

Heart to Art: Lora Reynolds of Lora Reynolds Gallery

Brian Fee

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Imagine my thrill as a seasoned New York art-goer thrust back into the unfamiliar Texas Hill Country this summer (I graduated from University of Texas at Austin but hadn’t visited the city but once since then), going totally off a strong recommendation from Big Apple friends to visit [Lora Reynolds Gallery](http://www.lorareynolds.com/). Imagine that joy when stumbling into a clean, well-lit white-box, with its raw concrete floor and huge windows, which just happened to be showing former Armory Show artist Susan Collis ([So it goes](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/susan_collis/), May 14-July 16, 2011). Since then (and looking back at gallery archives proves it), Lora Reynolds’ eponymous space has consistently staged solo, duo and group exhibitions of local and international artists that challenge minds and emphasize the fortitude of a Texas-based gallery on the larger art world.

**Brian Fee: What was your background before opening Lora Reynolds Gallery, and what considerations determined opening in Austin?**

**Lora Reynolds:** I became interested in and engaged with contemporary art upon returning to Houston after my undergraduate. My now mother-in-law Jeanne Klein was living there, and she was very involved with the Menil museum and was, in fact, a friend of Dominique de Menil’s. Jeanne was asked by Dominique to start a young supporters program for the museum, and while I was living there it was just getting off the ground. With Dominique around, we were welcomed everywhere and given extraordinary access. We traveled with Paul Winkler to The Philip Johnson Glass House where Philip Johnson himself joined us for lunch! The experience with that group, and with Jeanne and Mickey Klein in general, really opened my eyes to what contemporary art is and showed me there exists this entire community in which one can make a life, meet interesting, creative, wonderful people and see incredible things.

It was through the Klein’s that I met James Cohan, who was working at the time with Anthony d’Offay Gallery in London. I had never been to London and thought it would be a great adventure to do an internship at the gallery, despite the fact that at that time I had very little experience with the gallery world. So I applied and was accepted as an intern for what was supposed to be two months but ended up being a year, and an actual paid job. The experience of being in London and working at Anthony d’Offay Gallery altered the course of my life.

I worked for Anthony d’Offay Gallery for a total of five years. My job was to look after the artists that the gallery showed who lived and worked in the U.S., including Ed Ruscha, Vija Celmins, Jeff Koons, Maurizio Cattelan and others…although Ruscha was my main responsibility. It was an exciting time and a great moment of change in Ruscha’s career. After Anthony retired in 2001 and closed the gallery, I went to work for Matthew Marks Gallery for a year before my now husband and I began thinking about starting a family. He was already living in Austin, where he had an investment management fund, and we both knew this is where we wanted to raise kids. I moved back to Texas then, and I opened the gallery in 2005 when my daughter was 1 1/2.

I named the gallery after myself because I am utterly lacking in creativity – but mostly my reasoning was that perhaps the connections I made while working in the art world in London and New York would recognize my name and thus connect me to the larger, international art world.

**BF: What role did you intend for your gallery in Austin’s art scene?**

**LR:** The gallery has sought to bring international and national artists to Texas and to provide a venue to see interesting contemporary art in all mediums. It also gives artists a chance to show somewhere outside of the more critic oriented art scenes such as Los Angeles or New York. Being located in Austin can provide artists a chance to show more experimental work—to perhaps feel more comfortable taking risks. Because we are removed from the main centers of the art world, we are able to show artists who already have representation in Los Angeles and New York—their showing at the gallery is seen as a positive expansion of their reach, rather than an encroachment of any sort. We are also very interested in cultivating a connection with the community and collectors by providing a place where they can engage with very progressive artwork.

**BF: As the local art climate has shifted, what unique challenges has the gallery faced, and how has it adapted to surmount them?**

**LR:** We have seen great growth in the visual arts in Austin over the last six years, with the completion and opening of the Blanton Museum, the expansion in reputation and reach by Arthouse, along with their gorgeous new building and now the merger of AMOA and Arthouse. The Visual Arts Center (VAC) has opened at UT and is doing great work, as is Fusebox. All of this amounts to a much richer and more diverse art-world here - one that brings interesting and important international artists to Austin. We, as a city and community, are making great strides and I can only hope it continues.

What all of these institutions and festivals achieve is bringing great curators, artists and gallerists here, along with museum and collector groups. We have had groups from the Centre Pompidou in Paris, The Menil Collection, CAM in Houston and Miami MOCA, among others. We recently had Jay Sanders and Elisabeth Sussman — curators of the upcoming Whitney Biennial — as well as Franklin Sirmans from LACMA and Nicolaus Schafhausen of the Witte de With in the Netherlands. This influx of curatorial talent and museum supporters is just fantastic for the artists living and showing here!

Unfortunately, we have had pretty slow growth in the number of contemporary collectors. Or, rather, the community of collectors here is rather small for a city of this size, which presents a challenge on the commercial side. If I had not started my career outside of Texas, in larger collecting communities, it would be much harder to succeed here now because the base is just not broad enough. That is why it is so hard for commercial galleries to survive here and why so many try and fail. I would love to see ten more international commercial galleries here to build a community, but it will take time.

