

# 30. Because New York's Galleries Are the Greatest Single Machine Ever Invented for Exhibiting Art.

By Jerry Saltz Published Dec 11, 2011



Nan Goldin's *Swan-like Embrace, Paris* (2010).  
(Photo: © Nan Goldin/Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery)

Anyone who relishes art should love the extraordinary diversity and psychic magic of our art galleries. There's likely more combined square footage for the showing of art on one New York block—West 24th Street between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues—than in all of Amsterdam's or Hamburg's galleries. Size, however, is not the source of our greatness. That comes from the incredible mix of ideas and activity combined with the numbers of talented, committed, passionate people involved and intense geographic density. They collectively create a living organism that reflects and produces consciousness. My inner life depends on it all.

I see around 100 shows a month, going from Niketown-size palaces where you feel like yelling to storefronts in Bushwick. Each has to pay the bills; keep artists happy; and cope with collectors (oy!), curators (ay-yi-yi), critics (woo-hoo!), and occasionally plumbers. That their fiscal life often hangs in the balance only adds to the energy.

Proximity creates extraordinary nodes of research, development, risk-taking, serendipity, and beautiful chaos. Want to compare late-medieval panel paintings with the compositions in Jeff Wall's latest giant photos? They're thirteen blocks apart, at [Richard L. Feigen](#) and [Marian Goodman](#). Yes, 85 percent of the art you see isn't any good. But everyone has a different opinion about which 85 percent is bad. That in turn creates fantastically unstable interplay and argument.

Take the grimmest day I remember in a while, that disgusting pre-Halloween Saturday snowstorm. After I grumbled and bundled up, what unfolded was not misery but magic. At [Peter Blum](#) in Soho, my viewing life was changed forever by a bowl made in the Southwest more than 700 years ago. It was adorned with a painted line drawing of a crane stooping to spear a fish. A whole world was conjured in new ideas of curved space, pebbly texture, and uncanny consciousness. Energized, I went to [KS Art](#), a shoestring gallery in Tribeca. There, [Kerry Schuss](#) showed me a group of intensely rendered, tightly composed small-scale pencil London landscapes by an artist I'd never heard of, the late [Tom Fairs](#). Now they occupy my inner museum.

Then to the West Village and up into Chelsea. At [Maccarone](#), I gasped at one of the best shows of 2011, [Bjarne Melgaard's](#) "After Shelley Duvall '72 (Frogs on the High Line)," a raucous exhibition of work by insiders, outsiders, and other geniuses, jammed together and teeming with anger and ideas. Then, at 5:30, this perfect art-looking machine produced one of its incredible reversals. After I'd dismissed [Nan Goldin's](#) [Matthew Marks](#) show as clichéd, the snow picked up, so I stayed and looked longer. Her pictures of lovers and paintings from the Louvre blossomed before my eyes: I saw Goldin transform herself into a living raw nerve. Which is exactly what happened to me. My life was changed. Again.