

BEN LEWIS



London galleries to watch

Forget Tate Modern — if you want to find your way around the capital's booming arts scene, here's where to start

WITH no sign of the wobbles at recent modern and contemporary art auctions affecting the ambitions and accounts of private galleries, collectors and dealers, 2008 promises to be yet another boom year for London's art world.

My predictions for the year ahead include a big splash around the opening (finally) of Charles Saatchi's massive space in Chelsea, more hype around contemporary Indian art, greater international recognition for the new generation of serious artists exhibiting in younger east London galleries, a massive comeuppance for the auction houses and greedy collectors in the June auction round, and the invention of a new word to describe the modernist revival: "remodernism".

There's just one drawback — with so much going on, how do you pick what to do and who to follow? London's galleries come in four colours, or should one say, shades of white — public institution, private commercial gallery, not-for-profit artist-run space and the new private museum. Each kind of operation makes a different contribution to the jigsaw of art. It's impossible to remember the names of all the young artists popping up in group shows, so my advice is to copy the strategy of the collectors — pick a few galleries that you like and follow what they do all through the year. Here is my handy, somewhat idiosyncratic, occasionally arbitrary guide.

1. SPRUTH-MAGERS

With its 19th century carved wood and glass facade, Spruth-Magers gets my vote for the most beautiful gallery in London. This, the London outpost of Germany's leading blue-chip contemporary art gallery, has only been open in its present form for a year, and brings the rigour of German taste in international conceptual artists, photographers and new generation painters to London.

Forthcoming attractions are an exhibition by the legendary LED text-based artist Jenny Holzer, and the unnerving paintings and sculptures of Mike Kelley student Sterling Ruby. 7A Grafton Street, W1 (020 7408 1613, www.spruthmagers.com).

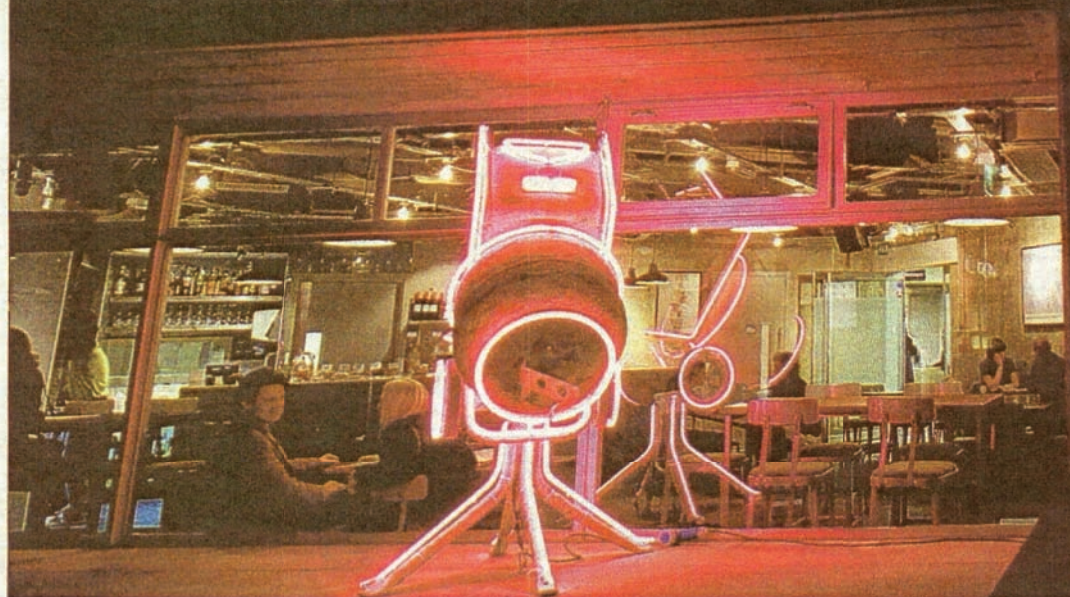
2. HERALD ST

It takes a mixture of bravery and impulsiveness to pick out one of the handful of private galleries which have opened in the East End in the past three years but Herald St, for me, has an imperceptible edge over Kate McGarry Store and Hotel. It strikes just the right balance between exuberance and earnestness.

Here is the full spectrum of contemporary art practice — the return of figuration (Djordje Ozbolt), investigative architectural fantasies (Pablo Bronstein), modernist nostalgia (Markus Amm), conceptual humour (Peter Coffin) and knitting (Alexandra Bircken).

3. HAYWARD GALLERY

The influence of new director Ralph Rugoff is finally beginning to show on the South Bank. First with the recent *Painting of Modern Life* exhibition, now with *Laughter in a Foreign Language* (opening at the end of January) and then with *Psycho Buildings*, opening in May.



the publicly funded Hayward is developing a new take on the group exhibition, combining accessible themes which relate directly to the world outside the gallery with a diversity of artists, many of whom are young, obscure or overlooked.

