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New York Gallery Week Returns

By Stan Sesser



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David Zwirner

An art gallery is more than a store that sells paintings and sculptures.

That's the message that 60 New York art galleries are sending out with the three-day Friday-through-Sunday gala called "New York Gallery Week." It will include not only exhibits, but dozens of free events and programs, including lectures, gallery tours led by artists, and performances.

"We thought the message going out to the world about what we do—that we're purely commercial enterprises—is wrong," says Casey Kaplan, the founding member of the Gallery Week organization and himself an art gallery owner. "This is an effort to tell our story on our own terms."

A look at some of the exhibits indicates that the story could indeed be impressive. Consider, for instance, the Soutine-Bacon display at Helly Nahmad Gallery, showcasing the works of Chaim Soutine, an expressionist painter from Belarus who made his name in Paris and died in 1943, and Francis Bacon, whose abstract figures, often isolated in glass or steel cages, earned the much-repeated characterization of the artist from British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as "that man who paints those dreadful pictures." According to Maurice Tuchman, co-curator of the exhibit, Bacon, who died in 1992, was so impressed with Soutine's series of paintings of a beef carcass that he considered Soutine a major influence on his art.

Half of the 32 paintings in this exhibit, including two Soutine beef carcasses, come from museums in Europe and the U.S. There's also a 200-page hardbound catalog. "It's an amazing expense for a gallery to take on," says Mr. Tuchman, who is an independent curator. "Gallery life has changed so much. Now it's where the action is."

A second unusual exhibit, at the Sean Kelly Gallery, presents 50 photos from the famed Robert Mapplethorpe, who died in 1989 and created a storm of controversy with his images, many with homosexual themes. The 50 photos were selected by 50 Americans, one from each state. With the participants' widely varying backgrounds—including a rabbi, a rancher, and a centarian—the gallery says the choices will demonstrate how Mapplethorpe is regarded today, shedding light on current cultural tastes.

This is the second year of New York Gallery Week, an event that was conceived during the 2008 economic downturn. "During the height of the recession, people stopped coming to the galleries," Mr. Kaplan states. "We wanted to send out the message that galleries aren't just shops, that we put on world-class exhibitions that are free and open to the public." Last year's event had financial rewards too, he notes. "Some galleries had some of their best weeks of the year financially in terms of sales."

Among other highlights of Gallery Week, Matthew Marks Gallery is presenting ten sculptures by Jasper Johns from his "numerals 0 through 9" series. Donald Judd, an American painter and sculptor who died in 1994, is featured at the David Zwirner Gallery in a reprise of the artist's seminal 1989 exhibition in Germany. The contemporary African-American artist Kara Walker, who explores issues of race and gender in her work, will be exhibited at Lehmann Maupin Gallery.

Some of the special events and a list of the artists displayed can be found on the [website](#). Each of the participating galleries will hand out a guidebook, not on the Internet, with more complete information and maps.