

BEHIND THE CURTAINS OF A ONE MAN SHOW

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Larry Gagosian's art galleries have become a real contemporary art phenomenon, with a brand new space yet to be opened next march in Hong Kong, reaching a total of 11 galleries belonging to the Gagosian system. What's the strategy behind such a huge success? Exibart gathered together with Serena Cattaneo Adorno, director of the Parisian branch, who also unveiled the secret of the so-called Go-Go school...



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Larry Gagosian started out his career as a manifests trader nearby UCLA city campus in Los Angeles. How was your first approach with the art world?

I started working explicitly with artists from the very beginning and I had the chance, at an incredibly early stag, to meet Anish Kapoor.

At that time he was working on the possibility of using Carrara marbles, which he never did before; I was aged eight years old by then: I went along with him to Carrara, where he picked a marble block in order to turn it into a work of art. I was instantly charmed by the very white essence typical of Carrara's village. It's then that I realised my inner nature: to be by the side of the artist and follow the related artistic project management.

Is it an assumption that Larry Gagosian would choose his entourage on the basis of the same eclecticism characterizing him next to solid market knowledge?

I believe there are various correspondences, in fact within Larry's team there are individuals coming from years of experience with museums and others, like melike myself, who come from a totally different perspective, which is determined by the relationship with the artist. I think he selects a great variety of people in order to cover all aspects involved in the good functioning of the galleries. Each one of us is specialised in a different art field. The advantage is that there are people coming from all backgrounds and all nationalities: Gagosian has always distinguished himself for his global art vision, along with the choice of the galleries, which eventually impacts exhibitions and human resources.

What kind of world do you come from?

I started out very young by collaborating directly with artists; I've worked in Gagosian's London branch for over eight years: I must admit to my advantage that I could always join forces with the best curators, the best writers, the best artists; what is extraordinary is that every detail involved in the setting up of an exhibition is of very high level. There's a striving for perfection that can also be mirrored in the combination of the spaces in which we operate. A lot of time and energy is invested in this direction.



What does this step forward mean to you?

It hasn't been a quick evolution. I've been working on the Parisian project for over two years, this plan obliged me to go back and forth quite a lot already from some time. Our London office is a real

establishment, made up of 30 people, existing on the market for more than 10 years. Here the situation is completely different, since we only opened last October (2010). London is still very interesting, nevertheless I have been examining the French market for a while now and I realised that it's experiencing a constructive moment. There is, in fact, a strong desire to apply projects of a high level. Just look at the exhibitions taking place in Versailles; they are not very easy to read nor are they automatic. A strong desire to turn Paris into the most advanced contemporary art centre is definitely in the air.

Is this the reason why you picked this very moment to jump on the Parisian art scene?

No. Rather, it's been a series of coincidences: at first we struggled in finding the right place, plus there was no one in loco. Paris is not a virgin territory; undoubtedly there are excellent galleries already.

What does the Go-Go School concept mean to convey?

This is a nickname that has been given to Gagosian on the basis of the speed of his services. It is a very fast structure, in Paris only we have exhibition cycles lasting for one month and a half. Our business mechanism is structured on an impulsive basis, whereas other galleries may be more cautious.

Your prestigious Parisian headquarters are located right across Christie's auction house. Why did you opt for your location to be in the Triangle d'Or instead of the Rive Gauche?

What is interesting in this neighbourhood is the series of art merchants present along the Avenue Matignon. They are real merchants, this kind of figure is completely lost in the London scene, these people have their clients who commission them artworks to find, they completely lack of an agenda of exhibition i.e. Instead, what we do is working on a method where the generic public is allowed to our exhibitions, which pieces will then be shown differently on a one to one basis to our clientele. Rive Gauche is not a location for us, since Saint Germain galleries are mainly specialised in design, that is a division we don't deal with: there is also the Marais, which galleries tend to focus

on contemporary art a lot, while we cover both a modern and a contemporary profile.

Lately the pop-up gallery concept has been popular. What is your idea about it?

We have done it a couple of times in Moscow. It is a device one should use in order to test a market. It's rather exciting, since there are many markets opening right now and it's worth doing a one-off, even if it comes with a high

price. Sometimes a pop-up show allows for an unknown artist to finally get into the galleries network.



What about collectors? Don't they want to get a physical grasp of the work they're about to purchase? What if they find out about the existence of an artist/artwork when the exhibition has already come to an end?

It depends, often artworks are carefully stored in out-of-town caveau, allowing the relationship to continue. There are different kinds of collectors, surely though the generation that was able to sell artworks through jpeg, somehow stopped due to the crisis. There are collectors in China or Japan who do not have the possibility to travel around; therefore they are obliged to give in to digital. There's a new art fair, called VIP Art Fair, to which we take part too, that is completely digital. But that is just the beginning.

What is the driving element in Larry Gagosian's galleries success?

One would need to build a theorem around it, mixing the global vision with the ability to manage ten independently successful galleries. I guess timing is key, it implies a merge of the following elements: showing the right exhibition with the right artist at the right time.

Gagosian is one of the few galleries managed by One Man Only.

written by eleonora galasso