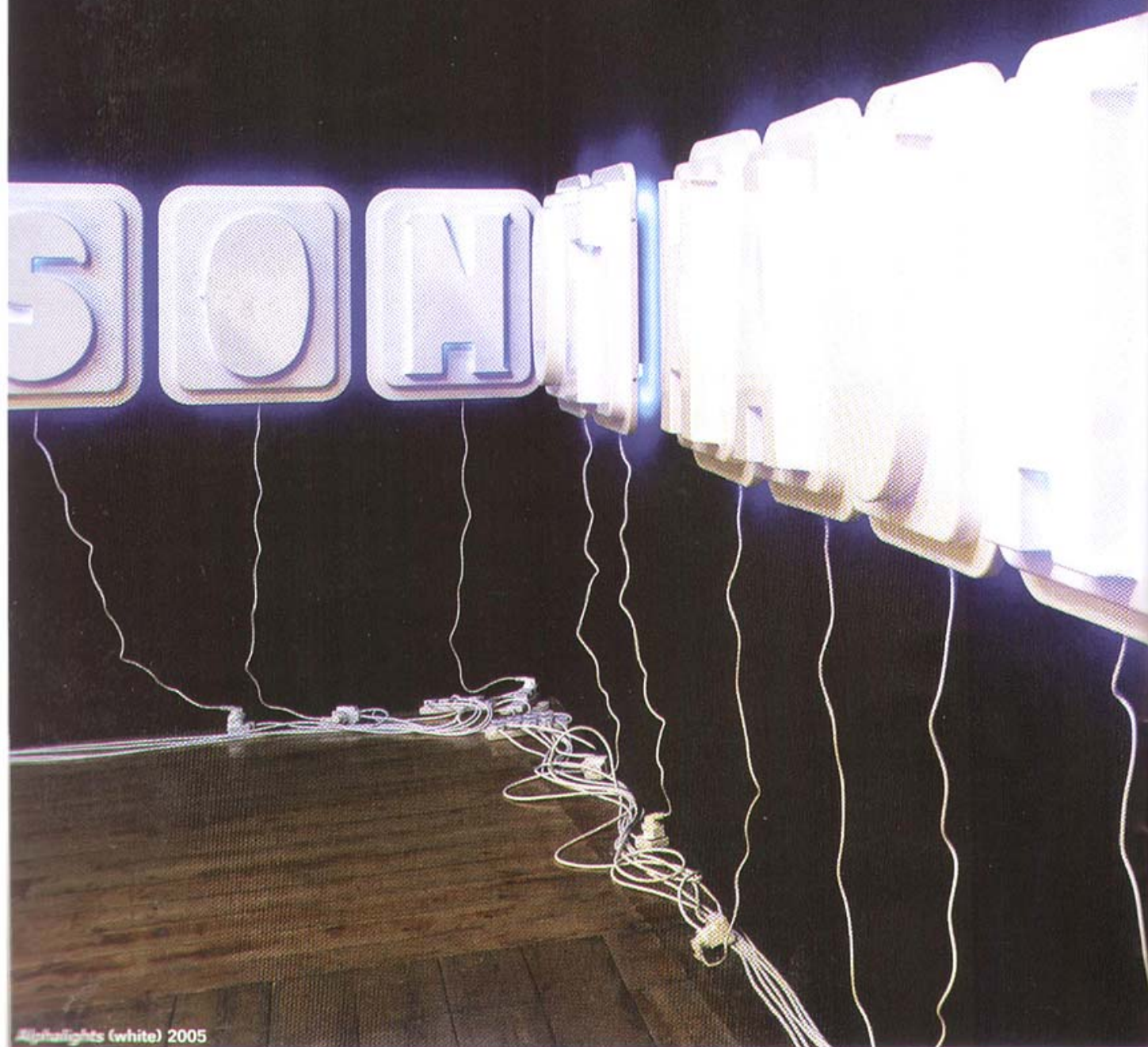


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After twenty years of hanging
in the hollow halls of Hoxton,
modern art is moving back to
Mayfair, says **Jennifer Sharp**

When London's contemporary art world sprang to prominence 20 years ago, young conceptual artists turned their backs on the West End and colonised deserted warehouses and light industrial premises in East London for their studios, project spaces and galleries. Hoxton, Shoreditch, Bermondsey and more recently Vyner Street in the outer reaches of Bethnal Green became home to all that is edgy; the heartland of super-cool.

But something has changed and a remarkable drift back into central London is taking place. New West End galleries showing challenging modern work have opened alongside grand old names synonymous with Old Masters and refined good taste. In Mayfair, where the Grosvenor House Art & Antiques Fair used to set the tone, you can buy subversive work more at home at Fricze and Zoo. North of Soho, once home to the city's garment district, large fashion showrooms make ideal galleries for dramatic modern pieces that need more space than elegant paintings in gold frames.

