigating some art venues for pop-ups.

Are there any in the works?

There will definitely be one in California in November, because Sam Parker has agreed to have a pop-up Henry when I have my show at his gallery then. Tiny. It will be very tiny.

Do you think your art will change once you've closed Henry?

Oh, interesting question. It probably will.

I ask because there has always been such a porous boundary between Henry and your studio, with objects from Henry turning up in your work and your work turning up, from time to time, at Henry. It was a porosity made very clear in your 2007 show "Retail" at Feature.

I'm excited by the thought of Pop-Up Henry affecting what I do.

How do you imagine that working?

Well, I think there will be crossover visual elements, and the fun of using them together.

You have a big inventory to choose from.

Yes. I'm trying to empty my storage now in order to house what's left here. I realize I don't like being a retailer.

After 30 years.

Yeah. So I'm willing to think of this as an ending of something, but a beginning of something else. I'm looking forward to being able to spend more time in my studio.

You said you were a retailer, and you most certainly are, but I always thought of Henry as a kind of salon.

It is a salon. For things.