

Art World

Pour One Out for the Galleries That Closed in 2025

It's been a tough 12 months, but there are reasons for hope. There have to be.

by **Andrew Russeth**

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The dealer Leo Castelli once said that "there are just five or six galleries that at one moment or another play a more important role, come up with new ideas." Here he is in 1993 at the "Party Against AIDS."

Photo: Pool Benainous/Reglain/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images.

When the artist **Florine Stettheimer** died in 1944, at the age of 72, her old friend **Georgia O'Keeffe** delivered a eulogy. “Florine made no concessions of any kind to any person or situation,” O’Keeffe said. She proposed that, in her joyous paintings of prewar New York’s art scene, Stettheimer had depicted “a way of life that is going and cannot happen again, something that has been alive in our city.”

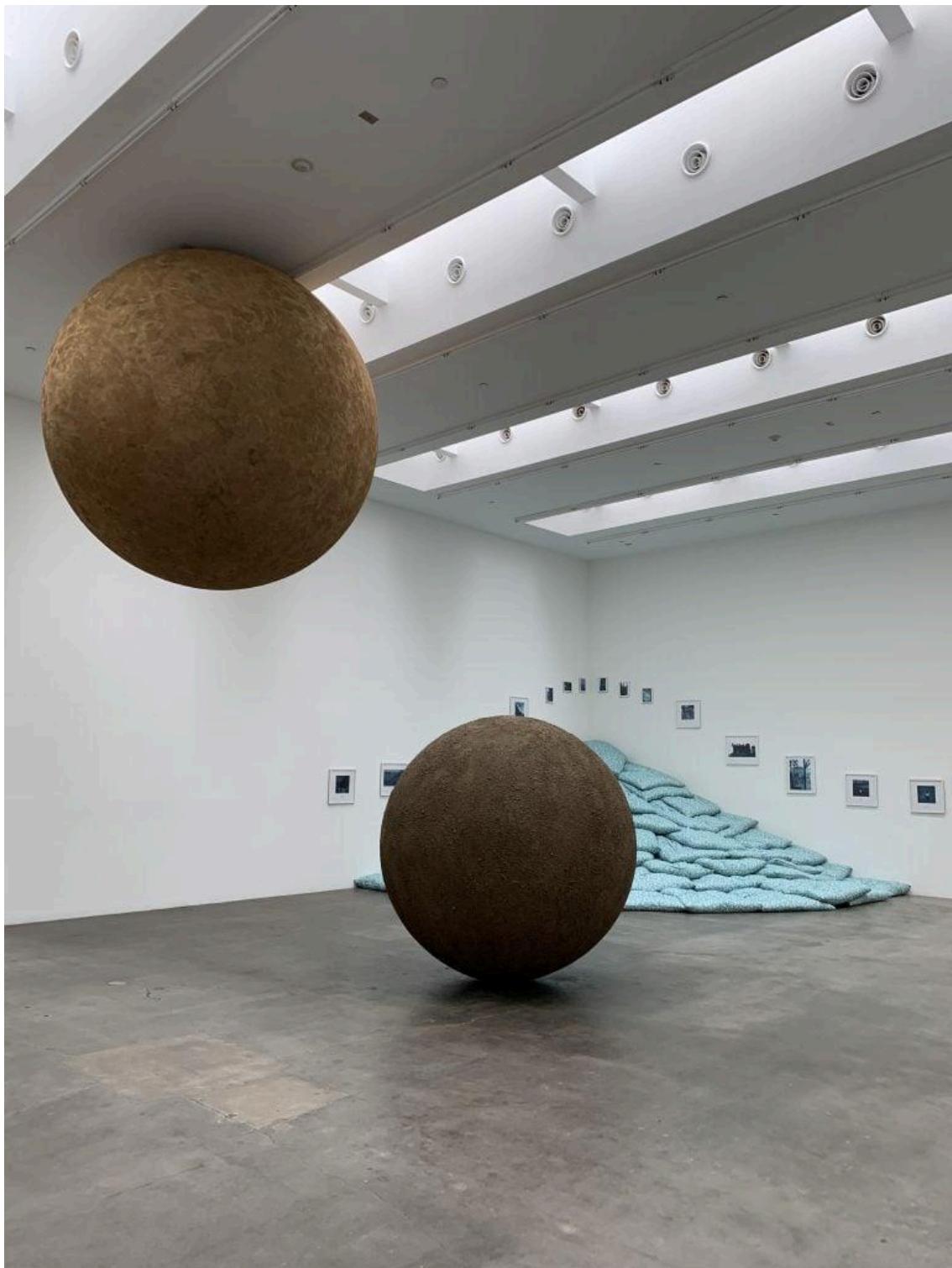
Similar things could be said of worthwhile art galleries. They embody ways of being in the world that are distinctive, charismatic, and even argumentative. When they go out of business, as many did this year, their artists may continue to work, but the context can never be the same. Hothouse energies and competitive spirits dissipate.



