

ROUNDTABLE



GALLERIST ROUNDTABLE: UPPER EAST SIDE

AMALIA DAYAN OF LUXEMBOURG & DAYAN, DOMINIQUE LEVY OF L&M ARTS,
AND MARC PAYOT OF HAUSER AND WIRTH

BY KATY DONOGHUE, PHOTOGRAPHS BY AMY McCULLOCH



Whitewall met with Upper East Side gallerists at BES in Chelsea.

The Gallerist Roundtable is a new, ongoing series in *Whitewall* that presents a discussion between gallerists from different neighborhoods in New York. For our spring issue, three influential Upper East Side gallerists — Amalia Dayan of Luxembourg & Dayan, Dominique Levy of L&M Arts, and Marc Payot of Hauser and Wirth — sat down with us to discuss the character of spaces uptown, forging new relationships with new collectors, and the importance of creating museum-caliber shows.

WHITEWALL: *How would you describe the character of the Upper East Side and the galleries there? Have any changes taken place in the neighborhood?*

MARC PAYOT: For a primary-market gallery, it's unusual to be on the Upper East Side, but I think it's very refreshing to see the public in a different way. I think it's definitely less public but higher quality, also in terms of curators and definitely collectors. It's just a different way to work with the shows. It's more like a private showroom that you invite people to. On a Saturday we have something between 50 and 100 people, not more, but from these 50 half are really interested in art, and I would imagine that that kind of ratio is not the case in Chelsea.

DOMINIQUE LEVY: A lot of our collectors are used to going uptown more for secondary market, but a lot of those collectors have moved toward primary market or contemporary art, so they are coming back to the place

that they know well. And because of the proximity to a lot of hotels, the foreigners tend to start uptown.

AMALIA DAYAN: I used to have a gallery in Chelsea, and it's a completely different animal. You are open to the public in the whole sense of the phrase. On Saturdays it's hundreds of people. Most of them are interested in art, but they are not real collectors. So on the Upper East Side, what Marc said is absolutely true — you get the real buyers.

DL: Plus, you're close to all the museums. It's sort of a more logical place to be. If you think, where was the former Castelli gallery? Uptown. Where was the Martha Jackson Gallery? All of those historical galleries were uptown.

AD: But also, neighborhoods shift.

DL: Chelsea lost its monopoly, because it's not just us; it's the Lower East Side, 57th Street — it's more diverse.

MP: I think it's a little comparable to when you think of the tendencies in the market where you would have "Oh, now it's Russia" and then everything is Russian. Or "Oh, now it's South Africa" and everybody is interested in art from South Africa. Here was all Chelsea, and now it's not like that. Wherever something is great, the collector, the curator will go.



DL: But I don't think we should forget that there is a bit more personality and soul in the places uptown. We have molding; you feel more like you're in a house.

WW: *Do you think collectors feel more comfortable viewing art in that environment?*

AD: I feel that in my space, because it's really like a house, collectors come in and they can imagine the art in their living space.

DL: But also it's a different experience with the art. When you had that Jeff Koons show, I'll never forget. Seeing those very large paintings one to two to three feet from the wall was a unique experience. I had seen them in the late eighties, but this was a completely new experience.

MP: I think it's a really different experience looking at art. And I had a similar experience looking at that Jeff Koons show. I thought it was very successful in that space.

WW: *And does that affect the types of shows you put on? Or the artists that you work with?*

AD: We don't represent artists — we do a few historical shows a year. We're quite new in the scene. But I think it probably does affect the decision of what shows will look great in the space, what the art can take from the space.

DL: First we think of the show or the artist, and then we think of how the space can adapt itself to the need of the show, the artist, the concept. So we play around but, yes, there are some practical limitations — because we can't do the next Richard Serra show.

MP: When you represent artists, what's most important can only be the artist. The artist has a certain idea and then, hopefully, that works with the space, and if not, you find a space. We are in a lucky position that if it's not here,

we'll do it in one of our other galleries. Or you rent something in the city.

DL: Your first show, the Allan Kaprow show — would you have ever expected this? You entered an experience. And the fact that it was in that space in that presentation forced all of us to relook at everything.

WW: *That really changed my idea of what an Upper East Side exhibition could be.*

DL: Me too. Me too. Completely.

MP: Definitely since the Kaprow opening, we've seen young people at our openings. Not that much during the show, but at the event, artists and young curators come to the Upper East Side, which I think five to six years ago happened less.

AD: I think if you do interesting things, people come.

WW: *What do you see as the role of an art dealer versus a gallerist? Do you all consider yourself gallerists?*

DL: Today to be a gallerist you have to be a bit of a curator. You have to work with the art or the artist. The bar is so high that the standard forces you to be much more of a curator than we were in the past. And sometimes both hats are contradictory.

