



Title

Pace Gallery's New York headquarters

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Cover image:

Pace Gallery's New York headquarters

by Adela Kim • 13.11.2019

In September, Pace Gallery opened its new headquarters in New York with the following proclamation from its founder, Arne Glimcher: 'I had the *very original* idea, before I opened up as a gallery, that I wanted to be the director of the Museum of Modern Art [. . .] and now, in our own funny way, we have our own museum'.¹ The resulting 75,000 square-foot, lava-encrusted tower **FIG.1** marks the first major initiative of Arne's son Marc Glimcher, who took over the management of Pace in 2011. It also heralds the general mega-expansions of galleries such as Hauser & Wirth and David Zwirner, which are slated to open in the next two years in locations as varied as Chelsea and Islay del Rey, Panama. That a literal spatial extension would follow the galleries' establishment of publishing houses – Pace Gallery under *Artifex Press* in 2009; David Zwirner books in 2014; and Hauser & Wirth Publishers in 2019 – and a research institute (Hauser & Wirth in 2018), seems only logical in the recent trend of self-institutionalisation.

Yet what is particularly striking in the new Pace space is the zeal with which the gallery has deployed the totalising logic of neoliberalism and the Silicon Valley ethos of innovation, all in the name of inclusion and accessibility. In this grand vision, Pace is the lead disruptor of the art world, transforming the 'personality cult'-driven model of galleries by reconceptualising the gallery after a Silicon Valley campus model. Conveniently, in offering an 'experience' – rather than just art – this transformation also supposedly renders the white space more accessible to the general public.

This vision of a museum-gallery-campus is embedded into the building's structure. There are indoor and outdoor galleries across four floors; a research library for the public; a space dedicated to *Pace Live*, an inaugural multidisciplinary programme for music, dance, film and performance; office spaces; storage; a private viewing space **FIG.2**; and a dining room to coax high-net worth individuals and host parties. In short, it is a microcosm of the art world, with some room for the general public and much more for the donor class.



Fig. 1 Pace Gallery, 540 West 25th Street, New York. (Courtesy Pace Gallery, New York; photograph Thomas Loof).

The reception space resembles a boutique hotel lobby – perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the architecture firm in charge, Bonetti/Kozerski, specialises in residential and retail projects. Big, pastel-hued catalogue books of Pace-represented artists beckon from the left, at which point the first-floor gallery can be found. Here is a retrospective of Alexander Calder’s works, which – as certified examples of twentieth-century Modernism – provide the inauguration a certain museum-like authority. Indeed, the pedagogical labels and the representative range of works on view, from Calder’s abstract oil paintings **FIG.3** that preceded his kinetic sculptures to the mobiles from the 1960s **FIG.4**, dutifully perform the work of an institutional show and inform the public of Calder’s progression from wire portraits to hanging mobiles.

The charade of the gallery’s museum function, however, falls away following the Calder exhibition. A carefully calibrated list of market-friendly artists in various stages of their career are given exhibitions throughout the rest of the gallery. A small show by Yto Barrada is staged in the library **FIG.5**, whose doors remain firmly shut despite supposedly being open for the public. Through the glass, employees can be seen working away at their cubicles against the tantalising details of the Barrada works and shelves

full of books. Do we dare open the door and walk in? Is it just for employees and serious buyers? Similar to the Broad in Los Angeles, where the storage area can only be glimpsed through a small patch of glass, the glass here stops at merely signaling accessibility. That is, a selective inclusivity operates throughout the space, with deliberately obscure signs that poorly hide the fact that almost eighty per cent of the building is reserved for the rich or for gallery employees. The few instances that the public is welcomed are to generate free publicity. A case in point is the entire floor dedicated to the new market favorite Loie Hollowell, a thirty-six-year old artist whose works' prices have increased over 1,200 per cent since gaining representation at Pace.² Nothing comes close to the power of the public uploading Instagram-filtered shots of the abstract, sexual biomorphic paintings to further fuel the frenzy **FIG.6**.