Installation view of “Korakrit Arunanondchai: Painting with History in a Room Filled with Men with Funny Names” at Clearing in Bushwick, Brooklyn, in 2013. Courtesy Clearing

I wasn't around to see **Dan Flavin** and **Donald Judd** uncork new work at the **Green Gallery**, which operated from 1960 to 1965, but I feel lucky to have caught a few outings by **Cindy Sherman** at **Metro Pictures**, which shuttered in 2021; most of the exhibitions at the freewheeling **JTT**, which closed in 2023; and enticing debuts by **Korakrit Arunanondchai** and others at **Clearing**, which flamed out this past summer.

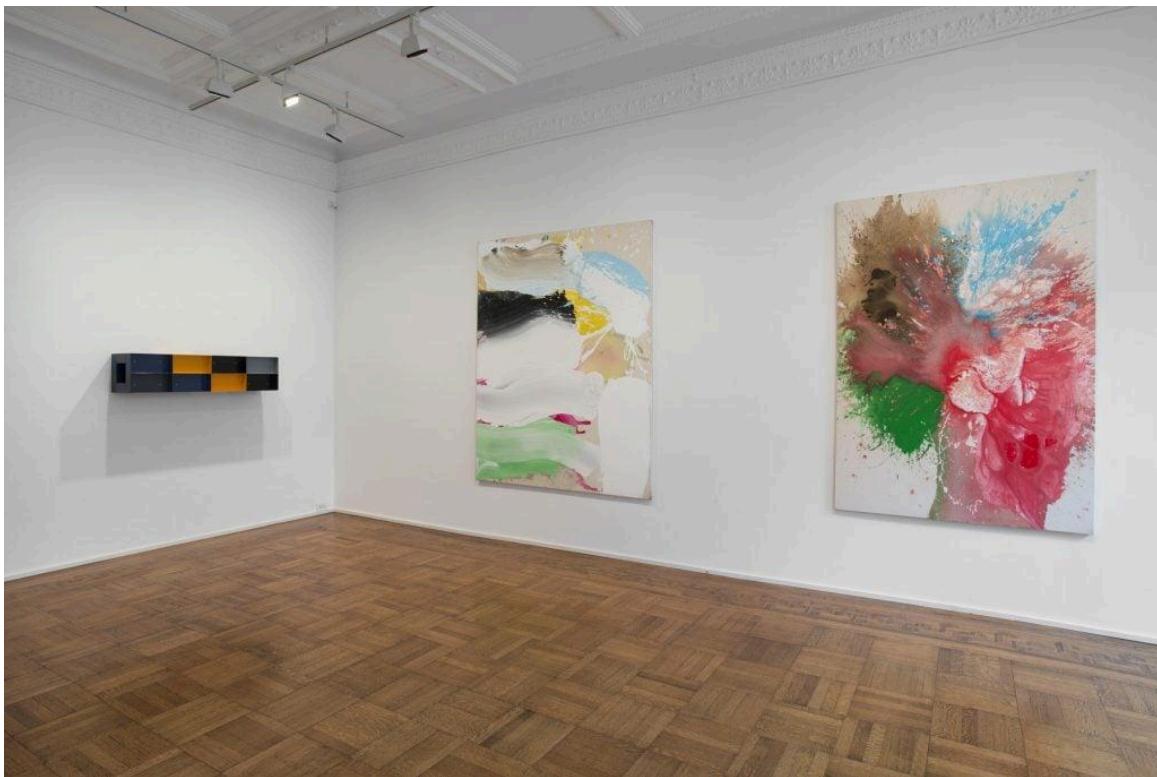
"For five years, we ran one of the best galleries in the world in our category," Clearing's proprietor, **Olivier Babin**, told my colleague **Katya Kazakina** in an exit interview. The line brought to mind something the fabled dealer **Leo Castelli** told an oral historian in 1991: "There are just five or six galleries that at one moment or another play a more important role, come up with new ideas." (He mentioned the late **Barbara Gladstone** and Metro.)



