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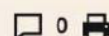
Design galleries proliferate in LA

Big houses, young collectors and influential interior designers are driving growth



Portrait of Southern Guild Collective, a South African art platform leveraging the country's centuries-spanning arts and craft tradition to spark debate around gender, racial politics and migration © Courtesy Ulrich Knoblauch/Southern Guild

Caroline Roux FEBRUARY 24 2024



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 LA’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 outdoor works,” says Alhadeff.



'Cleft Chair (Gold Leaf)' (2022) and 'Cleft Chair (Platinum)' (2022) by Max Lamb © Courtesy the artist/Gallery Fumi

During Frieze, he will be exhibiting the historic work of JB Blunk alongside contemporary pieces including Chris Wolston's dazzling bronze Flora desk. Marta is focusing on the local with work by Bennet Schlesinger — lights on sturdy ceramic bases with parchment and bamboo shades — who lives and works in LA.

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 Lisson Gallery, Sean Kelly and Jeffrey Deitch," says its 33-year-old director Louise Torron-Lavigne, who moved to LA 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 LA on the cultural map; staging intellectually challenging shows; and proving it's not the superficial little sister."



'DDC2117 Cabinet' (2021) by Vincenzo De Cotiis © Courtesy the artist



'Bluebelle' (2023) by Jeremy Anderson © Courtesy the artist/Gallery Fumi

Alhadeff agrees. “Los Angeles cannot be accused of being a vapid materialistic silly place any more,” he says. “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 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 LA as they 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 LA, though. Interior designers wield an inordinate amount of power in the city, 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 the LA-based Pamela Shamshiri and San Francisco’s 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-made purchase, “but when we went to ship it, the label said Jeff Bezos”.

Φ PHILIA



Portrait of Kim Hostler and Juliet Burrows, founders of Hostler Burrows — a gallery fusing their love of ceramics with the innovation embodied by Nordic design © Photo: Alexandra Rowley

There are pop-ups, too, attracted by LA'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 Tagliaferri 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 Ygaël Attali, who founded Philia with his brother Yaïr 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 LA. For them it's so far away, in every sense, it's like going to the Moon."