But a far more serious lack of judgment is found elsewhere. The third-floor is home to two Pace subsidiaries, Pace/MacGill and Pace African and Oceanic Art. Among these entities, the gallery's struggle to mime the museum rhetoric in a commercial setting is most starkly revealed. Pace/MacGill, which focuses on photography, presents a series of portraits by Peter Hujar **FIG.7**, whose tutelage under Richard Avedon and Marvin Israel is duly contextualised in a wall label by the director of the Peter Hujar Archive, Stephen Koch. But the display from Pace African and Oceanic Art – five unlabelled objects from Africa – is presented without any supporting or contextual information. The complex historical condition of art acquisition in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, driven by European colonialism, is nowhere referenced, nor is there any information as to the works' functions, cultures or dates. A fact sheet with minimal provenance details is available upon request: it reveals that all objects are from the nineteenth or twentieth century, including a Kikuyu *ndome* shield from Kenya; two masks, Yoruba (Nigeria) and Dan (Ivory Coast), respectively; an Urhobo *oniemo* maternity shrine figure from Nigeria; and a Kota reliquary figure from Gabon [fig]. In other words, they were created and traded during French and British imperialism. An open contextualisation of this information would entail acknowledging how remnants of colonial violence continue to operate in the art market today, wrenching art objects from their contexts and circulating them as commodities.

At the same time, the myth of the Western progressivist 'teleological thrust' is reinforced by a large abstract painting by Adolph Gottlieb [fig], an avid collector of African art.³ Without any critical discourse that explicate Primitivism and the racist tendencies at play, the juxtaposition reproduces Gottlieb's rhetoric of the modern artist discovering cardinal human nature through 'the irrational, the barbaric' sculptures.⁴ Under these circumstances, the objects are unable to stand on their own terms.

Pace may be attempting to reposition itself as a very modern museum, but its model seems to be the Museum of Modern Art as it was in the 1980s, and in particular its infamous exhibition *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* in 1984–85.⁵ The show was heavily criticised for omitting contextual information of the indigenous objects it brought from cultures of Africa, Oceania, and North America, which, as one critic decried, 'consolidate[d] Western notions of quality and feelings of superiority'.⁶ Incidentally, MoMA itself has recently remodelled its collection displays on the basis of critical self-reflection, questioning the prior imposition of chronology and expounding the violence of racism, sexism and colonialism in the Modernist canon.



Fig. 2 Viewing room at Pace Gallery, 540 West 25th Street, New York.

(Courtesy Pace Gallery, New York; photograph Thomas Loof).

It is crucial to locate Pace's expansion within the broader phenomenon of dispensing culture as a resource. The project was instigated by the real estate developer Weinberg Properties, which has owned the Chelsea site since 1971. Pace had been leasing the property when the developer decided to build an eight-storey building 'comprised of a mix of office and gallery space'.⁷ With the lease agreement between Pace and Weinberg Properties projected to cost the gallery \$169 million over the next twenty years, as well as Weinberg Properties' \$98.2 million construction loan from Shanghai Commercial Bank and a mortgage refinance from Citi, the new gallery complex underscores how culture functions as 'an engine of capital accumulation' in the current regime of neoliberalism.⁸ What remains to be seen, however, is the extent to which this turn will transform the dynamics of the art world. For if the commercial and the non-commercial sectors of the art world have always remained closely intertwined, this relationship will necessarily have to change under the joint pressures of the galleries growing more totalising and the museums slowly reckoning with their institutional histories. This assessment will come in due time.



Fig. 3 Installation view of *Calder: Small Sphere and Heavy Sphere* at Pace Gallery, New York, 14th September–26th October 2019. (© 2019 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; photograph Tom Powel Imaging).



Fig. 4 *Untitled*, by Alexander Calder. 1930. Oil on canvas, 99.7 by 64.8 cm. (© 2019 Calder Foundation, New York /Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; exh. Pace Gallery, New York).



Fig. 5 Installation view of *Yto Barrada: Paste Papers*, 540 West 25th Street, New York, 14th September 2019–14th September 2020. (Courtesy Pace Gallery, New York; photograph Kyle Knodell).

