

For Wall Street's Sake: Art to Lure Visitors Downtown

By GRACE GLUECK

Will art power help make Wall Street whole again? Julie Menin, a lawyer and former restaurateur whose husband owns the baronial Exchange Building at 25 Broad Street, is banking on it. Spurred by the drop in residents and businesses in the financial district after the Sept. 11 attack, she has created an upbeat organization called Wall Street Rising, which aims to bring new life to the area in part through the restorative spirit of art. Wall Street Rising is presenting, through the summer, an ambitious roundup, "Art Downtown," which consists of no fewer than five simultaneous contemporary art shows in a four-block area. The hope is that people will come to see the works, walk the streets, visit the stores and restaurants and maybe even stick around for a while.

Observing that the financial district has no major museums or galleries, Ms. Menin says, "We need more foot traffic, and by setting up a blockbuster show of museum quality artists that should bring thousands of people to the area, we can also help to plant the seeds for Lower Manhattan's residential, retail and cultural regrowth."

To pull off the five shows was no easy feat. In the space of four months, owners of buildings (like Bruce Menin, a real estate developer and Ms. Menin's husband), were persuaded to donate space. Then \$500,000 was raised for expenses. Richard Marshall, art historian, exhibition organizer and former curator of the Whitney Museum, was signed to do the shows, and museums, galleries and private collectors were tapped for loans. If all goes well, Ms. Menin envisions making "Art Downtown" an annual festival.

Other of new photography on the International scene and a third of post-Sept. 11 children's art from Lower Manhattan schools. The other two exhibitions are devoted to individual artists: Julian Schnabel and John Chamberlain.

The freshest of the group shows is "New Photography," displaying the work of some 50 artists from all over the world who use the hot medium of large scale color photography. One of the salient features of "Art Downtown" is the part that architecture plays, and the exhibition site for the photography show, the imposing Exchange Building at 25 Broad Street, is in itself worth a visit. Built in 1898 as an office building but recently converted to a residential property, this Italian Renaissance edifice is enhanced by a palatial entrance hall. The show is installed in a vacant space next to the lobby.

There's no overall theme to it beyond that of current work, so miscellany rules. There are narrative setups, landscapes, people, symbolic statements, special effects and what all. Among those present are Thomas

"Art Downtown," sponsored by the nonprofit organization Wall Street Rising, includes free exhibitions at five buildings in the financial district: 60 Wall Street, 48 Wall Street, 45 Wall Street, 25 Broad Street and 1 New York Plaza. They will remain through Sept. 15. Hours: Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Information: (212) 509-0300 or www.wallstretrisinge.org

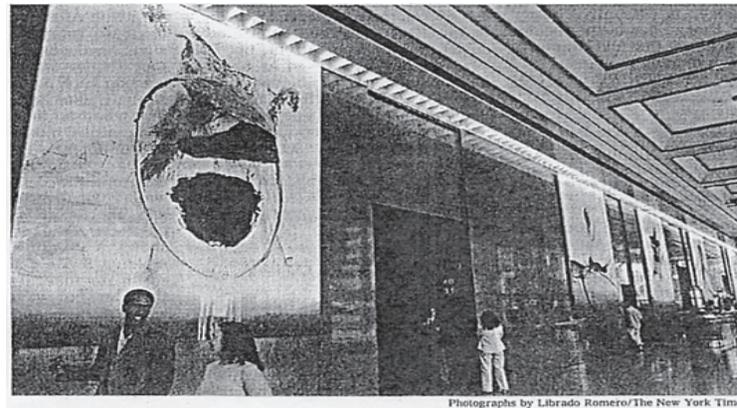


Struth, Tins Barney, William Wegman, Gregory Crewdson, William Eggleston, Anna Gaskell, Nan Goldin, Gary Simmons, Laurie Simmons and Lorna Simpson. Laughs don't exactly abound in the show, but they are there. One sure shot is "An Inner Dialogue With Frida Kahlo (Flower, Wreath and Tears)," Yasumasa Morimura's big portrait of himself as the Mexican painter, solemn in a white gown with his head surrounded by a ruff of flowers, heavy eyebrows meeting in simulation of the famous Kahlo facial feature. Another is Mr. Wegman's yet-another-dog portrait, "Gabo," in which one of his long-suffering Weimaraners poses with the aid of a sheet as a sculpture by the Russian Constructivist Naum Gabo.

Striking and witty special effects include Ms. Simmons's "Tourism: St. Basil" in which three of her doll figures stand in awe before a blowup of the Russian cathedral, and Vik Muniz's "Action Painter (From Pictures of Chocolate)," depicting a Pollock-like figure as he surveys a just-finished floor painting, all including Pollock done in chocolate drips and calligraphic swirls, then photographed.