Laughter is a genuinely funny show about a new globalised set of artists who use humour in their work. In *Psycho Buildings*, a similarly international cast will become architects, making large structures for the gallery and its terraces. Southbank Centre, SE1 (0870 3800 4000, www.haywardgallery.org.uk).

4. SAATCHI GALLERY

At some point this year — probably in spring — Charles Saatchi will finally open his new gallery in the Duke of York's Building on King's Road. With 70,000 sq ft of exhibition space, it will be the largest non-government funded institution in London.

The first show will be dedicated to Chinese contemporary art, the latest "trend" in the ongoing art bubble, an area in which Saatchi has been collecting avidly with little regard for cost — he bought at least one work for



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\$1.5 million in 2006 (20 times more than the previous owner paid in 2003). This expansive survey will hopefully provide the answer to the question of whether the new Chinese artists have come up with anything original, or whether they have simply been applying well-worn pop and conceptual art strategies to their own cultures. Duke of York's, King's Road, SW3 (www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk).

5. PARASOL UNIT

This time around, Saatchi will not be the only collector in town to have his own private museum. Last year Anita Zabiudowicz opened 176 in north London and, following exhibitions in Marylebone last year, David Roberts is opening his own space in 2008.

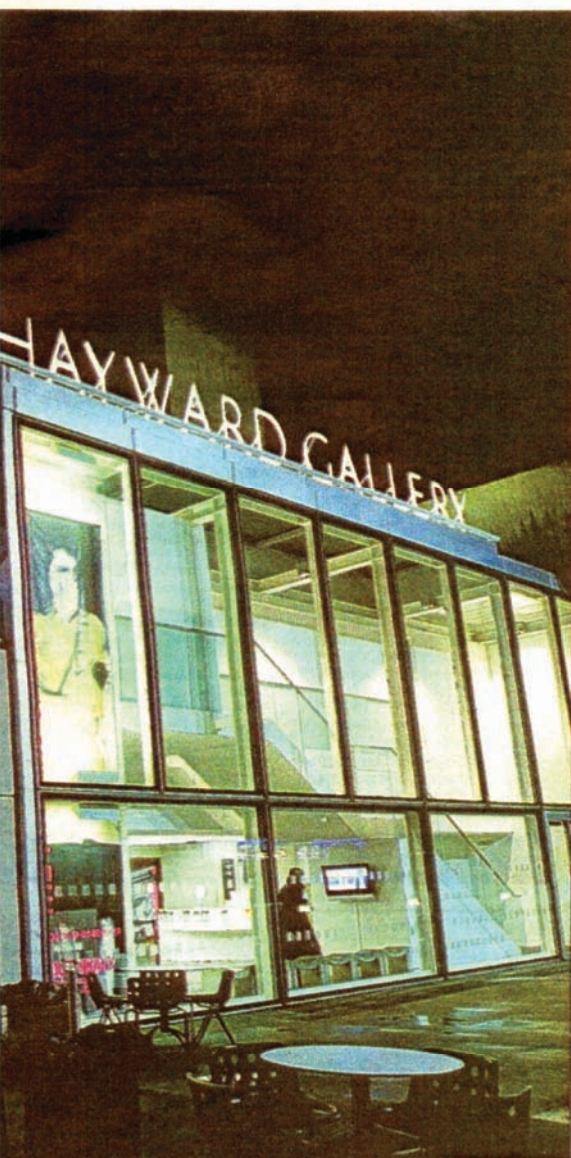
But the Parasol Unit is different. Here, wealthy Persian curator Ziba De Weck has set up her own space for temporary shows. It sounds like a disastrous vanity project but it isn't. The space is airy (if only the ICA looked this good), the installations are immaculate and the artists mostly well-chosen.

This year, one highlight will be an exhibition of work by Scottish painter and sculptor Charles Avery, which will, unusually, be transferring from this private museum to the National Gallery in Scotland.

