



"Jessica Silverman's new Chinatown gallery earning 'can't miss' status in historic neighborhood"

By Tony Bravo

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Jessica Silverman at her newly opened gallery in historic Chinatown on Grant Avenue in San Francisco.
Photo: Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

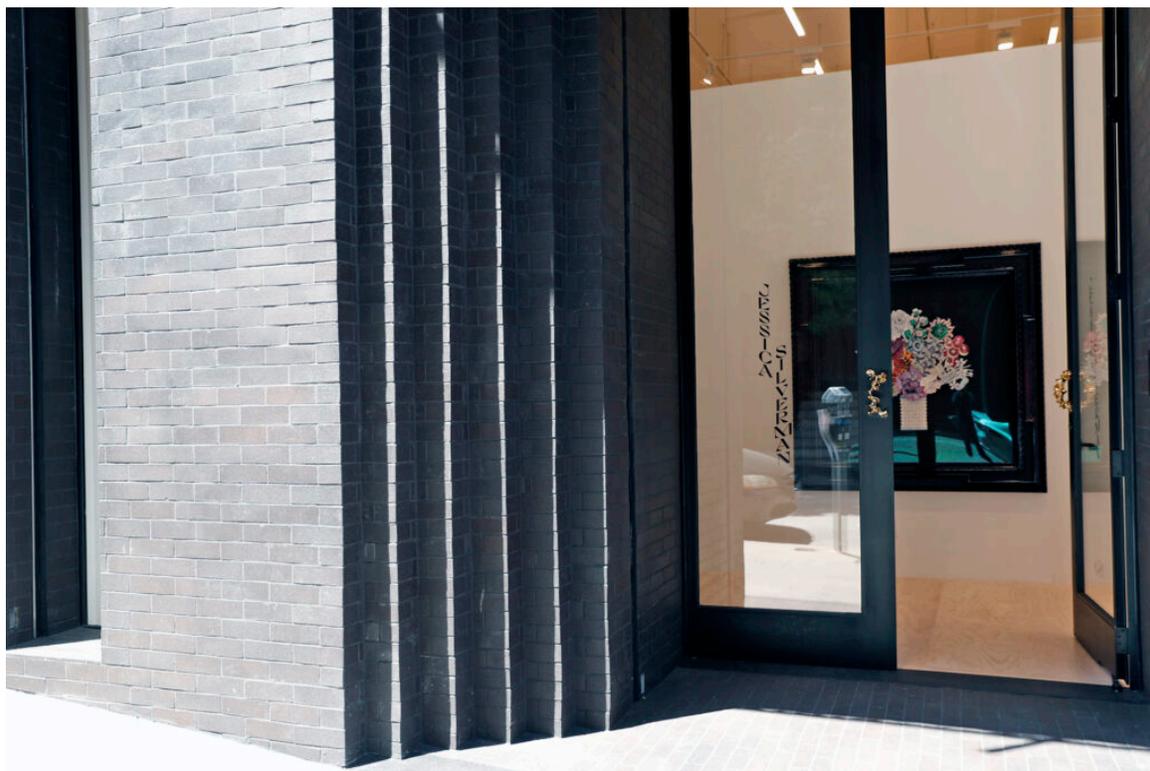
Jessica Silverman's new gallery is surrounded by the icons of San Francisco's Chinatown and since its opening in May, the space has been steadily gaining attention as one of the newest art destinations in the historic neighborhood.

A block away from the Dragon's Gate at 621 Grant Ave., the pale brick building with its green pagoda eaves and red trim is one of the neighborhood's distinctive architectural treasures, formerly owned by Chinatown's well-known Louie family. Across the street, St. Mary's Cathedral stands sentinel, its red brick reflected in the gallery's new windows.

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It was important to Silverman that the entrance offer a hint of the ethos of the gallery, which is known for its roster of diverse and heralded artists, including **Judy Chicago** and **Isaac Julien**. New dark brick masonry by architecture firm Kallos Turin frames the entrance and windows. Undulating door handles made from a cast by architect Antoni Gaudi glint in the sun, and Silverman's new vertical logo on the glass door echoes their shape, with a looseness she was hoping to capture. "It was sort of intended to go against a kind of masculine neutrality," says Silverman, who opened her first gallery space in 2008 on Sutter Street.