Setup photographs that impress include Tins Barney's "Bridesmaids in Pink," three young things in minigowns holding puffy bouquets of flowers in a seemingly casual deployment, and Anthony Goicoechea's "Porn," depicting two vacuous boys tugging at either end of a cat suspended between them.

If there are few of the more sensational works for which some of these photographers are known the let-it-all-hang-out Ms. Goldin, for instance, is represented by a rather tame photograph of the back of a young man lying in bed; Robert Mapplethorpe by a (phallic, to be sure) shot of a lack-in-the-outside



In the "Art Downtown" shows, Julian Schnabel's "Hat Full of Rain" series is at 1 New York Plaza, above; at top, from left, "Cry Baby" by Elizabeth Murray, "Bill" by Chuck Close and "Endless Drip" by Roy Lichtenstein are among the works at 48 Wall Street.

the sponsors wanted a family show. Moving right along, we come to the New York Sculpture and Painting show at 48 Wall Street, in the elegant Grand Banking Hall of the building that once served as headquarters for the Bank of New York. Completed in 1928, the hall is a Renaissance pastiche of arched ceilings and windows, ornate pillars, marble floors and staircases with narrative murals by James Monroe Hewlett, which tell the story of American commerce and banking.

The show, displaying more than 80 works by artists living in New York, is packed with paintings and sculptures by the usual suspects and then some: Chuck Close, Elizabeth Murray, Louise Bourgeois, Andy Warhol, Alex Katz, Jeff Koons and Francesco Clemente, along with a sprinkling of lesser knowns.

The exhibition installation sits nicely in the ornate banking hall (and a smaller, plainer gallery downstairs), with felicitous touches like Bryan Hunt's tall, Brancusi

esque sculpture "Copper Axis" placed before the bank's distinctive front window, where it can be viewed from the street, and a comic battery of 42 American presidents' portraits by Laurie Munn butting up against one another in the small but plush chamber once used as an office by the bank's president.

The important thing about the show, however, seems to be the names in it rather than the innovative quality of the art. In all fairness this roundup was assembled in less than a fourth of the time that museums take to process their shows. Still, a streak of bland expectedness runs through the display, not helped by the absence of multimedia installations, environments or video works. Some of the more seasoned practitioners come across well, however. Alex Katz shines with "Wave No. 2," a near-abstract rendition of a white crest riding a cool green broth. Philip Pearlstein brings a nice playfulness to his plain vanilla nude studies in "Mickey Mouse, White House as Birdhouse, Male and Female Models," and in "Pumehanna" Robert Kushner's talent for lush formal theatrics is at its most persuasive. Other attention getters include Philip Taaffe's "Spiraling Totem (Yellow)," a dazzler with its repetitive superimpositions of glitzy spiral motifs; Carroll Dunham's politically incorrect monster woman, "Female Portrait (Six)"; and MacDermott and MacGough's "Super Hero Dreamer No. 2," a sort of Norman Rockwell-meets-Superman fantasy. In short, as they say, there's something here for everybody.

"Monumental Paintings" in the lobby of the New York Plaza, a mammoth contemporary office building said to be one of the finest in Manhattan to use river water for cooling, is a suite of five very large canvases by the ubiquitous Mr. Schnabel, shown in Italy but never before in the United States. The paintings, titled "Hat Full of Rain" (scrawled in each painting), is said to be a memorial tribute to a Schnabel friend. Loose, calligraphic abstractions in tones of blue, black and brown on vast white grounds, they are just right for a sleek contemporary building, with lots of wall space. More interesting, aesthetically and architecturally, is the sculpture installation by John Chamberlain in a half-acre of covered public space at 60 Wall Street, another contemporary office palace designed in 1980's by Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo & Associates. Titled "The Hedge" no connection to the fund of the same name the Chamberlain work is a long row of 16 rectangular frames made of crushed auto parts, set diagonally parallel to one another on a base. Their rough outlines, multiple colors and severely formal arrangement give the impression of a well-disciplined floral hedge, an impression helped by the lattice-like detailing of the vast space, which also incorporates a subway entrance.

Not to be overlooked is "A Child's Vision," a display of children's works in the lobby of 45 Wall Street, another residential building. The works were commissioned by Ms. Menin from 11 schools in the area in celebration of the children's downtown communities. By no means are all focused on the Sept. 11 disaster, but flying planes and I ailing bodies remain heartbreakingly in the consciousness of many.