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Stromberg, Matt. “Why Galleries Are Setting Up Shop in Both New York and L.A.”  
*Artsy*, March 30, 2022.



*Exterior of Tanya Bonakdar's Los Angeles location. Courtesy of Tanya Bonakdar.*

In spring 2017, the influential art dealer and patron Virginia Dwan was on stage at the [Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#) to discuss her career in conjunction with the exhibition “Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery, 1959–1971.” She pointed to a slide of a yellowed sheet of paper bearing 12 names, titled “Dwan Gallery Collectors—April 17, 1965,” remarking that she had to compete with the legendary Ferus Gallery over these 12 L.A.-based buyers. “There weren’t enough collectors to go around. It’s part of the reason I moved to New York,” she recalled.

A lot has changed since the ’60s, as Los Angeles has emerged as a vital art center in its own right, with enough buyers to support a robust cultural ecosystem of galleries and institutions. Galleries in Los Angeles are now opening New York branches—not to relocate, but to expand—and galleries from New York and Europe are putting down roots in the City of Angels. Half a dozen are slated to open their doors in L.A. this year alone, including [Lisson](#), [Pace](#) (in a merger with [Kayne Griffin](#)), [David Zwirner](#), and [The Hole](#), the last of which debuted an 8,000-square-foot space on La Brea Avenue last month. Looking beyond now-clichéd notions of East Coast–West Coast rivalries, dealers are focusing on how the unique characteristics of each city can be leveraged to expand their influence.

The most obvious distinction between the two cities is quantity. A glance at [Artsy’s gallery database](#) lists 192 galleries in L.A. compared to 515 in New York, while *ARTnews*’s 2021 list of the top 200 collectors has about 17 in the L.A.

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area and 47 in New York (with some overlap for bicoastal jetsetters like Steve Tisch and Beth Rudin DeWoody). The collector base in New York goes back a century or more, while L.A. has a much younger community of collectors, fueled recently by the growth of the Westside tech hub known as Silicon Beach.



Adam Parker Smith  
*Narcissist (Blue Tourmaline)*, 2021  
The Hole  
Sold



Kevin Christy  
*Love*, 2022  
The Hole  
Sold

“There is nothing like New York in the world. The amount of culture being produced and consumed is astonishing,” said gallerist [François Ghebaly](#), who opened an outpost on the Lower East Side last year, more than a decade after founding his L.A. space in 2008.

Density is also a huge difference. Gallery clusters like Chelsea and the Lower East Side bring together dozens of galleries in the space of a few blocks in Manhattan. In decentralized Los Angeles, the car remains king with limited offerings in neighborhoods as far flung as Venice, MacArthur Park, and Lincoln Heights.

L.A.’s sprawling, fragmented quality suits [Sean Kelly](#), who will be opening a 10,000-square-foot Hollywood space later this year. “We’ve never wanted to be on 23rd Street with 10 other galleries around us,” said Kelly, whose New York location sits on the border of the Garment District and Hudson Yards. “We want to be slightly off the grid. We’re a destination gallery. If you make the effort to come to us, you’ll be rewarded.”

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*Alec Soth, installation view of "A Pound of Pictures" at Sean Kelly, 2022. Photo by Cooper Dodds. Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York.*

That decentralization also means that galleries aren't forced to compete as strenuously over real estate, and getting more square footage for less money is a major attraction. "New York is a very densely packed, vertical city. It has become extremely difficult to find space that's reasonable," said Allegra LaViola of Lower East Side mainstay [Sargent's Daughters](#), who cites L.A.'s affordability and space as reasons she's opening a branch—which will be split with the gallery's New York neighbor Shrine—in Melrose Hill later this year.

Dealers have also mentioned the need to be closer to their artists—and collectors—as one reason for expanding, as well as the desire to introduce their artists to a new scene, giving talent from one coast their first show on the other, for example. And in terms of sales, L.A. is closer to younger, emerging contemporary art and financial markets in Asia and Latin America, while New York has stronger ties to Europe.

When asked whether he was expanding to New York to be closer to artists or collectors, L.A.-based dealer [David Kordansky](#), who will open a Manhattan outpost in May, wrote in an email: "Yes, to be closer to artists, to collectors, to writers, to institutions, to new audiences...to bring art closer to everyone. Technology has helped make art more popular and accessible, more mainstream as culture, but art needs to be sensed and felt in the round, in space, and in person."

And though galleries are at their core financial operations, some gallerists mentioned a less commercial motive for opening new locations, one based around a sense of community. Joe Amrhein, who founded [Pierogi](#) in Brooklyn's Williamsburg neighborhood in 1994, looks at the ground level for the vitality of an art scene. "The best barometer is whether younger galleries are opening," he

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said. “In a city, galleries mean there’s a community...Community is the engine that drives it all.”

LaViola of Sargent’s Daughters said that sharing the Melrose Hill location with other galleries like Moran Moran and David Zwirner was a selling point. “As a relative newcomer to L.A., it’s nice to be in conversation with other galleries,” she said. “I wouldn’t have opened up in L.A. in an area where there’s nothing else.”



Carole Harris  
*Seeking A Place to Land, 2021*  
Sargent's Daughters  
US\$11,000

Gallerist [Tanya Bonakdar](#) echoed LaViola’s sentiment. “When we first opened, we heard again and again the refrain that you couldn’t just drop into L.A. and expect that the local community would immediately embrace you; that you needed to put in the time and become a part of the local community,” wrote Bonakdar in an email to Artsy. “We took this to heart.” When she opened her Hollywood branch in 2018, Bonakdar hired veteran local art professional Lia Trinko-Browner as managing director.

Amid this influx of new galleries, is L.A. poised to take New York’s mantle as center of the American art world? Dealers have their doubts.

“The idea of a dominant center is an outmoded perception,” wrote Kordansky. “New York has density, but there are, and have been, epicenters, historic narratives, and deep artistic forces emerging all over, and in Southern California especially.”

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As Kelly quipped, “Since 1985, everyone’s said that L.A. is the next big thing. Every time you’re told something’s the next big thing, it never is. But it *can* be a new center. Over the last decade, a nexus of artists have landed there, and L.A. has matured enormously as a community. As the world has shrunk, L.A. has become more distinct. New York is clearly not under threat. It’s the premier market in the world. That doesn’t mean there can’t be other really important centers.”