It's a simple recognition of market forces. Contemporary art is now mainstream and dealers want to be where the action is. Radical artists, especially the Young British Artists (YBAs) who caused such a stir in the 1990s, are now part of the Establishment, with Damien Hirst enjoying a worldwide reputation and global fortune, and wild child Tracey Emin turning into the "nation's sweetheart" and representing Britain at last year's Venice Biennale.

So who are the gallery owners making waves in the West End? Foremost is Jay Jopling at White Cube, probably the most astute operator in town with a stable of artists who regularly hit the headlines. Marc Quinn, Gary Hume, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Antony Gormley, Andreas Gursky and Gavin Turk, as well as Hirst, Emin and Jopling's wife, Sam Taylor-Wood are on an impressive roster of talent. The original White Cube opened in 1993 and occupied a tiny space on the second floor of a building in Duke Street, St James's, in the heart of traditional art dealer land. Its influence was out of all proportion to its size and in 2000, Jopling moved to the East End, to a huge new gallery in Hoxton Square with 185sq m of exhibition space created from a 1920s abandoned industrial site. September 2006 saw the triumphant return of White Cube to St James's, not far from the original site. The new premises are vast with 465sq m of space in a bold, modern building on what had been an electricity sub-station. Jopling is an elegant Old Etonian, effortlessly smoothing the path between artists and



buyers with lavish parties (at the Ritz hotel for Frieze last autumn) and a slick PR machine. To be on the White Cube inner track means you have arrived as a collector.

The Haunch of Venison gallery opened in 2002 in a quiet mews in Mayfair and has consistently impressed with a programme of exhibitions that raised the stakes in the art world. The gallery specialises in demanding, thought-provoking work from established artists and newcomers and has built up a core clientele of serious collectors – both private and institutional. Artists include Bill Viola, whose huge and beautiful video installations for The Tristan Project mesmerised London last summer, as well as Richard Long and Keith Tyson. Younger names include Nathan Coley and Zarina Bhimji, both of whom were shortlisted for the 2007 Turner Prize, and Leicester-born newcomer Jamie Shovlin whose paintings, video and sculpture capture the fading of the American Dream. Haunch of Venison opened in Zurich in 2005, Berlin in 2007, and in autumn this year, the first American arm of the gallery opens on the 20th and 21st floors of the Rockefeller Centre in New York.

The high-profile Hauser & Wirth gallery has exhibition spaces in New York, Switzerland and the flagship London base which opened in 2003. It has recently been voted the second most important gallery in the world by *Flash Art* magazine, losing out only to its US business partner Zwirner & Wirth. Owner and co-president Irwin Wirth opened his first gallery when he was just sixteen and the first Hauser & Wirth in Zurich in 1991. Today, he is frequently cited as one of the most powerful peo-

ple in the contemporary art world, always at the forefront of trends and identifying new talent. There's something agreeably informal and relaxed about the Piccadilly gallery where students rub shoulders with grandees, and art installations (such as Roman Signer) aren't afraid to inspire amusement as well as amazement. In 2006, H&W formed a partnership with the UK's leading Old Master dealer, Colnaghi, at their Old Bond Street gallery. These premises are used to show major 20th-century and contemporary work, and this summer (11th May-9th June) will stage a fascinating exhibition, *Old School*, featuring contemporary artists alongside iconic painters François Boucher, Jan Brueghel (Elder and Younger) and Lucas Cranach.

Larry Gagosian arrived in London with a bang in 2004, bringing his own brash magic to the well-mannered art scene. The Armenian-American dealer made his name buying on behalf of big-name collectors like David Geffen, Charles Saatchi and SI Newhouse Jr, and the important artists now represented by Gagosian Gallery (including Richard Serra, Jeff Koons and Ed Ruscha) read like a Who's Who of the art world. There are three galleries in New York, one in Beverly Hills, one in Rome and two in London. The main gallery here is a huge space, 1,400sq m, near Kings Cross, ideal for monumental work that would dwarf a normal gallery.

There is also a tiny 'boutique' showroom in Mayfair, useful for displaying smaller pieces or eye-catching works that act as a teaser to a main exhibition, such as Ruscha's series of neat drawings *Busted Glass*, or Tim Noble and Sue Webster's *Sacrificial Heart*, a large rotating sculpture of a bleeding heart pierced with a sword and studded with hundreds of flashing coloured lights. It mixes up the imagery of Christianity with rock'n'roll, romance, pain, the vulgarity of the fairground. The Gagosian

Schmerzemann
by Berlinde de Bruyckere



machine recognises the opportunities London can offer to people. 'As an international city, it's second to none,' says Stefan Ratibor, co-director of the gallery. 'Collectors come here, museum directors come here – there are people here to meet.'

