

San Francisco

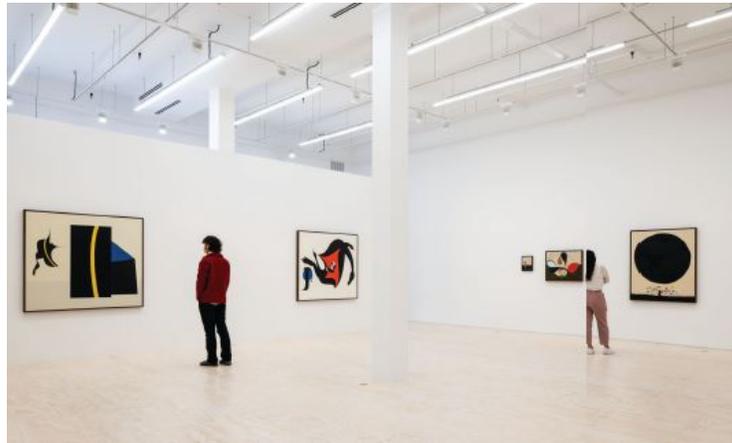
magazine

"Gallerist Jessica Silverman On Her New San Francisco Space And What's Next"

By Laura Eckstein Jones

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Jessica Silverman opens up about her love of art, her dedication to San Francisco and why she moved her eponymous gallery to a fresh new space in Chinatown.



Visitors at Clare Rojas' solo exhibition, "Here We Go," at Jessica Silverman. Photo: Henrik Kam

When did you first become intrigued by art? Was there a particular moment that stands out?

I was lucky to grow up around art. My grandparents were serious collectors. I remember being intrigued by how expansive art was and how varied the materials could be—from interactive instruction paintings by Yoko Ono to life-size figurative sculptures by John De Andrea and everything in between.

When did you first know you wanted to be a gallerist?

When I was an undergraduate at art school in L.A., I realized that I preferred to think and talk about the work of other artists. So, then I came to the Bay Area to do an MA in curatorial practice at CCA. The slower pace and bureaucracy of museums was not for me. I love the greater creative control I have in being an entrepreneur, choosing artists I believe in and committing to their careers over many varied exhibition situations.

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Gallerist Jessica Silverman

What prompted you to open your first gallery?

In the summer of 2006, I did a curatorial residency in Frankfurt and lived with a couple who had an experimental art space in the spare room next to my bedroom. In Germany, everyone seemed to have some experimental square footage. When I returned to S.F., I opened a project space underneath a coffee shop. I was still in grad school; the space was fun, freeing. Then in 2008, I opened a proper gallery.

How has your gallery and your approach evolved over time?

When I first opened the gallery, my understanding of the art world was a lot smaller than it is now. I feel more confident and more expansive. I also understand that working with artists to build their careers with great museum shows, international exhibition opportunities, public works, etc.... is one of my great loves.

What prompted you to move your gallery to Chinatown? Were you drawn to the neighborhood or was it just a great space, or a little of both?

Definitely both the neighborhood and the space! I had been looking for a larger space for over a year and eventually zeroed in on North Beach and Chinatown because of the lively characters and proximity to downtown. My new space at 621 Grant Ave. had been an Israeli-owned chandelier shop. It was a mess, but the 20-foot-high ceilings were inspiring, and the outlook onto Old St. Mary's Cathedral across the street was beautiful.

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Lam Tung Pang, *Half-step House Thinking Object #6*, 2021

What can readers expect when they visit the gallery this summer and fall?

We have a great program scheduled for the rest of 2021. Three Bay Area artists will have solo shows: Catherine Wagner opens July 9; Woody De Othello opens in September and Sadie Barnette in November. In between Wagner and Othello, we'll have a Judy Chicago show, which coincides with her important retrospective survey at the de Young. Judy is 83; she's had a major impact on art history; the shows will be dynamite.

How does your gallery represent the S.F. art world?

We are here. We are dedicated to the Bay Area. We represent seven Bay Area artists and many who have lived or worked here before, including Judy Chicago, Andrea Bowers, Margo Wolowiec, Matt Lipps. We represent the S.F. art world by staying here, supporting artists working here and by being ambitious about our programming

Where do you see yourself and the gallery in 10 years?

After the pandemic and a year of renovation, I am so happy to be in my new glorious space that I find it hard to answer this question. For the moment, I am enjoying settling in, appreciating art in the flesh, hugging my artists, meeting with curators and collectors face to face. I am ambitious and loyal. Perhaps all I can say is that, in 10 years, I'll be here in San Francisco, running the best gallery in town.

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