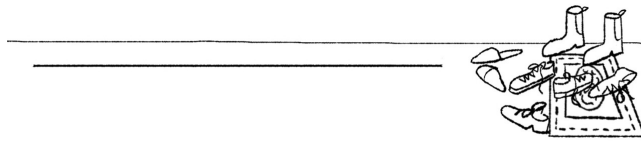
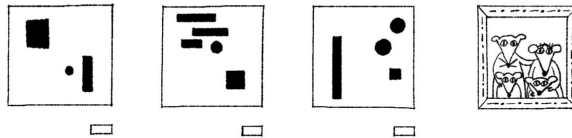


# At Home with the Works

In New York City, real estate plays double duty, and apartments turn into art galleries.

LOUIS BURY



JARED NANGLE

When I visited AAA3A in December 2023, a gallery that artist Blanka Amezkua has run out of her South Bronx apartment for almost a decade, several makeshift plinths not only looked stylish but also suited the quirky artworks they displayed. A wooden bench had been inverted on the floor, its legs pointing up, with an identical bench balanced atop it, legs down, as though the pieces of furniture were performing a two-person yoga pose. Colorful sculptures by artist Cesar Viveros were displayed on the benches, including a coffee mug with protruding eyeballs and birds' beaks (*Pajarito* from 2022), as well as a half-purple, half-white dog-*Firulaís* (2019)—whose skeletal body echoed the benches' spindly forms. Nearby, atop a sturdier wooden dining table, stood *Torito* (2023), a towering papier-mâché bull festooned with neon lights that evoked exploding fireworks.

These curatorial decisions were happy accidents. To install Viveros's fall 2023 exhibition, *My intimate relationship with paper*, Amezkua decided to improvise plinths from her furniture. She happens to own a number of benches and tables, in an otherwise modestly sized apartment, because for each exhibition she asks the artist to cook a dinner, or lead a workshop, for fifteen to twenty people. The gallery's tradition of hosting community events traces back to Amezkua's native Mexico City, as well as her upbringing in Los Angeles, where her family held large social gatherings. "Growing up, there were always people around the house. I missed that togetherness when I moved to New York twenty years ago and have been trying to re-create it wherever I go," says Amezkua, who has also lived in Athens, Greece.

A similar spirit of openness, as well as of necessary invention, animates other contemporary New York City home art galleries. New York has a rich history of artist-run spaces, but in the past decade, and especially in the years since Covid, home galleries here seem to be experiencing a renaissance. Perhaps social isolation left people not only longing for physical community but also accustomed to the idea of working from home. Another factor, certainly, is the lack of affordable, centrally located real estate compared with previous generations. Whatever motivates artists and arts professionals to operate home galleries, everybody who does so must be comfortable dedicating part of their domestic life to the venture. The artworks take up precious floor and wall space. Friends, acquaintances, and strangers request visits even when the gallerists (and their roommates, if they have

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encapsulates the kind of work his gallery exhibits. Its winter 2023–24 exhibition, *Reverse - Order*, featured lively watercolor portraits by artist Juan Hernandez, who in the decades since his incarceration at age sixteen has developed an art practice, with a rehabilitative bent, under conditions of severe constraint.

While most home gallerists do take a cut of sales, they're less likely than other gallerists to pursue business growth as an end unto itself. Curator Daisy Sanchez—who used to run Daisy's Room out of her former council flat in London and plans to open a new home gallery when she moves back to that city later this year—expressed reservations about “the myth of infinite growth,” preferring instead to keep operations manageable in scope and to “let young artists go rather than try to grow an apartment gallery with them.” Connie Lee—who runs Art Lives Here, a nonprofit that facilitates public art installations in underserved communities, as well as a home gallery in Harlem by the same name—also prefers for artists to “come through” one of her programs and then “move on.”

This reluctance to scale up is not only philosophical but also logistical. By their very nature, home art galleries are less public-facing than galleries with commercial leases. Often, their addresses aren't available on their websites, and potential visitors must reach out over email or social media to obtain them. Many home gallerists hold other jobs and have no staff. “There's a nice, natural limit to the activity,” muses Poppy Pulitzer, who used to work in the commercial gallery sector and together with artist Cal Siegel co-operates Astor Weeks, located in one of Harlem's gorgeous Astor Row town houses. “It's been surprising to see how each artist responds to the architecture,” she says.

The limits on home gallerists' space and time can lead to clarity of purpose. Underland Gallery, for example, is located in Bay Ridge, a South Brooklyn neighborhood far from New York City's more central artistic hubs. Its cofounding artists—Hannah Salyer, Ester Kwon, and Maxim Elrod—have therefore focused on serving the needs of hyperlocal arts communities. The result is an eclectic program of art exhibitions, literary readings, film screenings, and live music. Their *DEATH MASQUERADE 2023* was a Halloween potluck-style installation of death masks, and at their fall *2023 PRIX FIXE* exhibition visitors were seated around a table and served artworks for their viewing consideration. The ground-floor space that houses these events features sumptuous wooden moldings and bold, flora-and-fauna patterned wallpapering—the most attention-grabbing interior design I encountered in my research for this article.

The idiosyncrasies of home art galleries make visits to them feel more intimate than jaunts to traditional white-cube spaces. The experience is not only about seeing art but also about spending time in someone's home. Gallerists tend to offer coffee or tea, sometimes even a snack, as well as a seat in the living room or around a table. Longer, deeper conversation is practically unavoidable. “Given the smaller scale of operations, visitors get more attention, which they appreciate,” reflects Bill Cournoyer, who since 2016 has run The Meeting, an art advisory firm and private exhibition space, in his West Village apartment. The intimate setting makes it easier for people to imagine how the artworks might look in their homes, and harder to pretend that art exists abstracted from life's material conditions.

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