



ART

A Beloved Gallery Opens an Expansive New Space — and a Show That Really Uses It

By JULIE BAUMGARDNER MAY 3, 2016

"People think we move around a lot," Lisa Spellman says with a laugh. The beloved gallerist and her 32-year-old institution, 303 Gallery, were among the first art spaces to adopt Chelsea as a new home (from SoHo, of course, in 1996), and remained in the same space on 22nd Street for 15 years. But the last three have been a game of real estate musical chairs. "It's so boring, but everyone always wants to talk about real estate," quips Spellman, who in addition to launching the careers of heavyweight artists Christopher Wool, Robert Gober, Doug Aitken and Karen Kilimnik, has played a maverick hand in the continuous poker game known as the New York real estate market. "It's being a New Yorker for so long — it's a second language!"

But, now, 303 returns to West 21st Street, in a not-yet-finished, storm-ready Foster + Partners building — which displaced the site of Spellman's two-story gallery in 2013, resulting in a temporary move to a Studio MDA-designed space on 24th Street. 303's new space is a homecoming of sorts, according to Spellman, who negotiated air rights for her former property, "which allowed us to get a second floor," she says. The gallery also includes an origami steel staircase, a private outdoor sculpture garden and sun-flooded offices encased in prismatic glass (resembling an Aitken-devised creation more than an architectural feature). But, more important, within the 12,000-square-foot gallery (with 21-foot ceilings), there's nary a column or visible support buttress. "That was a deal breaker," Spellman says. The result? A seamless vault of sheer expanse.

The dust hasn't settled yet (and hard hats are still the fashionable back-of-house

accessory), but come this Saturday, May 7, Spellman is swinging open her glass doors with the gallery's first solo exhibition, of work by the Berlin-based Alicja Kwade, whose reality-distorting sculptures toy equally with physical space and human emotion. Kwade's show is titled "I Rise Again, Changed but the Same," a quote taken from the 17th-century Swiss mathematician Jakob Bernoulli, who was noted for his calculations of probability. "Space is a critical factor," the artist says. "Some works would never have been made without the space; though some are still not realized because there has not been the right space so far."

The show includes new large-scale works, "Paravents," in which glass and mirrors reflect found objects, such as wood cylinders or steel beams — to "divide the things in two different 'reality layers,' but in one physical space," as Kwade says. Also on display are her intersecting bronze rings in the shape of the world's time zones, which hang cascading in a perpetual 24-hour loop. And the gallery's walls hold coated mirrors reflecting sheets of steel, which manipulates the viewer's perception of "entry and vibrancy beyond the theoretical and describable," Kwade says. In fact, Spellman says she chose Kwade, whose Public Art Fund commission of a spinning clock in Central Park just closed, for her works' capacity to transform time and space. "They're very architectural, fragile but strong, and the building is so much about light and glass," Spellman says. "It's a very powerful contrast, anchored in the landscape but very temporal."

"Alicja Kwade: I Rise Again, Changed but the Same" is on view May 7-June 30 at 303 Gallery, 555 W. 21st Street, New York, 303gallery.com.