**BF: You show a dynamic lineup of international artists working in various disciplines/mediums. How has the public responded to them?**

**LR:** The gallery receives lots of support and kudos from our community, for which we are most grateful! And it is especially rewarding to see the gallery reach extend beyond Texas. For example when (gallery artist) Noriko Ambe’s exhibition was recognized as one of the Best Shows in a Commercial Gallery, Nationally, at this years AICA Awards Ceremony and when Tom Molloy was selected to represent Ireland in this year’s Sharjah Biennial in the United Arab Emirates.

**BF: You’ve hosted some laudable “firsts” at the gallery. Would you talk about these and some of the exhibitions you are most proud of?**

**LR**: Some of our firsts have included the first solo exhibition of Tom Molloy in the U.S. ([Lone Star](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/tom_molloy_lone_star/), May 11-June 23, 2007), the first solo exhibition of Susan Collis in the U.S. ([Why did I think this was a good idea](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/susan_collis_why_did_i_think_this_was_a_good_idea/), October 4-November 11, 2008), and the world premiere of Phil Collins’ [el mundo no escuchará / the world won’t listen](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/phil_collins_el_mundo_no_escuchara/) (July 8-August 31, 2005, which later earned him the 2006 Turner Prize nomination). I am always most proud of the artists’ accomplishments and when we are able to share those accomplishments with collectors, curators, students…

**BF: I’ve noticed some unique collaborations in past exhibitions between the gallery and local institutions. Can we expect more collaborations in the future?**

**LR:** The collaborations are another way in which the gallery has been able to connect with the community. We worked closely with Arthouse and the Paramount Theatre to organize the screening of Teresa Hubbard/Alexander Birchler’s film [Grand Paris Texas](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/teresa_hubbard_alexander_birchler/) (the related exhibition was September 9-11, 2010). This was the first time the artists had shown one of their films in an actual theater and the result was a major success. The VAC generously helped support the realization of Noah Simblist’s curated exhibition [Out of Place](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/out_of_place/) (January 15-March 5, 2011). We recently had a solo exhibition by Colby Bird ([Dust Breeds Contempt](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/colby_bird/), September 9-November 26, 2011), which was scheduled to coincide with [The Anxiety of Photography](http://www.arthousetexas.org/article/the-anxiety-of-photography/) show at Arthouse, in which he also had work.

We have also worked with Fusebox in aligning our programming and exhibition schedule with theirs, including the [Practice, Practice, Practice](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/practice_practice_practice_curated_by_michael_smith_and_jay_sanders/) (May 2-June 27, 2009) show curated by Jay Sanders and Michael Smith, that focused on performance and was on view during Fusebox. For 2012, we are working on special programming to coincide with the festival, which will be announced soon.

**BF: When did you begin using the “Project Room” space, and how has that exhibition influenced or reflected off the show in the main room? When planning, do you consider the two exhibits simultaneously, how they will play off one another?**

**LR:** We started using the space now called the “project room” as such in the summer of last year with a Colby Bird [installation](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/colby_bird1/) (July 17-September 3, 2010). Before that we would show work from our inventory or even extend the main exhibition into that space. I see it as serving two purposes: it allows us to show smaller bodies of work by artists such as Jim Torok’s group of seven [Walton](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/project_room_jim_torok/) (September 9-October 22, 2011) portraits or Tom Molloy’s eight “Vermeer” drawings ([Woman](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/tom_molloy1/), May 14-July 2, 2011), and it allows us to present more artists simultaneously, whether to introduce an artist who is new to the gallery or a more established artist who is interested in doing a smaller project.

**BF: You have integrated some very unique painters into the gallery’s exhibition schedule. What sort of painting-specific artist tends to attract your eye?**

**LR:** I tend towards paintings that have a careful attention to detail, like Jim Torok’s intimate portraits or the textured oil paint canvases of Donald Moffett. This manner of working is one that I am drawn to not only in painting, but in drawing, sculpture, photography, and all media. There are a number of female painters I’m recently excited about including Annie Lapin and Lesley Vance.

I just returned from a wonderful trip to London where I had the great pleasure of seeing the Gerhard Richter retrospective at the Tate. I also attended the Frieze and Sunday art fairs. While in London I visited with Richard Forster, an artist whom I collect personally, and who has kindly agreed to do a two person show at the gallery with Ewan Gibbs.  He and Ewan admire each others’ work and have forged a relationship over the last year. I think their joint show will be just gorgeous and fascinating. It will open in January 2013.

**BF: That sounds fantastic! What else can the public look forward to from the gallery in 2012, and beyond?**

LR: We are working on an exciting exhibition program that will shake things up a bit as far as our programming goes, including the addition of new artists to our roster.  We recently welcomed Hilary Graves as our new director. She moved to Austin from Los Angeles where she was the director of The Box Gallery. The coming year will see some integration of her interest in performance as well as the introduction of new artists, like Bradney Evans, who just had his first solo show up in our project room ([Still](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/bradney_evans/), October 28-December 2, 2011). We presently have a solo show with Mads Lynnerup ([Help is on the way](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/mads_lynnerup/), December 3, 2011-February 4, 2012).

*Lora Reynolds graduated from the University of Texas at Austin and established the gallery in Austin, TX in March 2005 after working with Anthony d’Offay and Matthew Marks Galleries in London and New York. The* [*current solo show*](http://www.lorareynolds.com/exhibitions/about/mads_lynnerup/) *by Mads Lynnerup, Help is on the way, runs through February 4, 2012.*

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