

BRIDGETTE **MAYER** GALLERY



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Featuring an interview with Bridgette Mayer

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Contemporary Art Abounds in Philadelphia

By Ryan James McManus

The city of Philadelphia, world-renowned for its reputation as a destination rich in traditional art, has become a burgeoning scene for contemporary art and multi-disciplined emerging artists. Established galleries such as the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA), a PHIL institution since the early 19th Century, have taken note. In fact, they went so far as to exhibit the work of a former graffiti artist and Disney cartoonist alongside some of the most historical works of art ever hung on America's gallery walls. The artists and institutions interviewed in this piece embody the state of contemporary art in Philadelphia.

Bridgette Mayer Gallery

Q: I'm disappointed I was unable to attend the Mural Arts and University City Science Center's 30th and 50th (respectively) anniversary collaboration dedication that you helped organize simultaneous to your gallery's exhibition with artist Ryan McGinness. Do you see University City as a potential hotbed for emerging contemporary artists and galleries, as it's one of the most creative new neighborhoods in the country in terms of fostering innovation, technology and entrepreneurial activity?

A: I was very excited to not only push Mural Arts to create their first digital mural with an internationally known artist, but to donate funds and become a sponsor along with the Science Center to make the project happen. I agree that University City is a fantastic neighborhood of artists and future galleries. There are a lot of exciting things going on there.

Q: Was Ryan McGinness one of the most recognizable artists you've exhibited thus far?

A: Ryan McGinness, Radcliffe Bailey and Federico Herrero are three recognizable artists that I represent in Philadelphia that are known globally. I made a commitment about five years ago to bring very special and widely recognized artists to Philadelphia, as often as I could, to engage the community in the wider conversation going on in the arts.

Q: I noticed that the McGinness exhibition ran for just over one month's time... is that your typical timeframe for exhibitions? Were there any other artists exhibited concurrent with this particular exhibition, or was it exclusive?

A: I curate about ten exhibitions a year and they typically run four weeks. Ryan took over the entire gallery; he is so prolific and has many projects running concurrently. We could have filled the Philadelphia Museum of Art with all of his work!

Q: Did you preview McGinness's work at the Metropolitan Museum (MET) and the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York?

A: I have followed Ryan's career since the 90's when he was becoming recognized and have seen most of his public museum exhibitions.

Q: Is your typical exhibition a shared vision between yourself and the artist in terms of gallery layout?

A: It really depends upon the artist. A lot of emerging artists will want my input on gallery layout and many of the established artists will have a concept and layout in mind that they will present to me. I usually give input on everything.

Q: I heard that you find inspiration when visiting the Barnes Foundation and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. Those museums are situated separately in two very different, but no less prestigious, areas of the city (the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and University City, respectively). Do you see yourself expanding from your current space in Walnut Street?

A: I also draw inspiration from my travels abroad and going to New York and California. Right now, I am in a conversation to expand the consulting side of my business in California, as I have a lot of private clients there. I am getting ready to celebrate my 13th year on Washington Square and have seen my own neighborhood blossom and truly love being in the center of the city. I can't imagine expanding in Philadelphia, as I have a gorgeous building and 3,000 square foot space that I renovated a few years ago.

Q: You were selected by the Tory Burch Foundation as a "Woman to Watch," in 2013. It can be said that Tory Burch is an artist for designing and creating fashion. Do you find it ironic that in this instance, the artist chose to showcase the gallerist?

A: I was honored to be selected and featured on her Foundation website. The Tory Burch Foundation has been recognizing women business owners since 2009 when they started.



Photo Courtesy: Jan Rattia

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Jason Rhoades, *Untitled (from My Madinah: In pursuit of my ermitage...)*, 2004/2013/Installation view/Institute of Contemporary Art/University of Pennsylvania/Photo by Aaron Iglar/Greenhouse Media



They have been working to empower women entrepreneurs and their families through small business loans and mentoring programs. I was delighted to be featured as someone to watch, as I have always been inspired by women's stories: Tory Burch, Sheryl Sandberg and many others. They have paved the way for women of my generation to run successful businesses while having a family and have been very inspirational for me.

Q: I also noticed in a recent interview that you had listed John-Michel Basquiat as one of your favorite artists. Did you get a chance to see his exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery in New York City last year? I spent half a day at the exhibition in Chelsea, and it proved to be one of the most intense visual experiences of my life. What is it about the late artist's unique style that you admire most?

A: It was an incredible exhibition. I love his mix of culture, language and symbols as well as the graffiti art that defined his style. He was the first contemporary artist that I came across in my studies at Bucknell University who made me want to work in the arts.

Institute of Contemporary Art of Philadelphia

Q: Which demographic did the recent Jason Rhoades exhibition primarily attract?

A: The majority of visitors to the exhibitions were under the age of 30, according to our survey. There were 58% from the PHL region, 23% from New York and 37% outside of these areas, including a significant international audience. Of the visitors from the PHL region, 23% were affiliated with The University of Pennsylvania in some way.

Q: How was "Taboo" received by the general public throughout the duration of the exhibition?

A: Visitors were invited to remove their shoes and sit contemplatively in the space. Some visitors appreciated the work for its sheer aesthetics and beautiful neon lights while others were extremely offended by it. The exhibition as a whole garnered an emotional response: some left completely fulfilled, others completely overwhelmed.

Q: What does it say about ICA PHL that this is the first American exhibition of the artist?

A: ICA does not shy away from challenges. It's our mission to showcase the work of under-recognized and emerging artists.

Q: How did you weigh the risks of running this specific installment of the exhibition?

A: As far as risks, this exhibition was an undertaking by our Chief Curator Ingrid Schaffner that began several years ago. No other museum has taken on this work partly because of the complexities of such an installation. It's work that has rarely, if ever been seen in person and needed to be shown. The risk was in how to present the work of this artist who is no longer living, but whose work is very relevant in today's art world.

Q: Was Jason Rhoades' work that profound and provocative that if he were alive today, he'd still be celebrated in the same fashion had he not died at 41? Would you consider showcasing the exhibition were it not for the artist's legacy, i.e. the Warhol, Haring, Basquiat effect of the great artist dying young?

A: The work is just as provocative and profound as when it was first shown. Rhoades has influenced many contemporary artists working today.