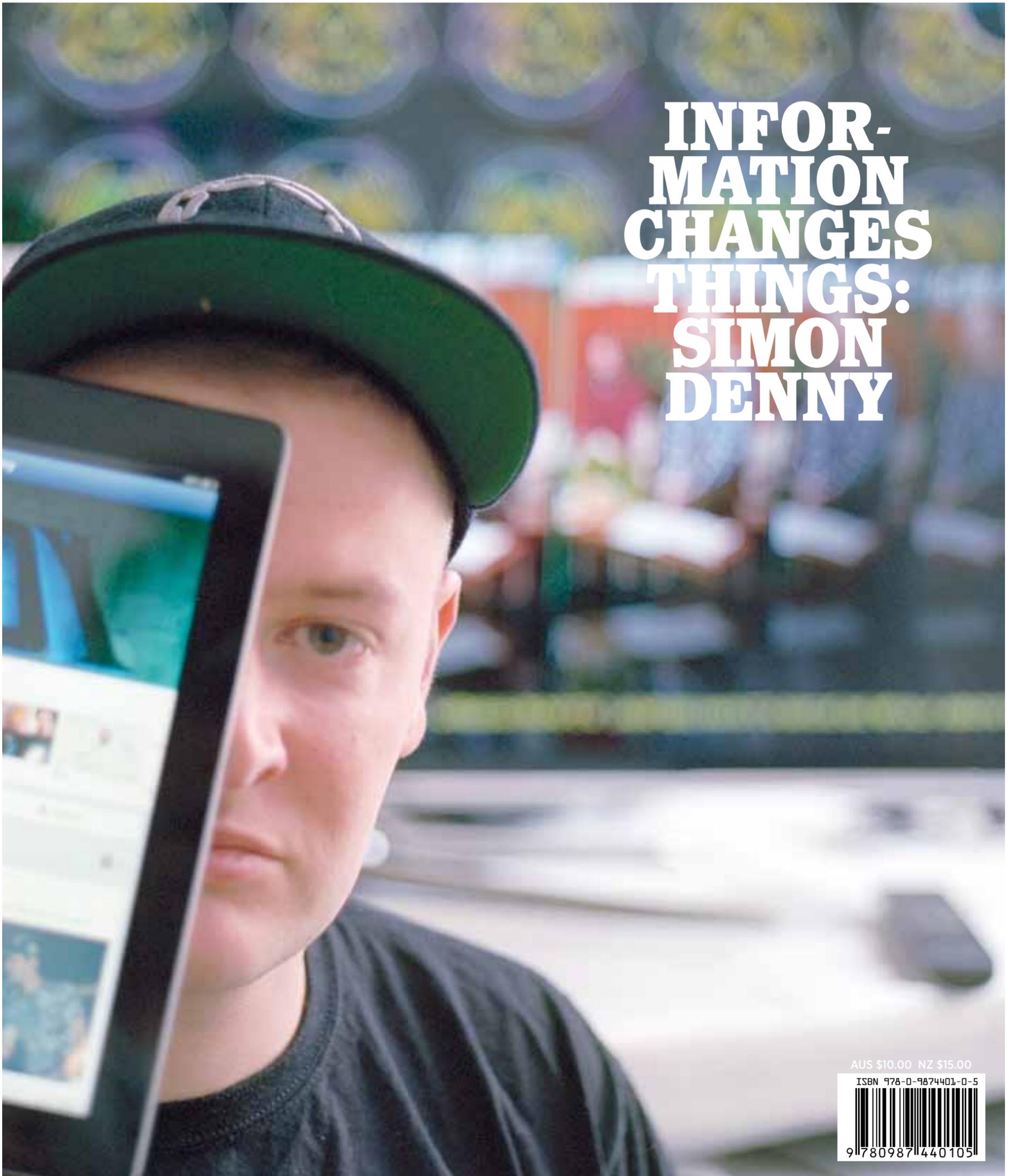


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In this time of economic uncertainty, contemporary art is working harder than ever to stay fresh, focused and relevant. Young galleries are constantly on the move; maintaining a thriving space means keeping up with your collector base, being strategic about which art fairs you participate in and not selling out, literally!

I spoke to four prominent young galleries from Turkey, Japan, Germany and the USA on the eve of Frieze art fair week in London, possibly the most anticipated event of the year for gallery goers, collectors, curators and artists alike.

Each of these four galleries take an international approach to dealing – exhibiting at art fairs, including artists from varied generations as part of their gallery roster and maintaining an engagement with global developments and museum trends.

I asked what led them to open up in the first place and what the future holds for their respective programs and their artists, especially as an increasing number of galleries are closing their spaces and opting for further presence online and at art fairs.

What they all share is determination, a strong work ethic and desire to match the ambitions of their artists. Perhaps what is most assuring, in an environment which is moving towards nomadic pop up shows and 'online exhibitions', is their commitment to the traditional gallery space as a hub for both public and private interests.



