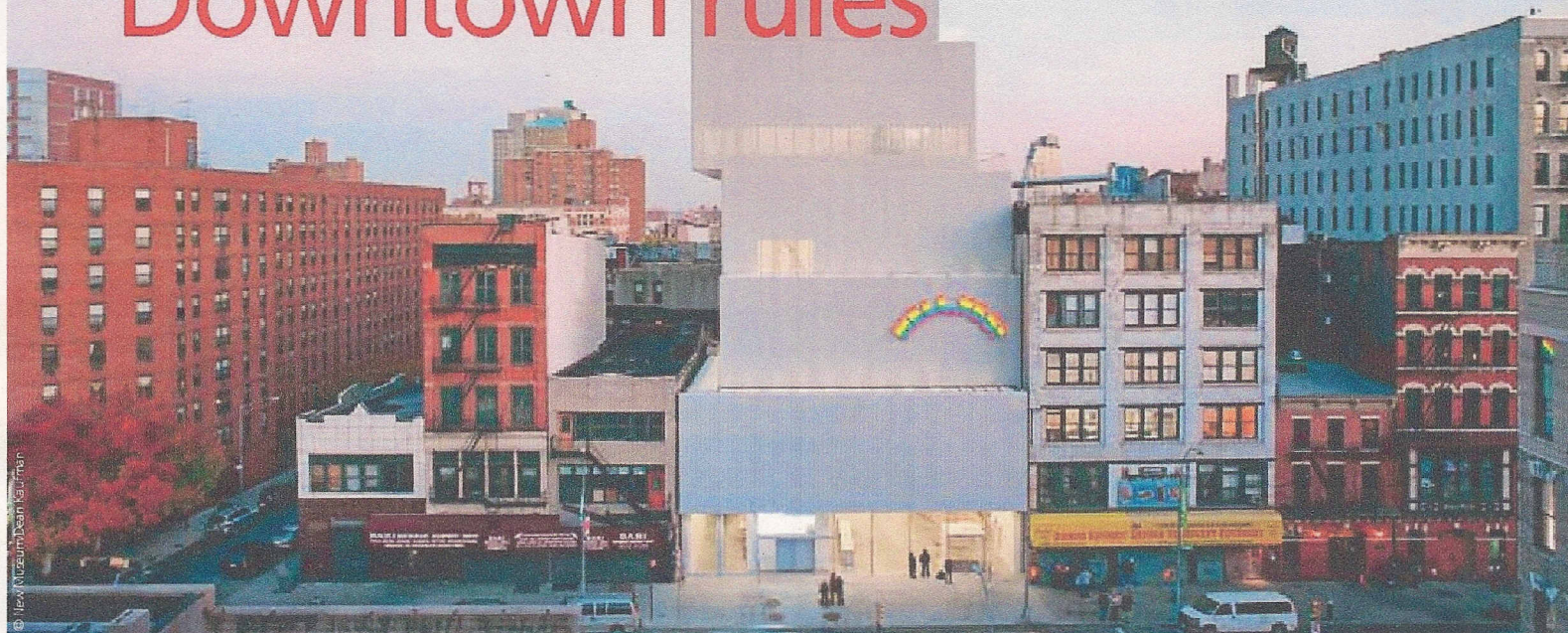


Downtown rules



Who'd have thought that the Bowery – once a byword for deprivation – would become the next hot spot? **Karen Wright** provides an up-to-the-minute guide to Manhattan's ever-changing art world



New Yorkers don't know how lucky they are. Manhattan's artistic riches are dazzling and, in the past few years, the entire city has become a museum, all of it rewarding exploration.

A whole new art district has opened recently in the Bowery on the Lower East Side, drawn by the destination du jour, the **New Museum**. Though beautiful from the outside, the museum has a problematic interior. The best approach is to take the lift straight to the top floor for a panoramic view of the downtown area rather than waste time on the frustratingly claustrophobic galleries which do the work on display no favours. The museum has acknowledged it has a problem. But it has bought the site next door and is raising funds for another building. Needless to say this will take a few years.

The hope was that the Bowery would replicate Soho in the 1980s, when the area became home to groundbreaking new spaces where artists could experiment and be discovered. Now, however, the market place has grown to a point where any spontaneity seems a thing of the past. Instead, the Bowery will house a new space for the blue chip Chelsea gallery, **Sperone Westwater**, with its modern masters such as Bruce Nauman, Susan Rothenberg and Malcolm Morley. To make its presence felt, Sperone has commissioned British architect Norman Foster to produce a sleek, transparent eight-storey building, complete with an external lift that will provide an extra gallery, if necessary. The renowned **Lehman Maupin** has opened a second large space nearby, alongside a collection of interesting boutiques and bars. The area is also home to small galleries such as **DCKT** on the Bowery, **Envoy** on Chrystie Street and **Invisible-Exports** on Orchard Street.

Indeed, there are so many new venues that there are weekly guided tours. To tag along, meet at **Gallery Bar** at 120 Orchard Street at 7pm on Wednesdays (call +1 212 529 2266 for more information). This area was traditionally home to Jews and other ethnic minorities, who are now being pushed out by

the gentrification. However, you can still catch glimpses of the good old days: peer into Russ and Daughters on Houston where you'll get a view of an old-fashioned smoked fish shop.

