

Designer eyes look westwards

Galleries | Dealers in objects of both beauty and utility are flocking to L.A. By Caroline Roux

In autumn 2019, Juliet Burrows and her partner Kim Hostler opened a gallery in Los Angeles — a sibling operation to their existing one in Manhattan. “We had a friend moving out of a 3,200 sq ft space on Melrose,” says Burrows, whose operation specialises in Nordic craft and design, both vintage and contemporary, “and we didn’t think twice. In New York everything’s driven by the stock market, and business is done with urgency. Here it’s driven by the industry, so we get different collectors from film and music, and the pace is slower.” It helps that “the houses are really large.”

Hostler Burrows was part of an already growing scene — Marta, run by Benjamin Critton and Heidi Korsavong, was up and running in September 2019 and David Alhadeff had opened Casa Perfect in 2017. And since its launch, it has been joined by a number of other specialists, reinforcing L.A.’s growing weight as a contemporary design centre.

The type of space on offer was part of the attraction for Marta and Casa Perfect. “We moved to new premises last year, where Silver Lake meets Los Feliz,” says Critton. “It’s not near anyone else, but we leaned into the building. It’s a big hangar, a poor man’s Jean Prouvé demountable structure.”

Alhadeff, who has galleries in New York and Los Angeles, now occupies a 1916 beaux-arts house in Beverly Hills that was once lived in by Samuel Goldwyn. “We have an acre of garden where we can show out-

door works,” says Alhadeff. During Frieze, he will be exhibiting the historic work of JB Blunk alongside contemporary pieces including Chris Woiston’s dazzling bronze Flora desk. Marta is focusing on the local with work by Bennett Schlesinger — lights on sturdy ceramic bases with parchment and bamboo shades — who lives and works in L.A.

Carpenters Workshop Gallery signed the lease on its West Hollywood premises in the summer of 2021. “Location was important, we share a parking lot with Tison Gallery, Sean Kelly and Jeffrey Deitch,” says its 35-year-old director Louise Torron Lavigne, who moved to L.A. during Covid. “We wanted to show big things and you can find big spaces here,” she says. “But also, Los Angeles is less cut-throat than New York or Paris or London [where Carpenters also have spaces]. There is a common interest among galleries in putting L.A. on the cultural map; staging intellectually challenging shows; and proving it’s not the superficial little sister.”

Alhadeff agrees. “Los Angeles cannot be accused of being a vapid materialistic silly place any more. There are serious collectors here, and they are often younger. It’s a new generation, often in the 35–45 age range.”

For Trevyn McGowan, co-founder of trailblazing South African gallery Southern Guild — it has practically created an international market for South African art, craft and design — the choice of Los Angeles, where she opens a



Above: artists and designers on Southern Guild’s roster with the gallery’s co-founders. Right: a cabinet by Vincenzo de Cotiis at Carpenters Workshop Gallery. Left: “Bluebelle” (2023) by Jeremy Anderson at Fumi Gallery



new space on February 22, also has a political edge. “We’re launching with *Mother Tongues*, an ambitious group show of 25 artists dealing with gender, migration and racial politics,” she says, “issues that are as relevant in L.A. as they

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are in Cape Town and Johannesburg.” There will also be a solo show for Zizipho Poswa whose tall works in ceramic and bronze represent the African women who underpin and nurture their communities.

Gallerists don’t always know who the collectors are in L.A., though. Interior designers wield an inordinate amount of power in Los Angeles, partly due to the scale of some homes, which need expert intervention, and partly because hiring one is quite the thing to do. Top names include Pamela Shamschiri and Nicole Hollis.

“If they have a big celebrity client, you don’t always know who it is,” says Burrows, “but then you see something you’ve sold in a picture of Rihanna’s house.” Another gallerist mentions an interior designer’s purchase, “but when

we went to ship it, the label said Jeff Bezos”.

There are pop-ups, too, attracted by L.A.’s growing design market. London’s gallery Fumi has taken over the 5,000 sq ft interior of the nearby Sized Studio for a five-week stint and the Geneva- and New York-based Philia is camping out in the studio of photographer Giampiero Tagliaterra to March 4.

“We asked our designers to create something in onyx that subverts assumptions around the material. It’s usually associated with things that are shiny and bright,” says Ygal Attali, who founded Philia with his brother Yair Attali. The stone was quarried in Mexico and worked in Baja California.

“We always try to work locally and reduce freight miles,” says Attali.

Burrows feels the same. “We’re hoping to get more of our Nordic artists to come here to do residencies,” she says. “There’s a strong tradition of ceramics in California, and it would great to create work right here. But also, they absolutely love coming to L.A. For them it’s so far away, in every sense, it’s like going to the Moon.”