

The New Criterion

Art

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Gallery chronicle

by James Panero

On “Claire Seidl and Kim Uchiyama: Plain Sight, Selected Paintings, Prints and Photographs” at Fox Gallery, NYC, “Tom Goldenberg: Landscapes” at The Graduate Center, The City University of New York, and “Todd Gordon, Tom Goldenberg” at George Bill-is Gallery, New York

An apartment gallery is just what it sounds like: a gallery in an apartment. The concept barely needs explaining, but the obviousness of it only became apparent to me in recent years. Of course, the traditional commercial gallery as we know it—that storefront of art, now almost always stripped down to a white cube—is, in fact, a modern creation. Art has been decorating the places where we live since before the first cave drawings at Lascaux. No doubt someone sometime in the Pleistocene was the first to trade a zigzag clam carving kept beside a stone pillow for entrails from the mammoth hunt. Hence the first apartment gallery sale was made.

But for whatever reason, from perhaps 15,000 years ago until sometime in 2008, apartment galleries have been far too exotic for most of us to pay them much mind. It could be that some prehistoric prohibition exists in mixing commercial transactions with a place of domicile; the art on the walls where you live should reside on the walls where you live and shouldn't be up for sale. Most municipalities indeed have some regulations against operating a commercial space from home, and presumably this includes an art gallery. I wouldn't want Gagosian West run out of the apartment across the hall from where I live, either. Yet there have been many famous and wonderful apartment galleries that worked out just fine for everyone. In January 2012, I wrote about the “temporary Museum of Painting (and Drawing)” that the painter Cathy Nan Quinlan ran out of her loft in Williamsburg. These have largely been alternatives to the mainstream; out-there spaces not for everyone (although, in fact, they could be far more inviting than chilly white-box storefronts).

This all changed with the declining fortunes of the art world after 2008. As the economics of all but the largest commercial galleries suffered setbacks, the nimble apartment gallery, often artist-driven, often in unusual locations, took on a new leading role. It might be added that social media, the flattening of information, Google Maps, and a new appreciation for the “sharing economy” all played a role in these developments. Apartment galleries in Bushwick such as Norte Maar and Centotto began rigorous and regular exhibition programs in the wall spaces next to the kitchen and above the bed. But more importantly these changes in venue brought with

them a sense of liberation. With gallery costs presumably now covered through other means—the best of them are living spaces first and exhibition spaces second—the lights stay on whether anything sells or not. So apartment gallerists (if we can call them that) have the freedom to show what they want, not what they need to sell.

Another discovery of apartment gallery-going is how interesting it can be to see art in a domestic setting. You can just about put anything in a white-box gallery and it will *seem* like art as it takes on the artificial aura of the venerated space around it. In a home, art must rise to the occasion. The art that passes this test looks even bigger and better than on a whitebox gallery wall. This is incredibly helpful, of course, in deciding if this is art you want to live with yourself. Apartment galleries also give us a sense for the seller's own taste, ideas for our own home, and a more direct connection (too direct, for some people) with the creative community we might be buying into.

These thoughts went through my head as I visited Fox Gallery NYC, an apartment gallery run by Annette Fox since 2009. Located in her apartment at 101st Street and West End Avenue on Manhattan's Upper West Side, and open by appointment, Fox Gallery delights from the street. Just look up at the intricate and now forlorn Art Nouveau façade of one of George & Edward Blum's signature apartment buildings from a century ago. The faded Gilded Age grandeur continues through the apartments inside, where a hundred years of landlord paint has built up over the picture moldings and French doors.

In Fox's apartment, this frosty white craquelure only adds to the texture of the space and resonates with the bold abstract paintings now on view by Claire Seidl and Kim Uchiyama.¹ Both painters create an enigmatic sense of color, layer, and light—Uchiyama through horizontal bands; Seidl in a scumble of scrapes and lines. As natural light fills much of this classical living space, their work breathes and converses like exotic figures lounging in the living room or sitting with you at the dining room table. *The Swing of Things*, an aqueous square canvas by Seidl at the end of the entry hallway, invites a deep dive in. A set of matching watercolors by Uchiyama finds her horizontal bands bending and resting against one another and connecting through the panels in the series. Fox effortlessly folds her own excellent collection in this mix while also showing the range of each of these artists' output: in the hallway, print editions by Uchiyama; in the bedroom, haunting long-exposure black-and-white photographs by Seidl of cabin dinners and lake swimming. This art settles us into a special place, like this gallery, where you just want to linger.