Installation view of "Parergon: Japanese Art of the 1980s and 1990s," curated by Mika Yoshitake at Blum in Los Angeles in 2019. Photo by Andrew Russeth

Most of the time, of course, even the most ambitious art dealers are not in that zone. They can't be. Sensibilities change, and new generations of artists and gallerists storm in, angling for attention. But committed gallerists still keep things interesting, supporting their roster and taking risks when they can. That's not easy in any economy. Eventually, they all close.

The many dependable galleries that called it quits this year did so for all sorts of different reasons. We'll miss them. They include the high-flying **Blum**, which deserves credit for championing key Japanese and Korean artists in Los Angeles and beyond; **High Art**, the taste-making Parisian outfit that repped superb youngish guns like **Matt Copson** and **Olga Balema**; and **Venus Over Manhattan**, a rare case of a rich art collector (**Adam Lindemann**) actually using his largesse for the public's enjoyment.



Installation view of "Ed Clark: Big Bang," curated by David Hammons, at Tilton Gallery in 2013, with a work by Donald Judd at left. Photo courtesy Tilton Gallery

Who else? **Sperone Westwater** is dissolving after a 50-year run (an astonishing feat) in real style, with one last **Richard Long** outing, his 17th there. **Galerie Francesca Pia**, of Zurich, also ended on a high note, after 35 years, with its sixth show with **Wade Guyton**; it was handsome, judging from photos. **Tilton Gallery**, which dates to 1983, is wrapping with shows of **Ruth Vollmer** and abstract painting. It's sad to think that there will be no more visits to its cozy townhouse, an urbane setting for art, where a **David Hammons**—curated mini-survey of **Ed Clark**'s paintings blew me away in 2014.

Over the past 12 or so months, many more firms have disappeared, or have said that they will soon, or have gone suddenly quiet: **Altman Siegel**, a stalwart supporter of the new and untested; **Kasmin**, which had admirably expansive taste; **Rena Bransten Gallery**, which also managed to last 50 years, in San Francisco; the storied **L.A. Louver** (which is morphing into a smaller form); the venturesome New York nonprofit **Canal Projects**, which got a lot done in just three years; the pugnacious London outfit **Project Native Informant**; and **Thierry Goldberg Gallery**, which gave early breaks to a bevy of very fine artists.

The list could go on for quite a while.



Installation view of Pope.L's recreation of Allan Kaprow's *Yard* at Hauser and Wirth's Uptown branch in 2009. Photo by Andrew Russeth

There have been downsizings, as well: London's **Stephen Friedman Gallery** pulled out of New York two years after entering it ("I may have put the cart before the horse," Friedman told the *Financial Times*, with unusual candor for his profession), **Petzel** closed its Uptown Manhattan space, the multinational **Almine Rech** retreated in London, **Hauser and Wirth** waved good-bye to the Upper East Side abode where it first alit in the city; **Tanya Bonakdar** said farewell to Los Angeles; and **Tramps** forewent New York for new adventures in London (after a brief stop with **Kai Althoff** on the Italian island of Filicudi).

