

ARTnews

"With a Larger Space, Jessica Silverman Gallery Expands to San Francisco's Chinatown"

By Maximiliano Durón

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Jessica Silverman Gallery's new location at 621 Grant Avenue in San Francisco's Chinatown neighborhood.

Photo: Henrik Kam

The last exhibition that San Francisco dealer Jessica Silverman presented was a solo show of work by artist Isaac Julien. It was open for exactly one day, March 13, 2020, before the Covid-19 pandemic forced the United States and much of the world into a lockdown. Now, over a year later, Silverman is ready to open her next show, this time at a brand-new and much larger space in the city's historic Chinatown neighborhood.

Now in its thirteenth year in business, Jessica Silverman Gallery has established itself as one of the country's leading galleries, representing established artists like Julien, Judy Chicago, and Andrea Bowers, along with rising stars like Matthew Angelo Harrison, Sadie Barnette, and Woody De Othello. "I'm a deep believer in going slowly and staying focused and on track with where you want

**JESSICA
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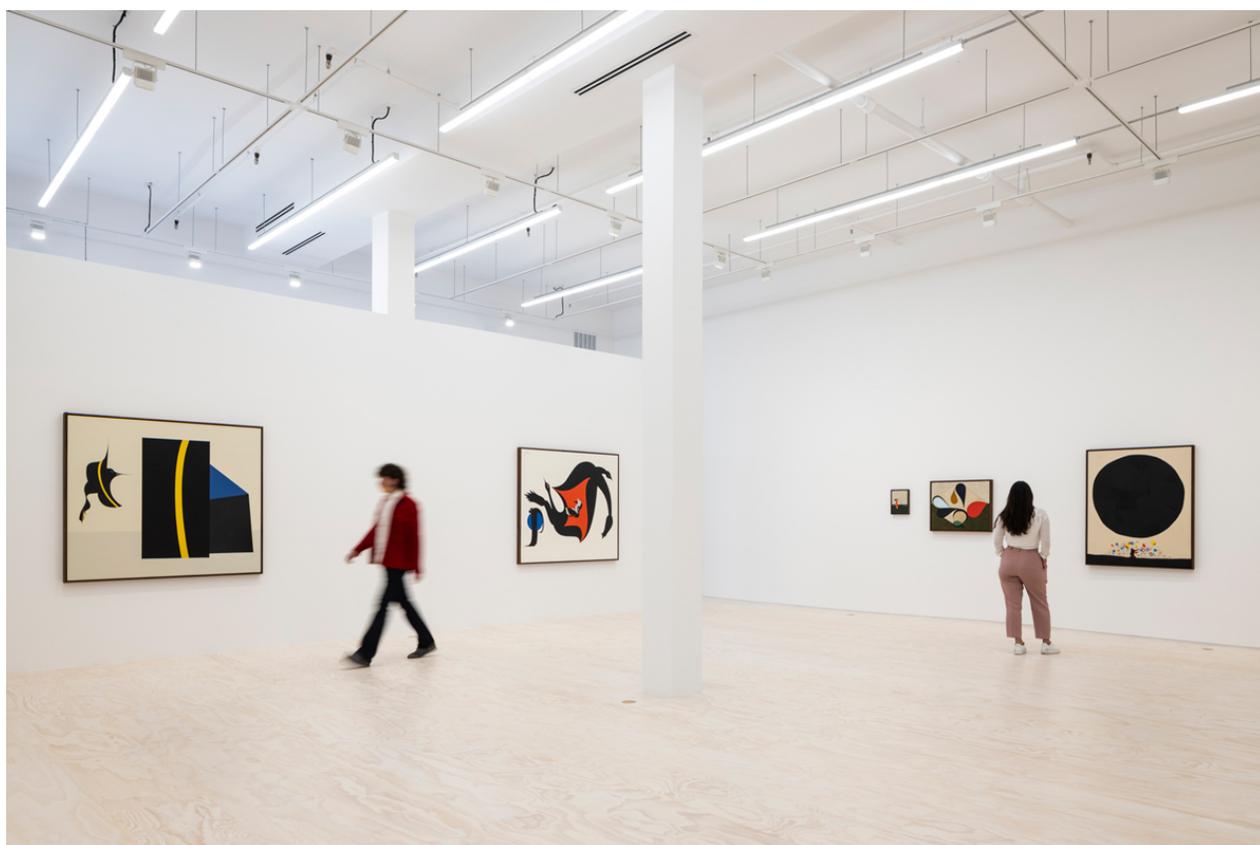
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jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

to be," Silverman told ARTnews, "It's the same way I work with our artists. I'm not interested in the fast burn. I'm interested in the long career."

"There's an experiential moment where you take in the volume of the space and leave the street behind while you're inside and focus on the art," Silverman said. "The space is really for my artists and my clients. I wanted to think about how we could embrace their needs with this space. I'm excited about the kinds of exhibitions we can do here—being ambitious is definitely something I'm keen to push."

The gallery is currently showing a solo exhibition of works by Clare Rojas, a soft opening of sorts before its inaugural group show, "We Are Here," opens on May 27. That exhibition will include work by gallery artists like Julien, Bowers, Conrad Egyir, and Matt Lipps, as well as a few other artists that the gallery doesn't currently represent, including Hernan Bas and Lam Tung-Pang, but who will have solo shows at the gallery in 2022.

"The show is a way of saying, 'This is the place to be,' without being explicit about that—it's a location finder," Silverman said. "The theme is being present and being here."



Installation view of "Clare Rojas: Here We Go," 2021, at Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco.

Photo: Henrik Kam

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After starting a project space that ran for two years, Silverman established her gallery in 2008, opening a space in San Francisco's Dog Patch neighborhood. She unveiled her most recent location in the city's Tenderloin neighborhood in 2013, but felt that she had outgrown that space around three years ago, at which time she started looking for a larger one in San Francisco.

She was eventually introduced to Betty Louie, a Chinese American community leader and real estate owner. The two of them walked around Chinatown, with Louie giving Silverman the lay of the land. "Betty has a very forward-thinking concept of what she wants of Chinatown," Silverman said. The dealer found the new location in the fall of 2019 and began work on renovating it in February 2020 with plans to open over the summer—and then the pandemic hit.

Silverman said that because she is moving into such a historic neighborhood—it is the oldest and largest Chinatown in the country—she feels it's important to operate as a good neighbor to the community's longtime residents and businesses. She hopes that, down the line, the gallery can collaborate on programming with the Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco, a community-based nonprofit that is a few blocks away.

The CCC provided the gallery with a list of local businesses run by community members to support. Additionally, Silverman and her team are at work creating a one-mile walk through Chinatown that shows gallery visitors other local businesses to patronize in the neighborhood. "I'm trying to create a support system with my colleagues and neighbors," Silverman said. "My hope is that we become a place that they come to when they need things as well, so it works both ways."

In January, the megagallery Gagosian confirmed it had shuttered its San Francisco location. But Silverman said that she is committed to running an internationally influential gallery in San Francisco for years to come—she signed a 12-year lease for the Chinatown space. She added, "On the tail of Gagosian closing [here], people might think you can't do what we do here in San Francisco. You can and we do—well. In order to do what we do well, going slowly and being specific are key to our success."

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