

Galerie

Jessica Silverman: "In a Shifting Landscape, Midsize Galleries Are Reclaiming the Center of the Art World"

By Ted Loos

December 1, 2025



The exhibition "The Lasting" by Andrea Carlson at Jessica Silverman gallery in San Francisco. Photo: PHILLIP MAISEL, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JESSICA SILVERMAN, SAN FRAN

In recent years, the rapid rise of successful mega-galleries—and the closing of a few prominent medium-size ones, including Metro Pictures and Blum—has led to art-world hand-wringing. Do galleries have to have multiple locations on far-flung continents and a stable of 80 artists to be successful? In fact, fairs like December's Art Basel in Miami Beach are full of what could be called the midsize, top-tier gallery.

Generally, those in the category set up an address in just one city; maintain a roster of 20 to 40 artists and estates, with a mix of established names and emerging talents; and have a presence at some of the big art fairs. But in a soft art market, there's a lot of pressure on this group and competition is fierce. These dealers have maverick tendencies, which reward collectors.

"Supporting midsize galleries means supporting a more independent corner of the ecosystem," says Alexander Gray of Alexander Gray Associates in New York's Tribeca. "We provide a different level of support to the artists we work with—it's more intimate and less about branding an artist as a luxury commodity."

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

Gray's stable of around 20 talents encompasses legendary sculptor Melvin Edwards and multimedia star Jennie C. Jones (whose work was seen recently on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum of Art), and he knows the challenges of this category—he's had artists poached by bigger galleries. "It makes us hungrier," he says. After a nearly decade-long absence, he's returning to the Miami Beach fair to sate the appetite of collectors with a range of works, including pieces by Edwards and Jones.

Jessica Silverman, a San Francisco dealer who has stuck with her chosen city since opening in 2008, describes how she sees the issue of scale: "We insist on being considered as we are, not in relation to others." She represents legends like Judy Chicago and Isaac Julien, as well as much-touted younger artists like Woody De Othello, who currently has a large solo exhibition at the Pérez Art Museum Miami. Her booth at Art Basel will feature Othello, plus works by Rupy C. Tut, the subject of Silverman's gallery exhibition that runs through December 20 in San Francisco.

All gallerists fight for their artists, but midsize dealers have to be creative about it. Silverman asks some collectors to forgo the standard 10 percent discount and instead put that money into a museum acquisition fund, which helps both the artist and collector in burnishing the former's reputation. "It's a great tool for emerging and midcareer artists," she says.

Nick Olney, of the recently opened Olney Gleason gallery in New York, frames the conversation about gallery size this way: "We're ambitious. We want to be the best gallery in the world. We're just not necessarily conflating that with large scale." Olney was president of Kasmin Gallery and folded much of the DNA of the late Paul Kasmin's business (the British dealer died in 2020) into the new venture over a long and thoughtful wind-down.

He and partner Eric Gleason are making their debut at Art Basel Miami Beach, offering works by painters Ali Banisadr (who is also the gallery's first New York show) and Nengi Omuku, both of whom were on the Kasmin roster. Olney Gleason will be adding artists—but carefully. "You need to have a certain amount of scale to be able to do great service for your artists," Olney says. "You want to have that reach."

You need to have a certain amount of scale to be able to do great service for your artists"

- Nick Olney

Long a common practice, co-representation has emerged as a "crucial way to keep artists," as Silverman puts it. If an artist is itching to be shown and sold around the world, sharing representation with a gallery in another country is a way to satisfy that urge and to prevent them from leaving for a bigger home with multiple locations.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn, founder of Salon 94 on New York's Upper East Side, even co-represents within the same city, which is relatively rare. She shares representation of sculptor Kennedy Yanko with James Cohan Gallery of Tribeca. "It's an uptown-downtown thing," she says. "James goes to more fairs than I do, and he loves them. Kennedy is a big, ambitious artist, and she can use two different points of view." Greenberg Rohatyn understands the size debate from the inside. For two years, she merged her gallery with other dealers to create a kind of mega-gallery called LGDR (it was a joint venture with dealers Dominique Lévy, Brett Gorvy, and Amalia Dayan, who have remained partners in the endeavor), but that proved unwieldy, and she reverted to her Salon 94 self. She knows now that her taste defines her—she was early to taking ceramics seriously and has made a specialty of Aboriginal artists. "I try to do something where I can add value—at the mid tier level, you have to be distinctive," Greenberg Rohatyn says. "Galleries of this size have a choice: Will they follow the mega-gallery lead or come up with their own strategies?"

Wendy Olsoff, who founded New York's P.P.O.W. in 1983 with Penny Pilkington, is proof this category of galleries has durability. "These galleries are actually the avant-garde in a way," she says. "We're showing points of view, culture that could disappear, works by Black, trans, and queer artists." And they were doing it before others were. The P.P.O.W. artist list has legends like Betty Tompkins, David Wojnarowicz, and Martin Wong. At Miami Beach, P.P.O.W. will show an important historical work by Wong. Olsoff says the bonhomie among similar dealers has led her to swap galleries with Susanne Vielmetter of Los Angeles, with Vielmetter taking over part of the P.P.O.W. space during Frieze New York in 2027 and vice versa during Frieze Los Angeles. "We trust each other," Olsoff says. "We're not stealing each other's collectors."

The idea of cooperation instead of competition got a boost in the fall, when Hannah Hoffman of Los Angeles and Bridget Donahue of New York combined to make the new bicoastal Hoffman Donahue gallery—two smallish entities adding up to a medium-scale venture.

In Olney's view, the issue of high-level personal touch may be the biggest benefit for collectors who are working with dealers at this tier, something particularly important for newer buyers as they get acclimated. "We want something that feels personal and not corporate," he says.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508