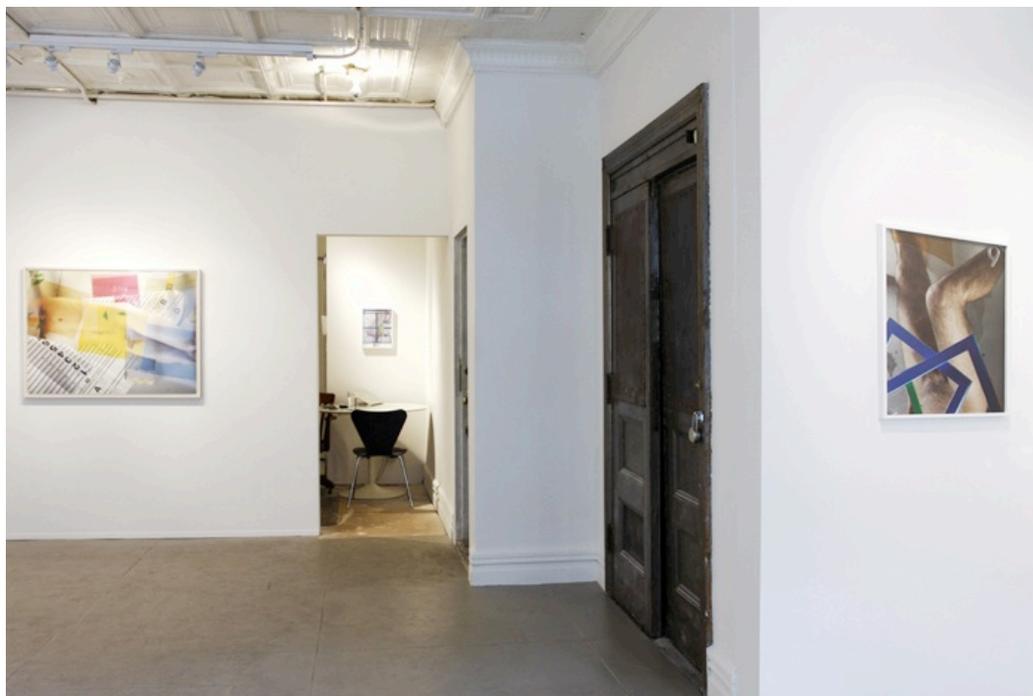


Turning Profit: 179 Canal Opens as 47 Canal

by Yasha Wallin 04/08/11

A ripped photo of Chairman Mao greets guests in the freight elevator of 47 Canal Street. Given the location--nestled on the border where the Lower East Side meets Chinatown--it could be the unofficial mascot emblem of the second floor gallery that takes its name from the address. Housed in a former loft residence, the venue, run by artist-curators Margaret Lee and Oliver Newton, has sprawling near-floor-to-ceiling windows and a mismatched gray floor that welcomed the rain-soaked footprints of visitors last night for organizers' first show--a series of photographs by Brooklyn-based Michele Abeles.



Quirky corners and a white tin ceiling stained with age add to the gallery's charm. The unfinished reflects "a bunch of people that never had a space before," Lee remarks, "although they always found temporary ones when necessary... now we're going to have a permanent location; let's see if we can make that last."

"My dream was to just be an artist. Then I realized it was so boring," says Lee, who works for Cindy Sherman by day, and is an artist herself. She began collaborating with friends to combat the isolation of her practice. This is the second incarnation of the ad-hoc project space 179 Canal Street, which Lee opened in 2009 in a shuttered building above a former jewelry store, where she also had a workspace. At the time, Abeles's studio was upstairs. Over the next year and a half--before a mahjong parlor took over the lease--an industrious group of unrepresented emerging artists, fostered by Lee, staged a dense program that included poetry readings, the pop-up Schadenfreude Sports Bar, 14 exhibitions and 15 performances. These efforts left an impression on the art world, and Lee took the project on the road. She curated a group show of 179 Canal-affiliated artists at the nonprofit White Columns. Newton, who previously worked at Alexander



and Bonin, came on, and they took a booth at the Nada art fair in Miami, displaying collaborations between

Newton, Lee and many of 179 artists like Josh Kline, Anicka Yi, Alisa Baremboym, Antoine Catala and Amy Lien. A nomination for "Best Alternative Space of the Year" at Rob Pruitt's Second Art Awards at the Guggenheim, followed soon after. Around that time, they set an opening date before finally finding a permanent home just a few blocks east of the original location.

Their new space has a few more white walls than the last, but "I wouldn't use the term professional," says Newton. "We'll do things as they become necessary and as things make sense to do, as opposed to following a predetermined system of how galleries work."

Though their roster is still being honed, they are now representing many of the same artists who showed at 179 Canal, with a few new additions. Lee jokes, "We'll all be poor together." It's a new, earnest, and decidedly commercial interpretation of the teachings of mascot Mao-one that many in the art world can appreciate.