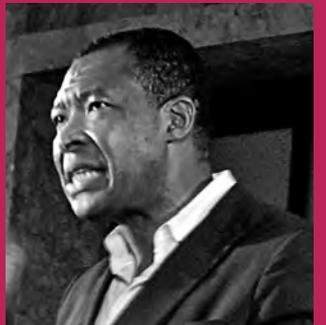


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**NICHOLAS LOGSDAIL** Lisson Gallery

**KRISTEN WEISS** Weiss Berlin

# VIEW FROM THE TOP

## GALLERISTS OLD & NEW ON THE ART UNIVERSE

**One has been in the business for the past 50 years, the other set up her gallery only last year. Logsdail and Weiss offer perspectives on the current trends and various issues in the art world from two different ends of the spectrum**

# Nicholas Logsdail

## Founder, Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery opened its doors in April 1967 after Nicholas Logsdail, then a student at the Slade School of Art, decided to do up a derelict building at 68 Bell Street with his art-school friends. Fifty years later, Lisson — which can still be found on Bell Street — is one of the longest-standing galleries both in London and globally, representing Ai Weiwei, Sol LeWitt, Fred Sandback, Haroon Mirza, Marina Abramovic and Susan Hiller, among others. This October, Lisson celebrated its 50th birthday with a monumental exhibition, “Everything At Once,” and a thousand-page book charting the gallery’s history. Anya Harrison spoke to Logsdail to learn more about Lisson’s evolution and the current state of the art market.

**Is it right to say that the gallery came into existence almost by accident?**

It wasn’t an accident but more of a fortuitous series of events. At the same time, there were tens of thousands of artists and very few galleries — and I recognised this as an opportunity rather than a misfortune.

When we started, there were only two or three galleries showing art that I found remotely interesting, and which could claim to be Contemporary: Signals Gallery, Robert Fraser, Kasmin, and McRoberts & Tunnard. So, we started very much at a down time.

**When you started Lisson, were you spared the pressures experienced by younger, smaller galleries today?**

Young galleries today have so much to compete with, above all each other. When I started there

was virtually no competition. I had no experience of that side of the art world or of business, and I was innocent and naïve — although I was also thoughtful and knowledgeable about art that interested me. Lisson created a new model. It was about being closer to the artists. We had an artists’ bedroom upstairs which was regularly used by artists and friends. When we started showing American and European artists, we had artists visiting for longer stays.

From a business perspective, it was an extremely simple operation, with none of today’s complexities. We had card index boxes for artwork details, and a big Rolodex for “art people.” There was no VAT. Lisson had many small collectors who supported it in the early days. Today’s shoestring [gallery] must be sophisticated and professional. The artists they discover will be delighted if successful, but if the gallery



LISSON GALLERY

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can't grow with them, they will inevitably move on. That has been the fate of many galleries that have not been able to progress.

We've never aspired to being a "mega" gallery but you have to be of a certain size to survive. There aren't many galleries like Lisson still around — probably only Paula Cooper in New York. All the others appeared 10, 15, 30 years later. There have always been young galleries with a shorter life span. But we've survived and have more or less thought afresh about the gallery continuously. It has always been important to be of the present.

### **What is the vision that has spurred you on all these years?**

I still have the same idea as 50 years ago: that the successful artists of one generation support those of the next. I've always thought of the gallery, and indeed the international art world, as a family. Quite inadvertently, and without any encouragement, all my children have been involved with it. They probably all sat at reception at some point.

### **When did you decide to expand to New York?**

We made the decision about eight years ago but it was something I'd had in mind since the 1970s. Now with Alex [Logsdail's son who runs the New York gallery], I don't have to deal with the complexities of the two countries.

I like New York. I feel that it is a much more direct instrument than London. It's compact, things

happen quickly there.

### **You also run the Factory, an artists' retreat in Lamu, off the coast of Kenya. How does it complement the gallery's activities?**

Lamu is to do with relationships, understanding, and spending time with people. It's got nothing to do with business. Since we started 10 years ago, a number of artists — including those represented by the gallery — have come over, but also writers and collectors. Marina Abramovic came just before we started working together. Haroon Mirza has been over twice, as has Wael Shawky whose work I certainly wouldn't have known so well otherwise — he used his time at Lamu to make the proto work for the series "Cabaret Crusades" that was later exhibited at MoMA PS1. Shirazeh Houshiary and her architect husband are building a house there.

### **Despite your international footprint, the heart of the gallery has always remained in London. How do you see Brexit affecting the gallery and wider market?**

I can't see how Brexit is going to help the Contemporary art world. My fear is that it will make the UK more insular and less connected. I'm very much a believer in cultural internationalism because with it there's a stronger likelihood that people will understand each other. Art is a powerful instrument in that sense. The utopian ideas that engaged the

culture 50 years ago are still a benchmark for me. But certainly all our utopian ideas are not much in evidence today.

