

'INTRIGUED BY THE BOWERY'

FOR YEARS the Lower East Side was the rough-and-tumble home to modest galleries whose owners were unwilling or unable to pay for space in Chelsea. Now, with the New Museum of Contemporary Art's move to the Bowery, galleries large and small are following suit in a migration that is transforming the neighborhood into a bona fide art district.

As the anchor in this burgeoning gallery district, the New Museum is "committed to collaborating with our neighbors," according to museum spokesperson Gabriel Einsohn. Dealer Jen Bekman, who opened her gallery at 6 Spring Street in 2003, acknowledges that the New Museum's relocation was "part of my reason for coming, because they were going to be just around the corner. I was excited, too, because it was going to be an architecturally interesting building."

Along with Bekman's, a handful of galleries, including artist Terence Koh's Asia Song Society, have set up shop in the area since the museum decided to move there in 2001. As the facility's inauguration approaches, the number of dealers coming to the Bowery is growing at a steady clip. Eleven Rivington, an offshoot of Greenberg Van Doren Gallery on 57th Street; Luxe Gallery; and spaces founded by Janos Gat and Amy Smith-Stewart have all opened there. Feature, Inc. plans to open a space this month.

David Maupin, who with Rachel Lehmann is launching a branch of Chelsea's Lehmann Maupin Gallery at 201 Chrystie Street this year, says, "We looked in Harlem, we looked in Brooklyn." But they settled on a Chrystie Street building with 26-foot-high ceilings. Other established galleries have been eyeing property in the area. At press time, PaceWildenstein communications director Andrea Glimcher declined to address reports that the gallery had already purchased a space there, but she acknowledged that "PaceWildenstein is intrigued by the Bowery."

While the neighborhood is far from gentrified—the legendary Bowery Mission, one of the country's oldest homeless shelters, stands on the same block as the New Museum's building—the area's lack of polish is part of its appeal for some dealers.

Kristine Woodward moved her gallery from SoHo to the Lower East Side in May. "The SoHo spot no longer had soul," she says. "The neighborhood had become a mall. We needed to go where it was gritty and the artists had a base."

—K.C.



Smith-Stewart, which opened its Stanton Street space this fall, is one of several galleries to move to the Lower East Side neighborhood around the New Museum.

of a collection is significant," she says. "There are as many negatives to having a collection as there are positives. Museums only show such a small fraction of what they own, and they're encumbered by it and have to store it." Phillips argues that developing a permanent collection would run counter to the New Museum's mission. "We don't want to be somehow locked in time with a collection," she says. "It's a big dilemma for contemporary-art institutions: how do you stay contemporary when your collection is aging?" Instead, the museum relies on loans from artists, private collections, and other institutions when it is staging exhibitions.

The building's design provides the museum with more space and a greater range of options for displaying art. Each of the six "boxes" corresponds to an exhibition space or resource floor, with three main gallery levels and an entire story devoted to educational facilities. "We wanted flexibility, but we wanted spaces that would ultimately show off the art," Phillips says. "The galleries each have their own character—there are different dimensions, different proportions, and different lighting on each floor." The building also features a terraced event space on the top floor with panoramic city views, a multimedia laboratory, and a 180-seat theater. "The theater expands the possibility for public programming, especially for performance," Phillips says. "It's not something we could emphasize before, but we intend to in the future." The lobby, named Marcia Tucker Hall in honor of the museum's founder, who died last year, features a café, a gift store, and a gallery area.

The museum's inaugural show will be "Unmonumental," a global survey of contemporary art that will occupy all three primary gallery floors. A collaborative effort by chief curator Richard Flood, senior curator Laura Hoptman, and curator Massimiliano Gioni, the exhibition will unfold in four stages through April, beginning with sculpture and gradually incorporating collage, sound, and new media. Among the artists to be exhibited—90 in all—are John Bock, Trisha Donnelly, Isa Genzken, and Thomas Hirschhorn. The works will be installed without temporary dividing walls in order to show off the building's contours and to take advantage of the spaciousness of the big-box galleries.

To supplement the opening exhibition, the museum, in collaboration with the new-media art organization Rhizome, is hosting a computer-animation and sound installation by the art collective Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries. The piece, *Black on White, grey ascending*, was specially created for the lobby gallery and will be on display through the end of March. Another multimedia work, an "information environment" by Jeffrey Inaba titled *Donor Hall*, will be installed on the theater level. The piece will present data detailing the amount of money different groups, including religious organizations and the military, give to cultural programs. The building's facade will feature rotating installations of sculpture, beginning with *Hell Yes!*, a large-scale multicolored sign by Ugo Rondinone that will remain on view for a year.

In an indication that the New Museum is already becoming an anchor for a fledgling art district on the Bowery, galleries are moving nearby. "Activity started developing much faster than we anticipated," says Phillips. "People started thinking about what the Bowery could be. It has a really interesting character that these new galleries and stores and restaurants are drawn to—the intimacies and the intricacies of the spaces and the history of the street. It's always been an artist's neighborhood, a place where art is made."

—Kriston Capps