Again, the reasons vary. Some were correcting for over-extensions, and some were simply doing as they please. Godspeed. There are few cultural experiences as demoralizing as visiting a gallery that is spread too thin or running on fumes, its programming growing ever more bland, and stale, and out of touch. There's no shame in closing—so long as you don't leave artists and vendors unpaid.



Applause after a performance of Georgica Pettus's *Seconds Minutes Hours* in New York on December 11.

Photo by Andrew Russeth

It's heartening that, amid the market downturn, enterprising new galleries have been opening at a rapid clip in New York in recent years. The dream endures, as Artnet columnist **Kenny Schachter** recently pointed out.

My default state about pretty much everything is cautious optimism, but a mid-career artist of some note recently made the case to me that a remarkable gallery renaissance is underway in New York, and I was persuaded. We've all seen dealers come and go, but this artist argued that the latest crop is ambitious and savvy in a way that even the Lower East Siders of around 15 years ago were not.

Let's name some names. There's the razor-sharp **Francis Irv** duo on the edge of Manhattan's Chinatown, who just presented a winning **Georgica Pettus** play at a Union Square loft space. There's **Alex Berns**, who's holed up in a bizarre two-floor venue low on Broadway. There's **Felix Rödder** with his stately Upper East Side showroom, cycling between contemporary names and historical greats, a **James Castle** show on deck next month. There's **Galerie Yecho Lange**, which has been doing outrageous shows in an office at the tip of Manhattan (though it's suddenly gone dark). There's **American Art Catalogues** and **Slip House, Gladwell Projects** and **Donald Young**. These are just a few of the bunch.



Installation view of "Buffet, USA" at 95 Gallon Gallery, installed on a rooftop in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, on August 16. Photo by Andrew Russeth

Project spaces keep coming in New York, too, against all odds. (Have you seen rents in this town?) They include the outré-minded **Smilers** in the East Village, **Turquoise** (which presented a brainteaser of a **Marcel Duchamp** show at its Crown Heights perch), **Stellarhighway**, and **Benny's Video**. **Emmelines** is doing serious shows in a subway station, **U-Haul Gallery** is doing them in, yes, rented U-Haul trucks, and **95 Gallon Gallery** is doing them out of a 95-gallon garbage can.

Meanwhile, foreign galleries are continuing to land in New York, filling gaps in the local scene. It's a thrill that Germany's legendary **Konrad Fischer Galerie** is now here, with a little space in Lower Manhattan. Ditto for Seoul's venerable **Gallery Hyundai**, which has arrived Chelsea. Ditto for Hong Kong's excellent **Kiang Malingue**, which has grabbed real square footage in an industrial building in Manhattan's Chinatown. With such a variety of art on offer on any give day in New York, who needs art fairs? I'm barely joking.



Installation view of Bruce Nauman's *Office Edit #1* (2001) at Okey Dokey Konrad Fischer in New York in November. Photo by Andrew Russeth

Great art galleries put vital new art into circulation, as Castelli said, and they bring old, forgotten art back into the fold. They keep precarious but important ideas alive, communicating them from one believer to another. At a recent holiday party hosted by the **Art International Foundation**, the artist **Sarah Sze** modeled this process of transmission in a short speech, sharing a radiant quotation that she'd gotten from the choreographer **Trajal Harrell** that was spoken by another dance luminary, **Martha Graham**, to still one more, **Agnes de Mille**. And here was Sze on a cold night in Chelsea, passing it on in a room filled with artists. Graham's message to de Mille, a kind of pep talk, began like this:

"There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and be lost. The world will not have it."

Bravely, artists tackle that all on their own. They are the foundation of our little industry. But thank goodness for the dealers who help ensure that what they do is not lost.



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