

ART IN AMERICA
REPORT FROM NEW YORK

Down East

Manhattan's Lower East Side has become a mecca for independent, highly innovative new galleries.

BY STEPHEN MAINE

May 2006

O Pioneers!

The first wave of new galleries dates from the fall of 2001, when Maccarone Inc. and Canada opened their doors within a month of each other, in the bustling Chinatown area. They were quickly followed by Rivington Arms, and some months later by the nonprofit Participant Inc., both located on Rivington Street.

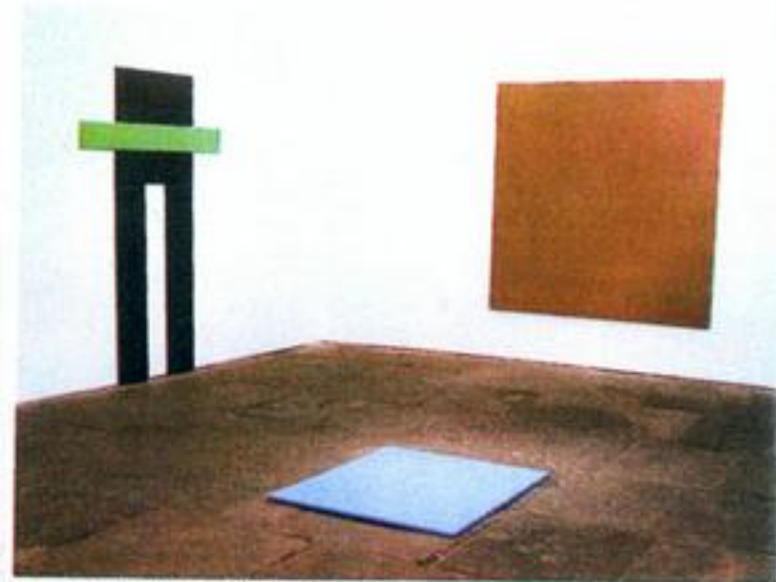
In contrast to Maccarone, from which the street is never far away, Canada is cloistered, at the end of an anonymous corridor in a building on Chrystie Street near Canal. It was started in September 2000 by artist Phil Grauer in the lower level of Leo Koenig's Tribeca space, and augmented by the curatorial skills of fellow artists Sarah Braman and Wallace Whitney. (An alumnus of the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, Grauer cites "the poetry of the open landscape" in his choice of the gallery's name.) Canada moved a year later to the present address at 55 Chrystie, taking advantage of city and state financial incentives extended to small businesses coming to the area in the wake of 9/11.

A strong commitment to abstract painting, conspicuous materials and an artist-oriented curatorial eye distinguish Canada, as well as what Whitney terms an "office-heavy environment" whereby the gallery itself can feel a bit like an anteroom leading

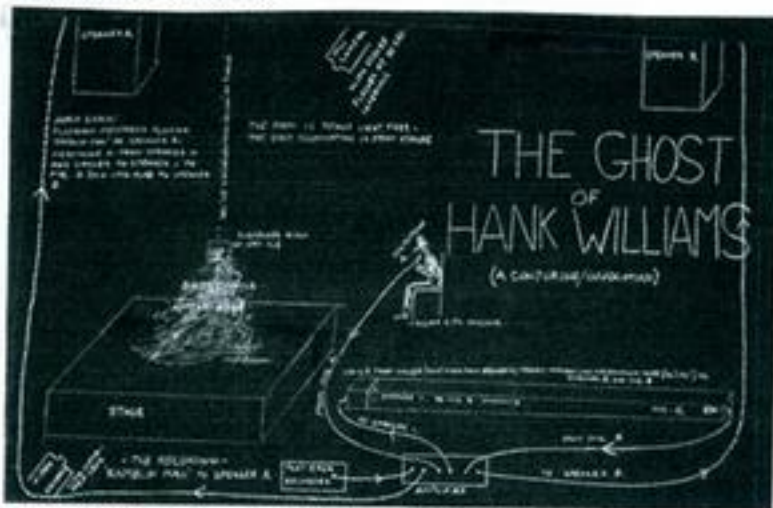
to a laid-back think tank. Grauer and Whitney consider "The Two Hanks," their 2003 show of performance, sculpture and video by David Askevold (a meditation on the divergent artistic personalities of country musicians Hank Williams and Hank Snow), a watershed moment for the gallery. A founder of the Nova Scotia School, Askevold is an abstract painter turned maker of mystical videos and performances conflating the banal and the transcendental, "the perfect candidate to spin this group of young abstract painters through."

Several artists associated with dealer Kenny Schachter drifted into Canada's orbit when Schachter left New York, including Brendan Cass and Joe Bradley, both of whom had well-received shows with him. "New York's Finest," curated by Whitney and Cass and mounted early in 2006, represented a coming-together of various strains in the gallery's program. Seen at Canada last fall were the assemblage-based soft sculpture, made of found clothes, linens and stuffed animals, of Michael Mahalchick, and Katherine Bernhardt's impeccably crude faux-expressionist portraits and self-portraits.

Canada has had a lively booth at the last two NADA Fairs in Miami, but a recent episode highlights the uphill battle facing less established galleries. Following his rapid ascent to wide recognition—capped by his inclusion in the 2006 Whitney Biennial—Canada regular Gedi Sibony recently broke with the gallery in favor of higher-profile venues in and near Chelsea, including Harris Lieberman, where he currently is showing with Josh Smith through May 6 [see "New Arrivals" below]. Lacking a certified star in the roster makes it tougher for any gallery to gain admission to the upper echelon of art fairs, *de rigueur* in the current climate. Vicissitudes of the "dark ugly market" do not deter the scrappy Grauer, or dampen his mordant humor. Asked about the gallery's ancient stone floor, which features a shallow but distinct drainage channel, Grauer avers that the space "used to be a kosher slaughterhouse—and still is."



View of Joe Bradley's exhibition "Kurgan Wares," 2006; at Canada. Photo Phil Grauer.



David Askevold: *The Ghost of Hank Williams*, 1979-80, white chalk on black posterboard, 29 1/2 by 37 1/2 inches. Courtesy Canada.