Jessica Silverman's newly opened gallery in historic Chinatown on Grant Avenue in San Francisco.
Photo: Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

Most of the galleries she and her partner, writer and sociologist Sarah Thornton, saw featured in *Art Forum* and *Frieze* magazines had conservative, stately fonts and logos that were bold but uncomfortably rigid. Silverman and her gallery are known as anything but.

"As a dealer, you want something with an identity, you want something translatable," says Silverman, noting that they wanted to do "something playful and fresh, something that felt unexpected."

Silverman worked with Jessica Fleischmann, founder of Los Angeles graphic design and branding studio *Still Room*, to create a logo that had energy and expressed a strong femininity. The font is a customized version of a typeset by designer Nikloas Wrobel.

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"It's not girly, it's 'womantype,'" says Fleischmann. "There's strong verticals then unexpected curves. It challenges some expected notions of femininity."

Silverman is thrilled with the results. "Being a woman in this field, and a gay woman in this field, you want to do something that feels strong but doesn't feel masculine."



Jessica Silverman's newly opened gallery in historic Chinatown on Grant Avenue in San Francisco.
Photo: Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

Silverman, 38, has been a gallerist for 13 years, spending the last seven years in a space in the Tenderloin on Ellis Street. The new gallery is twice the size of the previous location, with enough room for a private viewing room and onsite storage. Abigail Turin, the co-founder of international architecture firm Kallos Turin, says that during the project, the building drove the character of the renovation, along with Silverman's desire to situate it in a neighborhood known for its storefront culture and walkability.

"Jessica approaches things with a really personal mindset," says Turin. "She's got a distinctive eye. It was fun working with her for that reason. The space reflects that different eye and mindset." Its 5,000 square feet are most strongly felt in the main gallery, which is partitioned from the entrance with a wall used for additional hanging space and then open with soaring ceilings looking up onto the gallery's office mezzanine level. Blond plywood floors sealed and glossed to preserve their pale quality further the feeling of expanse.

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Davina Semo's *Agent of Balance* hangs in the middle of Jessica Silverman's newly opened gallery in historic Chinatown on Grant Avenue in San Francisco.

Photo: Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

During "We Are Here" Silverman's first group show in the space that runs through Friday, July 2, Julien's photo — "When The Tree Blooms," from his series "The Ten Thousand Waves" exploring ancient and contemporary China— greets visitors at the entry. Nicole Wermers' "Kusine," stainless steel and and concrete cacti-like sculptures, are placed in the windows.

Once in the main space, the large mobile "Agent of Balance" by Davina Semo hangs centrally, and works by Rashaad Newsome, Conrad Egyir and Matt Lipps command attention.

The gallery officially opened with a show by Clare Rojas, who is newly represented by Silverman. "We Are Here" will be followed by a solo show debuting Thursday, July 8, of San Francisco conceptual photographer Catherine Wagner titled "Clues to Civilization," who is also new to the gallery. In August, a Chicago show is timed with the de Young Museum's retrospective of the feminist art pioneer.

It's an exciting schedule to jump back into after a year without in-person shows due to the move and pandemic.

Wagner calls the space "an elegant blank slate," for presenting work filled with "little touches that don't over-announce themselves as they punctuate the space."

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Even the gallery's bathroom has one of those touches: a custom tile mural by artist Claudia Wieser.



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Now with the renovation behind her, Silverman says the joy and stress of opening the first two shows in the new space has been like "a honeymoon phase ... but also like merging into traffic." "I think finally having the artists and clients in here made it feel real," she says.

Artist Rose Simpson, who is featured in "We Are Here," says the new gallery reflects Silverman's desire to invest in artists, especially up-and-coming artists like herself. Before joining the gallery in 2019, the Santa Fe-based sculptor says her work was usually "pushed to the margins" and categorized as strictly as Native American art, limiting its exposure. "The enthusiasm Jessica showed for my work and in seeing me as a contemporary artist was not the normal reaction in Santa Fe," says Simpson.

For Silverman, the curatorial side of the gallery business has long been one of her favorite parts of her job, and with the gallery's expanded space she believes it will allow her and her artists to grow together.

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"I'm really interested in representing artists throughout their career, ensuring they have long-term success and showing people the work," says Silverman. "I love that I can apply that model to the location I'm in."

Jessica Silverman Gallery: "We Are Here" closes Friday, July 2; "Catherine Wagner: Clues to Civilization" opens Thursday, July 8. Through Aug. 14. Noon-4 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. 621 Grant Ave., S.F. 415-255-9508. jessicasilvermangallery.com

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