AD: And today, the galleries are not in competition, but some gallery exhibitions are better than museum exhibitions. For example, the Calder/Tanguy exhibition [at L&M Arts] was the best Calder show I'd ever seen. I think there are more expectations for a gallery today, in terms of the catalogue you are doing, the curatorial work.

WW: *In the past year, have you found that a type of show is more successful than others? Whether it's thematic, solo, group, historical?*

AD: You find that it's about the quality really, now more than ever.

DL: And it's about the surprise, I think. It's tough to say that, but we found that we did a fabulous De Kooning show and it got much less attention than our Calder/Tanguy show or our Hirst show. Or to regroup a body of work like you did with Koons, or to have an artist like the one you're about to show. When was the last time people saw Lee Lozano in New York?

MP: It was the P.S.1 show, so 10 years?

DL: Okay, so 10 years without seeing the work of this artist in a comprehensive way makes the thing really exciting.

MP: We work in such a global way, all of us. Maybe because the climate is such a way that sometimes you don't sell to the States, but you sell to Europe or Asia or wherever. The show is what counts and what has to be interesting. It is our business card, our image.

AD: The goal in my gallery is to do things that really interest us. I think if you do things that really capture your own interest in a real deep way, it's contagious.

WW: *Do you see yourselves as in direct competition with auction houses?*

[Laughter]

DL: All the time! But that's more the art dealers in each of us.

MP: Well, in primary market, if you do your work as a gallerist, 100 percent, then the secondary market of the artist you represent is crucial. The two facets or two roles mix. So you have to support a secondary market, and there you are in competition with the auction houses.

WW: *Are you vetting collectors or buyers before you sell an artwork?*

DL: They're collectors, and they have their freedom.

AD: I don't believe in it.

DL: With some collectors you have very particular relationships, and they'll always have the courtesy, the respect, call it whatever, to say, "Look, I may want to sell this — can you help? What should we do?" Some collectors will not and rightly so: "This is my piece, I do what I want, and I prefer to put it at auction."

That's one competition and the other today is to go to a private collector and get a secondary-market work. Very often the first question is, "What would be an auction house estimate?" And it's become very tough. The bottom line is that a lot of people think that you sell better at auction, which is really not always the case, and that you buy better privately. Which is definitely the case!

MP: I think it's a lot about relationships, the way you work with your clients. A successful dealer or gallerist will sell the important works to collectors where there is this relationship, where you know there is this trust. And then, yes, this person may be in a position where the work has to be sold, but then at least there is a discussion. And we have rarely had, in 20 years of existence, any problem at that level. There have been things sold that we didn't want to, of course, but it's not that we were surprised. When you sell something, you know.

AD: But I never believed you can treat collectors like prisoners.

MP: No, no.

DL: No.

AD: And in a way now, the time is different than three years ago when you could make people sign a right of first refusal. I think there is much less of that now.

DL: But don't you try? We always say that if you ever decide to deaccession you come to us first. At the end of the day, though, if you have the guts or the courage or call it what you want to buy a work of art, it's yours, and you are entitled to do whatever you want.

WW: *When a new person walks into your gallery, how do you approach them? How do you get to know them and their intentions? Would you refuse to sell a work?*

DL: It happens with a conversation. When you speak with someone you know if they are interested, if they're knowledgeable, if they want to become knowledgeable. And then you take your risk.

That's a discussion we always have, the value of a new relationship to the old relationship. The new relationship has incredible potential, and the old relationship is how you built your business. You constantly have to balance this.

MP: It's definitely both, and you have to juggle. It's an easy problem to have: who gets something you have to sell. But I really think it's relational; it's about relationships with the clients, with the artists. On all levels, that's what makes the business so special.

WW: *So what are some red flags?*

AD: I had someone who came the other day and said, "I'm an adviser" — never heard of him before — and he was looking for a very expensive work, something in the \$20 to 50 million price range. I would never offer anything in this price range to somebody I didn't know . . . I tried to get information and I couldn't. You can't risk it.

DL: The other big red flag is when someone comes in and tells you about all the sales that they've done. First, if you had done it, you wouldn't talk about it, and second, even if you had done it, I don't want to be in the next conversation you have with another gallerist.

Apart from that, I enjoy new relationships. New collectors come to this world with a fresh thirst, a fresh enthusiasm, and I enormously value old relationships, but I really value new relationships.

WW: *This is our fifth-anniversary issue and we were wondering what, for you as gallerists, have been some of the more striking changes in the art world over the past five years?*

AD: The art market went through a big dip that I feel we are now getting out of. But in the last five years we have experienced the highest, the most extravagant time in the art world that I was ever part of and then the biggest dip that I was every part of.

DL: The population of art world-interested people has exponentially exploded. Of course collectors, but everyone talks about art. Every newspaper, *Vogue*, *Elle* magazine has a page about art.

MP: The quantity of quality work has remained. Or become even scarcer because the demand was higher.

AD: And the art world is much more global. That's probably why we didn't suffer as much from this recession, because there is always somebody from somewhere who is interested in buying something.