Clockwise from top left: Claudia Altman, Sylvia Kouvali, Atsuko Ninagawa, Jenny Chert

FOUR GREAT WOMEN & A MANICURE

By Geoff Newton

JENNY CHERT, GERMANY

Italian born gallerist Jenny Chert is the co director and owner of Chert, a lively gallery in Kreuzberg, Berlin, which backs onto a chic bookshop and publishing company, Motto books, run by her partner Alexis Zavaloff. Her roster of 11 artists consists of practitioners from Germany, Italy, UK, Mexico, Switzerland and the Netherlands, including a schedule of international talent (Sydney artist John Spiteri presented new works in 2011).

Once a mechanics workshop, the gallery is a curious space split over two levels, a sense of which Chert has maintained – namely the tiles lining the walls of the upper space, and the hole in the floor. This aspect constitutes a key role in the intention of the gallery, as most artists are invited to realise their projects in situ.

Before opening her own gallery Chert worked for Zero gallery in Milan for three years, then moved to Berlin and worked with Johann Koenig for two years. When asked what motivated her to open her own space she says, "I started (Chert) in September 2008. I guess this is somehow what I wanted to do, and what I thought I knew how to do given the experience... but I guess you never really learn before doing it completely by yourself."

The gallery has participated in a number of art fairs and international projects over the past four years, including Artissima Turin, Frieze London, Liste in Basel and Art Basel, ABC Berlin, Art Forum, Art Cologne, Villa Tokyo and Arteba Buenos Aires.

Chert believes art fairs play an important role in raising the profile of her artists. She says, "I guess the program of the gallery needs to travel. We represent 11 very young artists, most of them are born in the eighties, we need to make the public aware of their research and the exhibitions in the gallery are unfortunately not enough for this. Also, we need to build a market request for their works."

After Frieze, Chert will participate in Artissima later this year. Among Chert's other upcoming projects & group shows, Petrit Halilaj will have solo exhibitions at Wiels in Brussels and at Museum Fridericianum in Kassel. Jérémie Gindre is preparing a solo exhibition for Fri-Art in Fribourg and a project related to the anniversary of Mamco in Geneva. Andrea Kvas will exhibit at Museo Marino Marini in Florence and Vanessa Safavi recently exhibited at Kunsthalle Basel (still on view until April 2013), CRAC in Alsace and other institutions in Switzerland and France.

Chert is concentrating on establishing the reputations of her young stable of artists and is very happy with the level of interest the gallery's program continues to attract. "Everyday we have people contacting us asking more questions and getting closer to the artists practice. It is all growing little by little and in a stable way. I still feel we are building our bases, the gallery is not a fast shooting star and I would not like that to happen."

She is philosophical about the current environment but remains positive about the gallery's ability to sustain itself and succeed in a tough market. "At the end of the day I believe what matters more is a constant and serious commitment, both from the gallery and the artist's side. It takes maybe a bit longer than some years ago, but good things are still happening!"

CLAUDIA ALTMAN – SIEGEL, USA

San Francisco based Altman – Siegel represents some of the most exciting American artists exhibiting today, including Trevor Paglen, who recently installed a series of photographs on a communications satellite that will orbit the earth for billions of years, the first time an artist has put something in space. At the time of writing, gallery artists are preparing for museum shows in Shanghai, Moscow, Daegu, Utrecht, Rome, Liverpool and Lisbon.

The 38-year-old opened her eponymous gallery in 2009 with the group show "A Wild Party and a New Road" which included work by young stars such as New York painters Josh Smith and Kelley Walker, as well as the veteran Christopher Wool, with whom she worked at Lühring Augustine.

Like Jenny Chert, Claudia Altman – Siegel began her career working in established commercial galleries, "I formerly worked at Lühring Augustine in New York. I started as a security guard and within two years was a director, then shortly after became the senior director. I worked there for ten years. At the end of 2007 I moved to San Francisco because I was ready to leave Lühring Augustine and was looking for a more creative environment. I felt that New York had become very corporate and sales oriented, more about auction results and less about artists. I think that has changed a bit since the recession, but at the time, the art market was booming, and everyone was obsessed with money."

It was this move that prompted Altman – Siegel to open her own space, "I am not from San Francisco, and knew very little about it before I got here, but when I arrived, I felt that there was a lot of possibility since there are very good artists, collectors and museums, but very few galleries working at an international level with young international artists. After doing some research I started to put together the program, and then finally opened the space in January 2009. The gallery now represents 13 artists. The first artist I officially started working with was Trevor Paglen who lived in Berkeley and had just finished his PhD. We met shortly after I moved to San Francisco and I had been really impressed with an earlier show of his I saw in New York. He had a show scheduled at SFMOMA in a couple of months, so I ended up sending them loan forms from my living room because my space wasn't done yet. I approached Matt Keegan and Sara VanDerBeek next and they were both very enthusiastic about working together because we had been friends for so long already. Once I had the opportunity to work with them on my own terms I jumped at the chance".

