

INSIDE STORIES

Behind the Scenes With the Nation's Leading Gallerists











GALLERY CHAT: ALEXANDER GRAY SAYS YES TO LESSER KNOWN ARTISTS, NO TO HISTORICAL FETISHISM

“In many ways I was raised to distrust art dealers,” says Alexander Gray, who became one in 2006.

That was after working in MoMA’s education department, and at a long line of nonprofits, including Art Matters and Visual AIDS. Opening Alexander Gray Associates on a second-floor West 26th Street space with his husband, David Cabrera (who handles the business side of the gallery), Gray filled his roster with artists he describes as “undervalued by the market, but respected by other artists. Their international lineup includes Harmony Hammond, Luis Camnitzer, Lorraine O’Grady, Jack Whitten, Melvin Edwards, Hassan Sharif, Joan Semmel, Regina Silveira, and more.

This summer, workers came to dig a hole in his floor, and then build a staircase to the 26th Street storefront.

We spoke with him at his newly expanded gallery space, which he launched last week with his first show of work by Siah Armajani.

You spent much of your childhood in Woodstock, New York, surrounded by artists. Your mother, the sculptor Frances Gray, married Alexander Archipenko, the great Ukrainian modernist.

I grew up literally in Archipenko’s art school. That certainly colors how this

program developed....Maybe it's Freudian that all the artists in the program are my parents' age.

Not Coco Fusco. She was born in 1960.

She's the youngest artist in the gallery.

Describe the gallery's sensibility.

Someone once said to me, "You work with all these artists who everyone else forgot about." Race, gender, and geography: that's the trifecta that marks our program.

How has the gallery evolved?

In 2006 we started with more '90s artists; today we're focusing more on artists who emerged in the '60s and '70s.

But not on the work the artists made during those eras.

That's historical fetishism, that focus on the work made when they're young. Here, we're always talking about the present tense.

You and David are ethical vegans who don't wear animal products or serve them in the gallery. What happens if an artist brings in work made with animal products?

We wouldn't do an exhibition of live animals. If a canvas has glue made from rabbits, that's a different story. It's intention, not perfection.

What's your advice for dealers just entering the field?

The respect of other artists is more important than red dots.

IMAGES FROM TOP: Alexander Gray and David Cabrera at Alexander Gray Associates, 2014. Siah Armajani, Tomb for Sacco and Vanzetti, 2009, brick, wood, paint. Siah Armajani, Tomb for Neema, 2012, concrete, wood, shingles, paint. Siah Armajani, Written Minneapolis (The Last Tomb), 2014, felt pen on mylar. Melvin Edwards, Untitled, c. 2004, welded steel. Melvin Edwards, Untitled, c. 2004, welded steel. Melvin Edwards, MZ, 2006, welded steel. All photos courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York.