On the West Side, Chelsea, which became home to so many galleries in the 1990s, has its own problems. When the art market became chic, new condominium blocks mushroomed to take advantage of the area's newly acquired cachet, forcing rent increases. Ironically, now that there has been a reversal in the property market, it seems that the Chelsea galleries have a better chance of survival. Sadly, this has come too late to save the renowned Dia Centre – which moved out in 2007 – and it seems that the organisation won't even have a replacement building as previously planned. Instead, the Whitney Museum has bought land (on 13th Street near West Side Highway) and is planning a new building designed by architect Renzo Piano. The cavernous spaces from David Zwirner (on 19th Street), up to Gagosian (on 26th Street), with Gladstone and Cooper in between, broadcast what's hot in the international art world.

Midtown is still home to important galleries. It is always interesting to visit the veteran Marian Goodman in her gallery on 57th Street. A die-hard lover of conceptual art, Goodman has the vision that many of the younger dealers lack. And don't miss the chance to visit other galleries in the same building.

Of course, when in New York, you can't miss MoMA. I hate the new building, but I love the collection. And how can New Yorkers complain when they can see Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*

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d'Avignon, Monet's *Water Lilies* and Matisse's *Red Studio*. There are more institutions to explore uptown. If you're still in modern mode, go to the Whitney, where feminist artist Jenny Holzer has a solo show based on her political text works, and then on to the Guggenheim for *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia 1860 to 1989*, which should prove interesting. But above all, don't miss the permanent collection in the mercifully horizontal side wings, where Picasso's *Woman Ironing* looks as fresh today as when it was painted in 1904.

If you've had enough of the contemporary, move west to Central Park and see the Metropolitan Museum. Better still, take tea in the tearoom on the main floor and wander through the mummy room, scene of some of my childhood nightmares. Nearby is the Neue Galerie, a museum founded by Serge Sabarsky and businessman, philanthropist and art collector Ronald S. Lauder, both of whom shared a passion for German and Austrian art of the early 20th century.

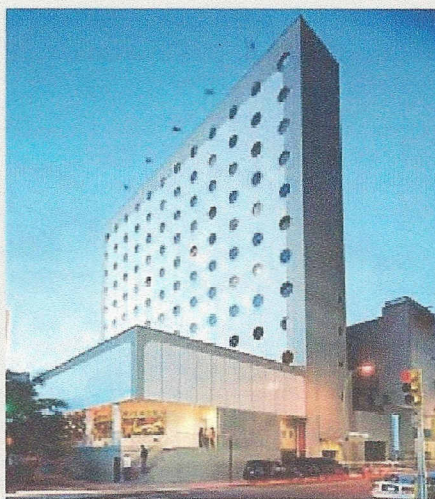
Moving even further north, I end up at the Studio Museum in Harlem, where chief curator Thelma Golden has been mounting some fantastic shows, such as the retrospective of African-American painter Barkley L. Hendricks. Who would have thought that I, a white Jewish girl from Westchester would be wandering round Harlem? But who would ever have believed the election of President Barack Obama?

Karen Wright is a writer who divides her time between London and New York.

When in New York...

Where to stay

If you want to explore the new art district, the Lower East Side, the place to stay is the newly opened Bowery Hotel (335 Bowery; +1 212 505 9200). Ask for a room in the nine series. These are cantilevered over the street and enjoy views both up and downtown. Just opened is a new Thompson hotel, Thompson LES (190 Allen Street; +1 212 460 5300), which, although sleek and stylish, is not as comfortable as the aforementioned Bowery. For Chelsea, the best bet is the Maritime Hotel (363 West 16th Street; +1 212 242 4300), with its porthole windows and chic bar (pictured below). It also has a rare off-street level garden to laze in and check your emails (there's free wifi). For those who need to be in midtown, the Warwick (65 West 54th street; +1 212 247 2700), across the street from the rear entrance of the MoMA, is a comfortable place to stay. But if you want sheer luxury, you can't beat the rooms and location of the Four Seasons (57 East 57th street; +1 212 758 5700), with its luxurious lobby and rooms with views. But it's not recommended for those who are scared of heights.



Restaurants

There are new places opening on a daily basis downtown. For good food, at not jaw-dropping prices, you can't beat Five Points (31 Jones Street; +1 212 253 5700), which features organic well-sourced food with attitude. I love their razor clams.

An insider tip is breakfast dim sum at Jing Fong (20 Elizabeth Street; +1 212 964 5256). Here you can rub shoulders with Chinese families eating a variety of steamed, grilled and fried dumplings offered from fast-moving trolleys. A cheap and original treat. The same owner of Five Points owns the Cookshop, one of the few reliable restaurants in the Chelsea area (156 10th Avenue; +1 212 924 4440). Save room for puddings, as the root beer sundae is the best dessert I've ever had. Don't let the name put you off – the contrast of salty crumble with icy sorbet is to die for.

You could do worse than eat at the Maritime Hotel (369 West 16th Street; +1 212 243 6400) and dine at either of its restaurants: Matsuri, in the basement, is an amazing space, having won several design awards when it opened, and it's still one of the best Japanese restaurants in New York; while La Bottega (369 West 16th Street; +1 212 242 4300) serves reliable Italian food with particularly good pizzas. MoMA (9 West 53rd Street; +1 212 333 1220) has impressive on-site dining. The café on the second floor offers delicious, if small, salads, and tasty sundaes. For fine dining, book the Modern, where chef Gabriel Kreuther offers New Yorkers a taste of Alsace, transforming local and carefully sourced ingredients into interesting combinations such as Pennsylvania Duck Breast with Black Trumpet Marmalade, "Fleischschnecke" and Banyuls Jus. K.W.