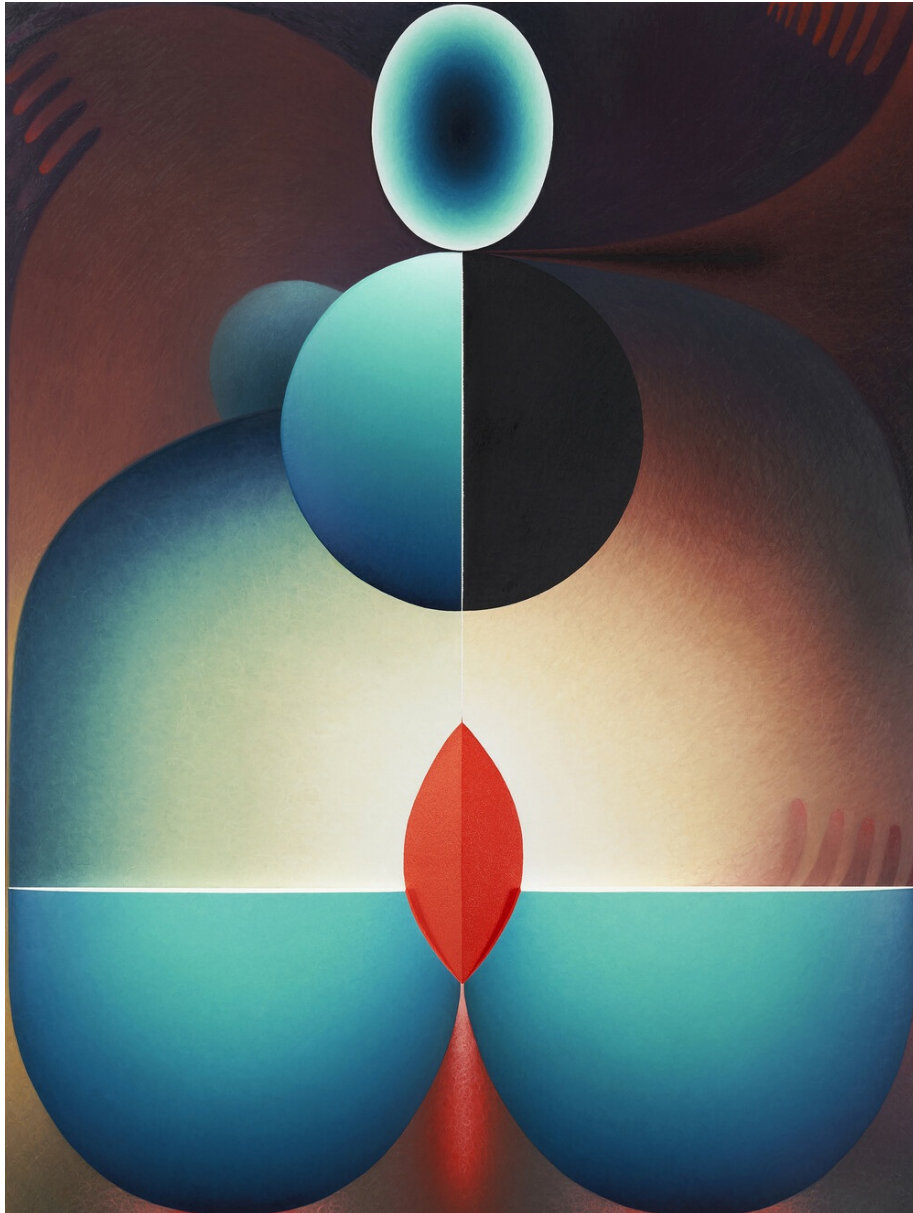


Fig. 6 *Birthing Dance*, by Loie Hollowell. 2018. Oil paint, acrylic medium, sawdust and high density foam on linen mounted on panel, 182.9 by 137.2 by 8.9 cm. (© Loie Hollowell; exh. Pace Gallery, New York).



Fig. 7 *Kota Reliquary Figure*, attributed to Semangoy. Gabon, nineteenth century. Wood, copper and brass. (Courtesy Pace African & Oceanic Art, New York).

Footnotes

- 1** Cited in J. Baumgardner: 'Pace Gallery debuts its massive Chelsea flagship', *Galerie* (5th September 2019), available at <https://www.galeriemagazine.com/pace-gallery-flagship-chelsea/>, accessed 7th November 2019.
- 2** N. Freeman: 'How newly minted art market star Loie Hollowell's prices rose more than 1,200 percent in just three years', *Artnet News* (15th September 2019), available at <https://news.artnet.com/market/how-loie-hollowells-prices-rose-1200-percent-in-three-years-1649155>, accessed 7th November 2019.
- 3** 'Is modernity multiple?', in K. Moxey: *Visual Time: The Image in History*, Durham NC 2013, p.15, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822395935-002>.

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- 5 See W. Ruvin, ed.: exh. cat. 'Primitivism' in 20th century art: affinity of the tribal and the modern, New York (Museum of Modern Art) 1984–85.
- 6 T. McEvilley: 'Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief', *Artforum* (November 1984), available at <https://www.artforum.com/print/198409/on-doctor-lawyer-indian-chief-primitivism-in-20th-century-art-at-the-museum-of-modern-art-in-1984-35322>, accessed 8th November 2019
- 7 K. Brenzel: 'Weinberg plans 8-story building to replace Chelsea art gallery', *The Real Deal* (29th January 2016), available at <https://therealdeal.com/2016/01/29/weinberg-plans-8-story-building-to-replace-chelsea-art-gallery/>, accessed 7th November 2019.
- 8 G. Yúdice: *The Expediency of Culture*, Durham NC 2003, p.8.

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