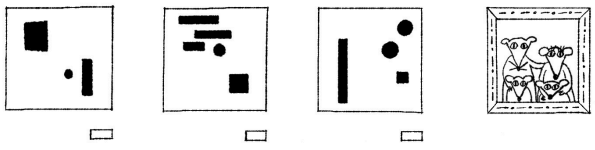
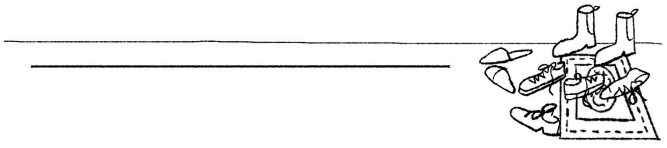
At Home with the Works

In New York City, real estate plays double duty, and apartments turn into art galleries.

LOUIS BURY





JARED NANGLE

back to Amezkua's native Mexico City, as well as her upbringing in Los Angeles, where her family held large social gatherings. "Growing up, there were always people around the house. I missed that togetherness when I moved to New York twenty years ago and have been trying to re-create it wherever I go," says Amezkua, who has also lived in Athens, Greece.

A similar spirit of openness, as well as of necessary invention, animates other contemporary New York City home art galleries. New York has a rich history of artist-run spaces, but in the past decade, and especially in the years since Covid, home galleries here seem to be experiencing a renaissance. Perhaps social isolation left people not only longing for physical community but also accustomed to the idea of working from home. Another factor, certainly, is the lack of affordable, centrally located real estate compared with previous generations. Whatever motivates artists and arts professionals to operate home galleries, everybody who does so must be comfortable dedicating part of their domestic life to the venture. The artworks take up precious floor and wall space. Friends, acquaintances, and strangers request visits even when the gallerists (and their roommates, if they have any) might prefer time alone. Needless to say, running a home gallery is difficult and inconvenient, so much so that you're unlikely to do it unless you consider the undertaking urgent and enjoyable.

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This willingness to try things out extends to the gallery's business practices. April describes Tutu's commercial approach as a "hybrid" of elements from the for-profit art industry and not-for-profit DIY music scenes. While most of its artworks sell at higher price points, the gallery also offers smaller, more merch-like pieces at lower price points and has even experimented with forms of barter. Its potlatch-esque 2022 Christmas exhibition, *Very Naughty Super Trashy*, for example, included several hundred artworks by more than fifty artists; each visitor to the show was permitted to take one work for free.

The varieties of exchange that occur at Tutu Gallery exemplify how some home galleries aspire to commercial growth; others operate on anticapitalist principles; and most find a balance between profit- and pleasure-seeking. Until recently, for example, Putty's Coronation gallery took zero cut of any sales.

While most home gallerists do take a cut of sales, they're less likely than other gallerists to pursue business growth as an end unto itself. Curator Daisy Sanchez—who used to run Daisy's Room out of her former council flat in London and plans to open a new home gallery when she moves back to that city later this year—expressed reservations about "the myth of infinite growth," preferring instead to keep operations manageable in scope and to "let young artists go rather than try to grow an apartment gallery with them." Connie Lee —who runs Art Lives Here, a nonprofit that facilitates public art installations in underserved communities, as well as a home gallery in Harlem by the same name—also prefers for artists to "come through" one of her programs and then "move on."

This reluctance to scale up is not only philosophical but also logistical. By their very nature, home art galleries are less public-facing than galleries with commercial leases. Often, their addresses aren't available on their websites, and potential visitors must reach out over email or social media to obtain them. Many home gallerists hold other jobs and have no staff. "There's a nice, natural limit to the activity," muses Poppy Pulitzer, who used to work in the commercial gallery sector and together with artist Cal Siegel co-operates Astor Weeks, located in one of Harlem's gorgeous Astor Row town houses. "It's been surprising to see how each artist responds to the architecture," she says.

run The Meeting, an art advisory firm and private exhibition space, in his West Village apartment. The intimate setting makes it easier for people to imagine how the artworks might look in their homes, and harder to pretend that art exists abstracted from life's material conditions.

> All-or-nothing assumptions about cultural relevance—the idea that if something isn't well-known it must not be important—not only minimize the contributions of home galleries but also obscure the economic conditions, by naturalizing them, under which those galleries seek to carve out an alternative.

Yet informality can also undermine a business's credibility, at least in some people's eyes. "There's a comfort to home galleries," says artist and writer Lucas Regazzi, who together with his partner, the curator Patrick Bova, runs april april, a Bed-Stuy gallery that shows artists who live outside New York City and commissions poetry to accompany each show, "but there's also a class-related stigma against them." The persistence of this stigma—the notion that home galleries aren't as serious as other types of exhibition spaces—

professional networks expanded more slowly, artistic communities were more centralized, and word-of-mouth cultural knowledge wasn't a dead metaphor.

Yet even as home galleries might feel like a form of resistance against the internet's flattening of culture, they benefit from the ease with which information is disseminated online. Unsurprisingly, multiple home gallerists told me that their or their gallery's online presence facilitates most of its new face-to-face connections. This was especially the case for Sanchez, who, in her midtwenties, has already received notable recognition from the art press, such as a 2022 ARTnews profile. As a matter of fact, she first developed a substantial online following as a teenager, when she posted about art on Tumblr.

In 2020s New York City, then, home art galleries represent less a return to the physicality of underground spaces than a reassertion of that sensibility's pleasures. It's a sensibility that manages to be a bit more private than is typical nowadays, without regressing into in-group exclusivity. It also offers a way of doing business that doesn't measure its worth solely in market terms, resulting in a less hurried and less status-oriented experience than so much else that visitors encounter in the art world and beyond. Home art galleries existed long before the internet, but their persistence affirms the need for

SHORTCUT

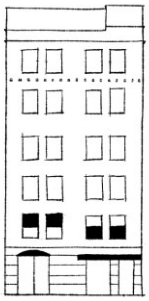
New Art City

People like a Yayoi Kusama because it looks like a Yayoi Kusama, i.e., polka dots.

ALLISON HEWITT WARD

REVIEW

Nothing Is, but What Is Not



The cast changes; the choreography stays the same; what holds infinite interest at *Sleep No More* is being there.

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