

Tribeca's Storage gallery emphasizes art and transcendence

By Bob Krasner | April 10, 2024



At Storage, 52 Walker St, L-R : Gallery assistant Sophia Brown, artists Marcus Leslie Singleton and Elizabeth Flood, director Onyedika Chuke, artist Kathryn Goshorn | Photo by Bob Krasner

One doesn't expect a DIY project to look quite as perfect as Tribeca's Storage gallery, but owner/director Onyedika Chuke is responsible for more than filling the space with art.

"I couldn't get a loan for the renovation, so I did it myself," he says. "I spent 20 hours a day on it. I could build a house if I needed to."

The Nigerian-born artist began his career as an art dealer when he was still studying sculpture at Cooper Union, under the mentorship of Susan Sheehan.

"She was a smart, well-respected, astute business person," Chuke recalls. "I learned a lot from her."

After a stint as a professor at Cooper Union ended with the COVID lockdown, Chuke got serious about his first gallery, which also happened to be his living space on the Bowery. The move to 52 Walker St. was a leap, but Chuke was up to the challenge, both practically and philosophically.

"There's frustration on a daily basis," he explains. "People don't think that I'm the gallery owner, I'm not from a certain demographic. But I don't believe in complaining. I look at the obstacles and I look at my resources — which is mainly myself."

His approach to finding artists is somewhat refreshing, as he will "scour the internet" to find artists outside of trends and fads.

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“I’ll look at 200-300 artists a month on the internet. I’m looking for tough, focused individuals,” he says.



Marcus Leslie Singleton and his “Stone Faced Clown Hanging on Yesterday”, a painting that “references the Harlem Globetrotters of early New York”. Photo by Bob Krasner

Elizabeth Flood, who is in the current group show and has a solo show coming up on April 19, was found by Chuke as he combed through pages of grants and residencies. Flood appreciates the way that her work was integrated into the group context.

“My night painting resonates with celestial themes of Michiko Itatani and Kathryn Goshorn’s paintings,” she notes. “Director Onyedika Chuke described the curation of the show to me as a mix of inner and outer worlds. My painting represents a shift outside, quite literally, and acts as a segue into Storage’s next exhibition — a solo show of my paintings, titled ‘Lookout,’ which will consist of large scale multi canvas oil paintings made on site at the Hudson River, the Atlantic Ocean, Civil War Battlefields, and the California Desert.”

Another artist in the current show, Marcus Singleton, has had a very positive involvement with the gallery: “Working with Storage has been an incredible experience! My favorite part has been the community it’s gathered — both the artists and the art lovers that frequent the space.”

Chuke muses on the process of putting together the gallery and the artists, noting that “I want to know what the work is ... I listen to the space, to the artists, to the audience. There is a sense of shamanism ... listening to the energy of the artist.”

Not content with the main space, Chuke decided to again turn his apartment into a satellite gallery, aptly titled Storage APT (Art Presentation Template). It’s an appointment only location which the gallerist calls his “sanctuary amongst art.”

“I go home to something that I really love and when I talk to people about the art there I know it intimately,” he says.

“Intimate” is a good word to describe the first show there, as series of images by Barbara Nitke titled “American Ecstasy.” Taken on sets of porn films in the 1980’s, Nitke’s project is an invitation to examine what the genre is all

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about with a mix of nostalgia and an invitation to “open a discussion about normalizing porn stars and removing the shame,” according to Nitke.

“Barbara was the best artist to start with at APT,” Chuke says. “This gallery operates with a wholistic view of the artist. I want to slow things down here – we only allow five people at a time in the space.”

The plan is to have five events for each show, such as the slide show and Q+A that Nitke recently gave.

“I’ve done big presentations before,” Nitke says, “like the one I did at the Kinsey Institute. But it’s so much more personal here, I’m not on a stage or behind a lectern. It’s more casual and easier to say hello to everyone.”

And, she continues, “I love working with Onyedika, he’s so frigging smart! He’s got a great eye and gives great advice. I like who he’s showing my work to. I feel like part of the family.”

Chuke bucks the trends by encouraging new collectors in the same way that he does new artists.

“We appreciate people who are in the beginning of their journey,” he states. “They are often overlooked by other galleries but we are empathetic.”

As for his own objectives, he knows what he wants: “My personal mission is to correct history. It sounds pompous, but I have ambitious goals.”