

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY



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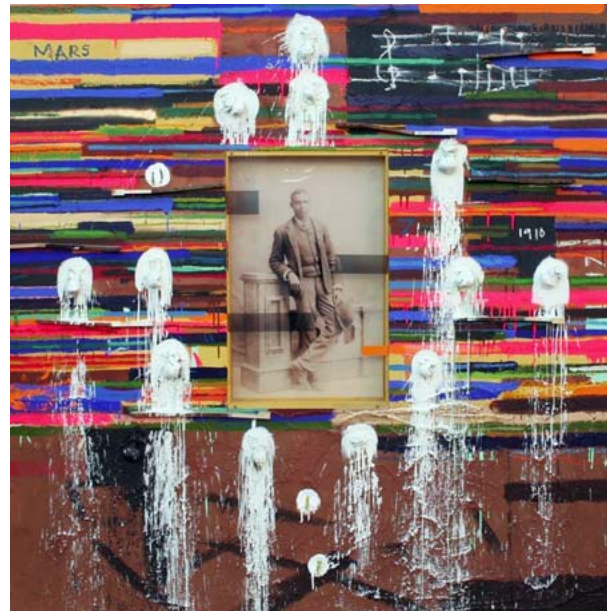
Re-View: Robin Rice on Visual Art

Bridgette Mayer Gallery undergoes a major transformation.

Robin Rice

After being closed for most of the year, **Bridgette Mayer Gallery** is ready to unveil a major renovation that transforms the space's look, size and functionality.

Mayer says she was surprised to learn that her Washington Square building was considered historic, built as a residence in 1799. A typical 18th-century row house, it is deep but relatively narrow. To create an unfussy, unbroken, considerably larger space, Mayer knocked out the walls between rooms and united her original gallery with an apartment in the back of the building. The walls are not entirely flat: A couple of shallow niches will frame individual works or installations.



The design is characterized by simple, open areas and right angles, flat planes and limited expanses of rustic texture. In the entranceway, a small television screen will display art-related videos (not all proprietary). The floor is made of white oak planks from an 1864 French barn. The color is cooler than you'd expect: stone gray and bisque veined with black grain, complemented by an unusual narrow steel channel running laterally along the base of the walls. The velvety black margin frames the walls and floor, bracketing the flow of space. The work of Philadelphia Museum of Art lighting designer Andrew Slavinkas is perfectly unobtrusive, as it should be.

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Mayer retained two barrel-vaulted spaces, one above the other, from the original building but removed their heavy steel doors. The one on the gallery floor has been fitted with special lighting, an up-to-date audio system and a suspended, concealed screen that is available for video and performance. The lower-level vault functions as a conduit from one section to another and is outfitted as a wine cellar. Its exposed brick walls make a nice foil to the unmarred white elsewhere. A really beautiful up-to-date painting storage area shares the downstairs with Mayer's office, a conference room and a private viewing area for clients. She anticipates hosting parties downstairs, just as the previous inhabitants did.

Meanwhile, Eileen Neff will be showing a photographic installation and Shelley Spector will have small sculpture in the office area. These two have recently joined Mayer's stable, along with several other local and international artists. Nevertheless, Bridgette Mayer Gallery retains its distinctive quality: intensely visual, sensitive, never heavy-handed. "For me," says Mayer of choosing new artists, "it's what I'm seeing and caring about and adding another layer of sophistication."

The new space's debut exhibit, "Karmic Abstraction," features 23 artists, including Radcliffe Bailey (whose *Four and One Corner — South* is pictured), Iva Gueorguieva, Eemyun Kang, Tim McFarlane, Tom Nozkowski, Odili Donald Odita and Rebecca Rutstein. Mayer says the title was suggested by paintings that layer moments in time, but it could also refer to the reincarnated persona of the gallery itself.

When reminded that upon opening her gallery a decade ago she had exclaimed enthusiastically, "I was born to do this!" Mayer says she felt an unexpected wave of emotion last week after seeing the completed renovations. "I had tears running down my face. ... This project is one big present to all of the artists here who are hungry for great shows just like I am, and to the community who need to know that the arts are alive and thriving in Philadelphia. I am overjoyed and so excited to open our doors and share this with everyone."

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"Karmic Abstraction" runs Nov. 15-Dec. 31, Bridgette Mayer Gallery, 709 Walnut St., 215-413-8893, bridgettemayergallery.com.