

Below: Gallerist Meredith Rosen with Guillaume Bijl's *Matratzenraum* (mattress dream) installation in Art Basel's Unlimited section in 2023

New York's Meredith Rosen makes waves across the Atlantic

The dealer's discovery-driven programme, which embraces both contemporary and unsung 20th-century artists, is finding outsize success in Europe. By Osman Can Yerebakan



Place your bets: Meredith Rosen Gallery's stand at Art Basel in Miami Beach in 2022 offered fair visitors a different kind of deal with a restaging of the Belgian artist Guillaume Bijl's interactive casino installation of 1984

What does a former psychiatrist's office in the basement of an Upper East Side townhouse have in common with a parlour level unit in a pre-war brownstone with leopard-print-carpeted hallways two blocks south? Both spaces house Meredith Rosen Gallery's eclectic programme, which unites some of the world's most cutting-edge contemporary names with some of Europe's most under-acknowledged 20th-century artists – and is finding outsize success across the Atlantic despite its firm New York roots.

This month, Anna Jermolaewa, a 54-year-old Vienna-based video artist who shows with the gallery, debuts her work for the Austrian pavilion at the Venice Biennale; titled *Swan Lake*, it processes the traumas of war and oppression through

Jermolaewa's memories of watching Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* against the social turbulence of her childhood in Soviet Russia. Two of Rosen's other artists wrap up solo shows at European institutions this month: Anna Uddenberg, a Berlin-based Swedish sculptor, at Germany's Kunsthalle Mannheim (until 21 April), and Tobias Spichtig, a Swiss painter of elongated, gothic figures, at Kunsthalle Basel (until 28 April).

Meredith Rosen devoted solo shows to all three artists last year. The presentations were the first ever in New York for Jermolaewa and Uddenberg, whose three sculptures inspired by plane seats and dentist chairs created a social media stir after their use in a performance piece premised on obedience. Spichtig, meanwhile, had not shown in New York in a decade.

The pillars of Rosen's intergenerational arch are debuts and reintroductions. Both rely on her trusting her "instinct in recognising unvetted talent". She not only acknowledges the risk inherent in this process but sees it as a prerequisite to worthwhile discovery: "I often say, 'If I'm not scared, it's not interesting enough.'"

From past to present and back again

Rosen founded her eponymous venture in a large 34th Street storefront in early 2018 with a solo exhibition by Jennifer Rubell, in which the artist allowed eight visitors per night to smash a whipped-cream pie onto her face. After three shows there and a three-person display featuring Rindon Johnson, Suzanne McClelland and Iiu Susiraja inside an unassuming Times Square space, Rosen inaugurated her current East 80th Street location (the psychiatrist's office) in the summer of 2019 by giving the Minimalist-inspired artist John Drue S. Worrell his first one-person gallery exhibition.

Three years later, she expanded to the 78th Street space with Chino Amobi's debut solo show in New York. Along the way, Rosen has given rising talents like Mosie Romney, Theo Triantafyllidis and Susan Chen their breakthrough exhibitions while also acquainting New York audiences with the work of late Europeans such as the Swiss designer Karl Gerstner and the Swiss painter Rudolf Maeglin. The result has been a complementary mix of young artists who produce subversive work on 21st-century Western identity and 20th-century continental figures whose contributions have been underappreciated stateside.

Counterintuitively, the latter group has provided as many provocative moments for the gallery as the former. In 2021, Guillaume Bijl, a 78-year-old Belgian conceptualist, turned the gallery into a fortune teller's studio for his first New York solo show in three decades. At last year's Art Basel in Miami Beach, amid stands aiming to serve the market the next big thing, Rosen dedicated her presentation to homoerotically charged paintings of factory workers by Maeglin, who died more than 50 years ago. The stark canvases depicting men with deadpan expressions and robotic bodies on ruby-washed stand walls garnered interest from institutions and private collectors alike.

"Re-examining the work of an overlooked [but] historically significant artist is surprisingly similar to discovering a new emerging artist," Rosen says about her multigenerational eye. "The fixed temporal boundaries that used to exist are more fluid now."

Experiments large and small

The dealer has also bucked convention by repeatedly using Art Basel's events as an opportunity to test the waters rather than fixate on immediate sellability. In 2022, the gallery made its fair debut in Miami Beach with a restaging of Bijl's 1984 interactive casino installation, where fairgoers rolled the dice and shuffled the decks (though only chips, not cash, were at stake). Last year in Basel, Rosen collaborated with Galerie Nagel Draxler to re-enact another of the artist's crowd-pleasers, *Matratzenraum* (mattress dream, 2003), which appropriates the trappings of a generic mattress store, including a cutout of a welcoming saleswoman.

"It's thrilling to be an American gallery



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Meredith Rosen, gallery founder

presenting this work to the world's most knowledgeable, committed collectors," Rosen says of her participation in Art Basel. This June, she will bring to the Swiss fair's Feature section a group of moody paintings created between 1930 and 1955 by the late Irène Zurkinden (1909-87). According to the dealer, "the works examine the Swiss artist's role as a significant precursor to generations of feminist artists, cementing her legacy as a hero in her hometown of Basel".

Rosen believes that by jumping between centuries, her programme energises the audience's attention and broadens the gallery's collector profile. "At times we present solo exhibitions by an estate and a contemporary artist simultaneously," she says. "This breadth allows the viewer to take a critical look at both the past and the present, to enter the dialogue, to play."

The dealer maintains an austere, nearly off-the-radar profile compared with many of her peers, but Instagram is where Rosen lets loose. Between posts championing her artist's institutional exhibitions and circulating their reviews, she plants outlandish memes always tagged with "#artdealing": a baby stops weeping when handed a fistful of cash, or a woman contorts her body to extremity for a selfie (in a posture that echoes some of Uddenberg's figurative sculptures).

"I find those memes everywhere," Rosen says about this material. She adds that she considers them a "Rorschach test for the art world – they mean everything and nothing". But she also hints that the joke might be on us, asking: "What do you think they say about the art market?"