

# Independent

September 8-11, 2022

Menu

## 20 Years of CANADA

**How to maintain an artist-invented, artist-run space for two decades.**

**by Rachel Wetzler**

**January 2018**



The founding partners of CANADA from top left to bottom right:  
Phil Grauer, Suzanne Butler, Sarah Braman, Wallace Whitney  
Courtesy of CANADA

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Founded by artists Sarah Braman, Suzanne Butler, Phil Grauer, and Wallace Whitney in 1999, CANADA has established itself as one of New York's most adventurous galleries, offering early solo exhibitions to artists like Joe Bradley, Katherine Bernhardt, Xylor Jane, Matt Connors, and Joanna Malinowska. In 2002, CANADA relocated from its original home—a small basement space in Tribeca—to the Lower East Side, becoming one of the first galleries to open in what is now a major New York art destination. When the partners came across a larger space around the corner in 2012—a former Chinatown print shop on Broome Street—they jumped at the chance to expand. Though CANADA has evolved from its early days as a basement gallery into an established New York tastemaker, Grauer insists that the gallery's "DNA is as an artist-invented, artist-run space."

As Grauer describes, CANADA grew out of the community of artists who lived and worked in Brooklyn in the late '90s and the disconnect that he and his fellow partners felt between the conversations happening there among artists and the established Chelsea gallery scene. The founders wanted to create a space where they could highlight the work of individual artists while also remaining tied to the ecosystem and environment in which it was created. According to Grauer, the gallery, in its early stages, "wasn't set up for commercial gain, but as a forum for looking at each other's art, removed one step from the studio."

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### -Phil Grauer, co-founder of CANADA

New York has an illustrious history of artist-run galleries, but few have remained open as long as CANADA. Grauer attributes the gallery's longevity, on the one hand, to "a sense of belligerence and a stubborn resilience not to quit" and on the other, to the "multiheaded" nature of the organization: the four founder-directors act as a mutual support system, "reinforcing the desire to fight on and keep it open."

Grauer has often been refreshingly candid about the challenges involved in running a mid-sized, artist-operated gallery. Though CANADA may not have the same financial resources of larger galleries, the partners bring another valuable asset to the table: an understanding of what it's like to be a practicing artist. "Other dealers might come with more financial support," Grauer says, "our thing has been artists banding together to fight for each other's voices. All of us have an understanding of the making end of things, not just the business side." The emphasis on creating a community means that the roster has developed in an organic way over the years. "There's a sense of new people being elected in by the gallery community," Grauer says. "It's like a weird family where somebody new gets invited to Thanksgiving. The gallery has a culture of people, like a living organism, that [the partners] try to maintain."

For this year's edition of Independent New York, CANADA will be presenting the work of Elisabeth Kley, a relatively recent addition to the gallery roster: her first exhibition at CANADA,

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The forthcoming presentation at Independent will include a wall drawing and selection of ceramics, all heavily patterned; the effect, Grauer says, “will be like walking into her studio and getting a 360-degree panorama of her world.”

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