### **After 50 years at the helm of Lisson, what do you look for in artists? What excites you and makes you want to delve deeper into their practice?**

Artists who don't look after history, who don't understand their own practice and its position in the wider world, probably won't have much of a chance. To identify this potential in emerging artists is tricky, as they're not fully developed. You have to trust your instincts, your relationship with the individuals, their personality and capacity to be resilient, to never give up.

The position I'm in now is a privileged one, [Lisson] having been around for so long. The artists I started working with in the 1960s are now historic figures: Dan Graham, Richard Long, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin and many others. They were much older than me when I started and were my mentors, particularly Sol Lewitt. I was very good friends with Donald Judd. He was a difficult man but I learnt a lot from him, as I did from Carl Andre and Richard Long. In that sense Lisson has always been an artist-run and artist-influenced gallery, rather than a market-interested one. I still want the young artists to be mentors to the gallery one day, because without good artists a gallery can only be a puff of hot air. **MP**

## Kirsten Weiss Founder, Weiss Berlin

Having opened her gallery, Weiss Berlin, just over a year ago in 2016, American-German dealer Kirsten Weiss has hit the ground running. Under her innovative model, she has invited exhibiting artists to live and work in the gallery for short residency periods. Weiss cut her teeth with a background in academia and curating, lending her a strong foundation from which to advise collectors and artists — she received a Ph.D. from MIT and post-doctorates from the ETH Zürich and UdK in Berlin. Although Weiss was born in Rüsselsheim in West Germany, her mother is from Detroit, so she spent time there as a child. Since 2015, she has been largely based in Berlin. She tirelessly scouted the city for her gallery space, finally finding what she had wanted in a Charlottenburg townhouse. Weiss discussed the Berlin art market, the difference between American and German collectors, and the future of Weiss Berlin with Louisa Elderton.



PHOTO CREDIT: ELENA CHEPRAKOVA

## **In the U.S., I appreciate that many collectors are involved in donating to institutions, which is important not only for the museums but also for their identity as collectors**

**Your gallery is relatively new, but even so, have you experienced a shift in the art market since opening the space?**

I started my gallery in 2016, and had never even worked in a gallery previously, so honestly, it's all new and interesting to me.

**Your program mixes an older generation of artists such as Ed Clark and Faith Ringgold with younger talents such as Elif Erkan or Demian Kern. What is your aim with the program as it stands, and how do you envisage its further development?**

It's essential for me to show works within a historical context, and all artists I work with share that interest. I come from working in academia and museums, so my approach to younger artists and their work is always to look for a deep commitment to and intense curiosity about making art, whether it be their own, or that of others. I'm extremely proud to be able to know and work with artists that can look upon long and uncompromising careers and substantial and significant bodies of work like Ed and Faith, or Keith Mayerson. Really, I can barely express how happy I am to have one of Ed Clark's iconic works from the late 1970s hanging in my space. The younger artists are at the beginning of their career, and I feel this is an important context and shared ethos that they appreciate. I can get just as excited about the works by younger artists, especially since

many of them are produced in the gallery itself [during brief residency periods], and I have a very close connection to them and the artists. The gallery will develop slowly, and working with artists of different generations will be part of that development.

**You have moved between the United States and Germany: Do you feel collectors approach art and collecting art in different ways depending on where they're from? How might German and American collectors differ?**

All collectors I've engaged with more closely have a good understanding and strong interest in art history, but that's maybe because that's what we like to talk about most, so they just don't have a choice. The conversations at a fair in Germany are, maybe, a bit longer than in the United States, but I only have minute anecdotal evidence of this. In the United States, I very much appreciate that many collectors are involved in philanthropic giving to cultural institutions, which is important not only for the museums, but also for their identity as collectors, thinking of a collection as something that is built within a larger cultural context. In addition to collectors, it's very important for me to have conversations with writers, historians, and curators, and the same applies here: there are committed and knowledgeable people everywhere.

**What about the rise of art fairs globally? What is your**

**approach in terms of how art fairs might complement your program?**

It's essential for us to do art fairs in order to meet collectors. We are located in a Berlin apartment building from 1897 in Wilmersdorf, very close to Bahnhof Zoo and the original Edition Block in Schaperstrasse. So while I think everyone should come to the neighborhood, and many times I'm happily surprised about who finds their way there, we're still pretty hidden. The obvious problem is the cost of art fairs, which can be very high, so I have to consider the financial risks, and sometimes they are too high. It would, for instance, not be possible to bring only works on paper by a young artist to a fair (even those for new galleries) because it's not possible to even cover the cost of the fair. Hence, much of this type of work doesn't get seen.

**How has the city of Berlin and its art market shifted in recent years, and what are your predictions for its future development?**

The gallery is based in Berlin because of the immense cultural resources the city offers, and my ability to offer a space here for the artists to work, live, and engage with the institutions that are here. The city is growing, which I think is wonderful — and I'm hopeful that it will attract people that will also grow to love the dark and difficult history of the city and support the arts it brings forth in many ways. MP