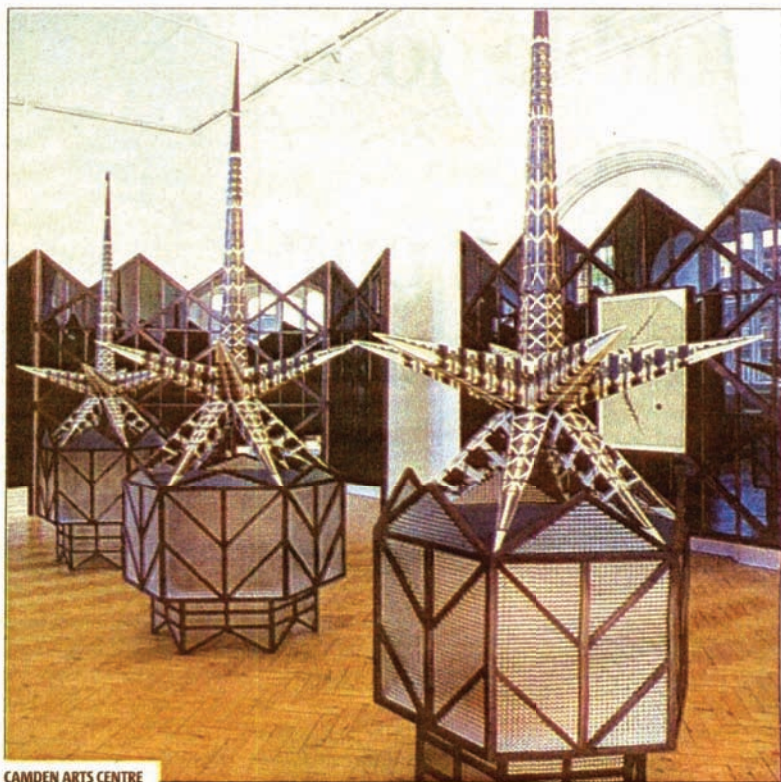
14 Wharf Road, N1 (020 7490 7373, www.parasol-unit.org).

6. RIFLEMAKER

Their gallery texts may be overwritten and the art they show is somewhat uneven but Riflemaker's virtues are ambition, zaniness and



HAYWARD GALLERY



CAMDEN ARTS CENTRE



RIFLEMAKER

glamour. Last year, they reinvented their gallery space over and over again.

First they became a gallery exhibiting a gallery, reviving the cult Sixties London art space, Indica; then they turned themselves into a living website, with an exhibition by internet pioneer John Maeda; then they became a novel, covering their walls and ceiling with text from Alisdair Gray.

And all this in an old wood-panelled Soho shop — though they recently opened a second space in another historic building on Soho Square.

Among the forthcoming highlights are an exhibition called Made By Slaves for Free People, on the theme of brands, from a pair of Madrid-based artists, Pablo San José and Cynthia Viera, and the first exhibition of works of art made of Aerogel — the material developed by Nasa and used by Mars probes to trap cosmic particles before they are brought back to earth for analysis — from the American artist Liliane Lijn.

79 Beak Street, W1 (020 7439 0000, www.riflemaker.org).



SPRUTH-MAGERS

7. PARADISE ROW

Since he used to write for the Evening Standard, this may seem another instance of the system of favours on which the art world runs, but Nick Hackworth's Paradise Row really has picked out a diverse selection of promising artists and put on some great shows — most notably Diane Bauer's epic, mannerist-constructivist Michelangelo-meets-Judge Dredd tableaux.

The gallery is also strong on international contemporary photographers such as the underrated Guillaume Paris, who have fallen somewhat foul of art world fashions in recent years. 17 Hereford Street, E2 (020 7613 3311, www.paradisierow.com).

8. CAMDEN ARTS CENTRE

The Camden Arts Centre, London's best public contemporary art space, pursues a policy of spotting international contemporary artists whose first institutional exhibition in this country is long overdue. As erudite as they are elegant, the CAC's shows make the exhibition programmes of other venues look absent-minded. Typically, from next

month, they will be staging the first major show in Britain of works by one of Germany's finest new-generation painters, Thomas Scheibitz. 15 Canfield Place, NW6 (020 7472 3500, www.camdenartscentre.org).

9. AICON GALLERY

Most pundits agree that the boom in Chinese contemporary art is being followed, with a time-lag of a couple of years, by India, embracing a broader timeframe of the whole post war period. The Aicon, operating in Gagosian's old Heddon Street address, is now on the slick frontline of the art market, thanks to its specialisation in this field.

It's no doubt in four or five years Saatchi and the Serpentine will be holding major exhibitions of modern and contemporary Indian art, but if you want to see the work now you will have to visit this dealer-orientated gallery, which has branches in New York and Palo Alto. As with the Chinese work, pieces of artistic genius are mingled with confections calculated to bewitch flush Western collectors.

8 Heddon Street, W1 (020 7734 7575, www.aicongallery.com).

10. SPACE STATION 65

When one enters the non-commercial precincts of Space Station 65, or other not-for-profit spaces in London such as I-cabin, Cubitt and Studio Voltaire, one can almost forget for a moment that a Francis Bacon now costs £20 million. Space Station 65 is an artist-run space in the depths of south London, best known for their annual fancy-dress pets' picnic.

They do a nice line in performance art pranks — offering last year, at various times, an Ideas Zoo and an artist who made himself available to move furniture around your home. But it's not just a joke: SS's artists have exhibited in London's public galleries, won prizes and been shown at biennales.

65 North Cross Road, SE22 (020 8693 5995, www.spacestation65.com).