The hottest story in art circles right now is that Stuart Shave/Modern Art is moving out of Vyner Street and into the West End. Since 1998, British-born Shave has been an influential (though self-effacing) figure on the contemporary art scene and his move to W1 signals a major shift of emphasis. The new premises, in what was a fashion showroom, have been transformed by architect David Kohn into a chic 600sq m gallery with double the previous exhibition capacity, offices and a dynamic space to realise large-scale experimental projects. The new gallery opens April 28th with an inaugural show by painter Nigel Cooke, *New Accursed Art Club*.

The Aicon Gallery is one of very few London galleries to specialise in contemporary art from India and Pakistan. It is part of the American company established in 2002 by two New Delhi-born brothers, Prajit and Projjal Dutta, both now US-based academics. The original aim was simply new Indian art online but the dotcom venture expanded into galleries in New York, Palo Alto (in California's Silicon Valley), and the London gallery which opened in March 2007. Modern Indian art is the next big thing for collectors, westerners, as well as NRIs (non-resident Indians). The gallery champions the new generation of painters and sculptors, including Riyas Komu, Ashim Purkayastha, Adip Dutta, Bose Krishnamachari and the Raqs Media Collective.

The established names in the art world aren't deterred by these newcomers. The venerable Fine Art Society, founded in 1876, launched its own modern movement in 2005, FAS Contemporary Art, in its lower floor New Gallery. FAS holds regular exhibitions of daring work by artists such as Gavin Turk, Alastair Mackie, Keith Coventry and the bizarre multi-media creations of Jonathan Baldock.

Marlborough Fine Art is still going strong since opening in 1946. The gallery deals in painting, drawings, prints and sculpture by well-known international artists including Lucien Freud, RB Kitaj, Victor Pasmore, Stephen Conroy, Euan Uglow, Dale Chihuly, Paula Rego and Fernando Botero. Marlborough also stages six to eight exhibitions each year.

Few galleries have had such a profound effect on the modern art market as Flowers, established nearly 40 years ago when the British had neither the money nor the inclination to invest in living artists. From a tiny room in Soho, Angela Flowers began exhibiting paintings, sculptures, drawings and perform-

ance art from undiscovered talent, and she launched the gallery tradition of group shows. Gradually the press and the public learned to respect – and buy – modern work. The company grew and is now run by son Matthew Flowers while Angela remains chairman. The main headquarters is Flowers East, and in the West End, Flowers Central opened in October 2000, with the same mission, to make modern art exciting and accessible.

In the face of dizzying activity in the art world, auction houses Sotheby's and Christie's raised their game with high-profile viewings, slick new galleries, specially curated exhibitions of contemporary art and road-show previews of big sales. Major New York sales of contemporary art preview in London, especially during the fabulous annual Frieze Art Fair, and there is a host of must-get-a-ticket social events such as Sunday brunch and bellinis for buyers who can't leave their desks during the working week.

THE GALLERIES

White Cube, 25-26 Mason's Yard, off Duke Street, St James, SW1 (+44 20 7930 5373) www.whitecube.com

Haunch of Venison, 6 Haunch of Venison Yard, off Brook Street, W1 (+44 20 7495 5050) www.haunchofvenison.com

Hauser & Wirth, 196a Piccadilly, London W1 (+44 20 7287 2300) 15 Old Bond Street, W1 (+44 20 7399 9770) www.ghw.ch

Gagosian Gallery, 6-24 Britannia Street, WC1 (+44 20 7841 8860) 17-19 Davies Street, W1 (+44 20 7493 3020)

Stuart Shave/Modern Art, 23-25 Eastcastle Street, W1 (+44 20 8980 7742) www.stuartshavemodernart.com

Aicon Gallery, 8 Heddon Street, W1 (+44 20 7734 7575) www.aicongallery.com

Fine Art Society, 148 New Bond Street, W1 (+44 20 7629 5116) www.faslondon.com

Marlborough Fine Art, 6 Albemarle Street W1 (+44 20 7629 5161) www.marlboroughfineart.com

Timothy Taylor, 15 Carlos Place, W1 (+44 20 7409 3344) www.timothytaylorgallery.com

Flowers, 21 Cork Street W1 (+44 20 7439 7766) www.flowerseast.com

Max Wigram, 99 New Bond Street, W1 (+44 20 7495 4960) www.maxwigram.com

Simon Lee Gallery, 12 Berkeley Street, W1 (+44 20 7491 0100) www.simonleegallery.com

Alexandre Pollazzon, 11 Howland Street, W1 (+44 20 7436 9824) www.alex-pollazzon.com

The Gallery at Sketch, 9 Conduit Street, W1 (0870 777 4488) www.sketch.uk.com

Scream, 34 Bruton Street, W1, (+44 20 7493 7388) www.screamlondon.com

COURTESY OF HAUSER & WIRTH ZÜRICH LONDON / PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIRIAM DEVERNOT