Art fairs are an important part of Altman – Seigel's strategy in connecting her artists to a receptive audience. "So far we have done both Frieze London and New York, last year we did NADA in Miami, and this year we did Liste in Basel and we are doing Art Basel Miami Beach for the first time. I think these fairs have very prestigious reputations and will open doors for the gallery".

"Reputation is everything in this business, in a way like fashion, so it's really important to choose the right context for the gallery", says Altman – Seigel. "We show rigorous conceptual work that needs the right audience to appreciate it, so I try to choose fairs that understand what we are doing and encourage this kind of thinking, both from us and the other participants in the fair. We are getting ready for Frieze London next week, and will do Positions at Art Basel Miami Beach in December."

Altman – Seigel has no intention of shifting the gallery's focus entirely on art fairs. "It's important to the artists to have a nice space to work with, to show their works and get some critical feedback. I don't think you can attract good artists without a nice space", she says. "Having a space is a serious financial burden, but I am not sure you can become a serious dealer with artists whose work appreciates without this component. Also I like presenting shows to the public. There is a certain amount of altruism that I seem to stubbornly cling to."

SYLVIA KOUVALI, TURKEY

Greek national Sylvia Kouvali studied art history before establishing the young gallery Rodeo in Istanbul. Like a lot of curator lead galleries, Rodeo was born out of the need for a commercial space which represented artists of its own generation and had a level of ambition which matched its international counters.

The gallery opened in September 2007 with a group show spanning four floors, with the likes of regular Biennale favourite Ahmet Öğüt covering the ground floor with hot asphalt. It 'officially' opened on the second floor of the same premises in January of 2008.

Kouvali began representing artists from Turkey, Greece and Cyprus before moving into a more established international flavour (at the time of writing Rodeo will participate at Sunday, London with two English artists, the mid career installation artist Mark Ariel Waller and young counterpart Ian Law, who works across a variety of media). She now represents 13 artists. To date, Rodeo has participated in art fairs such as Independent, New York, Arco, Madrid, FIAC, Paris and Frieze London and New York.

Originally housed in Tohpane, a district formerly known for tobacco and butchers shops, a now gentrified part of Istanbul, the gallery relocated in September this year to a larger premises in Taksim, in the centre of town.

Kouvali says, "When I opened Rodeo, there were no truly international galleries in Istanbul; the concept was exotic. There were art centers and museums and private collections, but Rodeo was the first individual effort to show and sell work by Turkish and non-Turkish artists."

Asked if the steady closure of galleries worldwide has made 30 year old Kouvali consider having a stronger online presence she says, "I think whatever the global economical situation is, e-shopping, virtual art fairs, (etc) doing exhibitions is the most important thing and should not change. One may generate profit in whatever ways but the money should go back in the space and do great things in ones' space. (Right now) we have a new great space and a gorgeous garden to fill with ideas."

ATSUKO NINAGAWA, JAPAN

At 34, Atsuko Ninagawa is well placed to join the recent line up of Art Basel Hong Kong's Discoveries selection committee. She worked as an independent curator in New York, establishing herself on both sides of the world before opening globetrotting Take Ninagawa gallery in 2008. The gallery represents mostly Japanese artists of varied generations but punctuates the calendar with international artists. Shinro Ohtake participated in this year's dOCUMENTA13 with a major commission in the Karslaue Park. Ninagawa has also just started working with Tsuruko Yamazaki, one of the founding members of the postwar Gutai group of experimental artists, adding to the stable of 13.

"In 2008 I opened Take Ninagawa in Azabu district in Tokyo to help build up the market for contemporary art in Japan. I work mainly with emerging artists but from the start I also felt it was important to have a bridge across different generations that have influenced each other", says Ninagawa.

She studied art history and theory at Kyoto University of Arts and Design and also studied art administration for non-profit organizations at an independent school established by Kazuko Koike who was the director of Sagacho Exhibit Space (an alternative space in Tokyo which was active in the '80s and '90s).

The gallery participates in a number of art fairs including Frieze London/New York (she likes "the fair's curatorial aesthetic") FIAC and Art Basel Hong Kong. Ninagawa also admires French collectors. "From them I can feel the deep-rooted respect for the arts in French culture". Of Art Basel Hong Kong she says it is, "more than just a fair" but has also become "the place for international exchange in Asia".

Ninagawa is also committed to preserving a physical space for her gallery, "Personally, I feel that physicality is one of the most important factors for experiencing art. I have a decent space (not big), but I feel that without being overly concerned with selling, this allows me to focus on creating a site for experimentation. In Japan, where there are no real kunsthalle-type, curatorial driven institutions, if galleries can function as a space for artistic practice, then they can provide a foundation for historical development. I feel it is really important for us to create an original set of values in dialogue with local specifics, and not solely depending on an 'international standard'. So I think there are many different models already in practice around the world, with many different possible futures."