

Christina Lee, a model-like Korean-American beauty, floats around the courtyard of P.S.1, the contemporary-art center in Long Island City, New York. She's like a car-show hostess, waving, smiling, all even hand movements. She is P.S.1's registrar, a kind of multipurpose manager and one of a handful of young women in the New York art world who make things happen behind the scenes. They're known as "gallerinas," though few of them embrace the term.

"I don't use the word. I think people take me pretty seriously," says Lee, who walks with grace even as her high heels sink into the rocky gravel.

It's a brilliantly sunny day in September, the day of P.S.1's fall opening, and the event is drawing an illustrious art crowd. Lee seems to know everyone: "Oh, hi, Leo"—it's Leo Koenig, the art dealer with the Stray Cats hair; "Inka, hi, how are you?"—Inka Essenhigh, the fashionable painter who's getting so much press lately.

"What did you think of our John Wesley exhibit?" Lee asks.

"Oh, I think he's a great artist," says Essenhigh. "Mysterious, gritty."

"Yes," says Lee, "there's a subversive edge—like Lichtenstein."

Lee, 29, has worked hard for this day, installing the exhibits, negotiating for loans, dealing with shipping and insurance. "We borrow a painting, and there are conditions," she explains.

Julian LaVerdiere, the platinum-haired sculptor, takes her hands, kisses her cheek. "She juggles 100 balls at once—she's one to watch," he says.

"No, you are," Lee insists. "Julian's becoming *very* famous."

"The art world is a lot about relationships," she says, continuing her tour through the oncoming stream of art lovers. "Artists can be difficult, and

it's important to be friends with them." Suddenly she cocks her head to the side: "Oh, hi, Jane"—the painter Jane Benson.

"We were partying last night at [artist] Shahzia Sikander's house," Lee says as she walks on. "That's why I'm hungover."

She doesn't look it. She has perfect skin, careful makeup, the shiniest hair; her brown highlights were done for the opening today. Her dress, by Indian designer Alpana Bawa, seems well chosen, with a modern-art-ish design in fuchsia and gold, and oval slits around the hips.

"For better or worse," Lee says, "image has become extremely important in the art world."

In fact, women all over the art business seem to be almost as pretty as Lee. As one collector says, "That's the hook." Since it's part of their job to convince collectors to spend sometimes millions, it's not surprising they present a nice face to look at while

making an argument for why a piece of art is worthwhile. And to make the argument, they also have to have the education.

Lee graduated from Barnard and has worked at Christie's, Sotheby's, MoMA, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Her head tilts sideways again for another name. "Oh, Henry, how are you? This is Henry Urbach; he has a gallery in Chelsea—it's a *great* gallery, very up-and-coming."

Urbach and his boyfriend, Stephen Hartman, smile back.

"I think a generation ago," says Lee, a while later, having a

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smoke, "the art world was heavily dominated by men, and you had to be a raving bitch to make it. But now it's pretty equal—there are many powerful women."

And with their power—especially in the current boom—money and fame can follow. It happened for Mary Boone (who, meanwhile, acquired a reputation, perhaps undeserved, for bitchiness). "Mary Boone is a historical figure," says Lee. "One can't deny her significance. But I don't think her approach fits into the current art scene."

She smiles. "I should probably not elaborate."

One of the more consuming pastimes of gallery managers is networking; like any sales profession, theirs demands a lot of lunches, dinners, and parties at which to make connections with buyers. In New York, they can be seen almost any night at Bottino, in Chelsea, or at Passerby, the bar adjacent to Gavin Brown's Enterprise (a gallery).

On a balmy Tuesday evening, around eight o'clock, you can see a cocktail party going on through the wide bay windows of a pink stone building on St. Marks Place. The guests inside—men in white button-downs and women in minimalist dresses—look like a scene out of Whit Stillman's *Metropolitan*. It's Kristine Bell's biweekly "salon." "We just started," she says, "but I think it's going to be really big."

Bell, 28, is the manager of Zwirner & Wirth, a high-end secondary-market gallery (they buy at auction or bring in works on consignment from private dealers and collectors) on the Upper

East Side. She is a princess among gallerinas—a storybook blonde with wide blue eyes and a birdlike frame. She's wearing a scoop-neck dress and standing, barefoot, in her candlelit kitchen, which is already loud with the sound of the animated connection-fest in the next room.

"The art world is very difficult to navigate," Bell says above the din. "So you have to commit a lot of time to socializing."

Bell has her eye on Michael McCracken, an investor in ugo.com. "He's my main Internet guy," she says.

Her eyes sparkle over a glass of white wine.

McCracken can't seem to take his eyes off his hostess. "It's harder to be a woman in the art world and socialize," Bell admits. "You can be looked down on as barhopping—you walk a fine line. It's important not to give a wrong impression."

She says she doesn't have a boyfriend at the moment. "I'm so busy."

"I have a bit of a crush on her," says a young British sculptor in the kitchen, a bit tipsily. "She's beautiful! Don't tell my girlfriend."

"Kristine's the absolute *star*," says the party's cohost Joshua Briggs, who works at the Tony Shafrazi gallery (which would make him a "gallerino"). "To make it, you've got to know your stuff, and you've got to be quite pretty. It's very competitive. You have to know what you want out of it all."

"I want to develop my own clientele," says Bell.

She started out wanting to be a painter, but in her second year at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the specter of the starving artist ceased to appeal. "I wondered where all this was going to leave me in four years," she says. So she went to Paris and London to study art history, then moved to New York, where she landed a job at Feigan, the gallery owned by master dealer Richard Feigan. "He told me how things work," Bell says, "what faces to know, how a deal is made."

She became tireless in what she calls "the social side of things, going to every opening and event. I've stood in the standing room of every auction in New York since I've been here. People get to know who you are." Eventually, as assistant to Arne Glimcher at the Pace Wildenstein gallery, "I handled some of the most high-profile dealers," Bell says.

Her buzzer is ringing again.

More people she needs to know are coming up the stairs. ►

On a Sunday evening, two other women in the art business are having dinner with their boyfriends at Bar Pitti, a bustling Italian restaurant in the West Village. They are Sara Jo Romero, director of the Holly Solomon Gallery, and Kyrie Tinch, an account executive at MF Productions, a company that throws the art world's hot-ticket charity events. Their boyfriends are Jonathan Newman and Greg Bogin, relaxed, handsome painters.

As they talk, the subject inevitably turns to the current crop of curiously, exceptionally pretty young female artists—Cecily Brown, Rachel Feinstein, et al.—dubbed the Beautiful Young Things by *The New York Times*.

"The concept of an art superstar who's a woman like Cecily Brown is really a new one," says Newman. "For men it's been around forever, so they can sit back like, I'm a slob, a pig.

"But the women artists are defining a look for themselves—whether they decide they're gonna be dressed in Calvin Klein or sloppy painter pants. And if it's sloppy painter pants, then

THERE ARE GALLERINAS WHO—BUT FOR THEIR MULTIPLE LANGUAGES, DEGREES, AND ABILITY TO CONVERSE INTELLIGENTLY ABOUT TINTORETTO—COULD NOT BE DISTINGUISHED FROM ASPIRING FEMALE ROCK STARS.

maybe Calvin Klein will *do* sloppy painter pants."

"Oh, no, not Calvin," Romero says. "Nothing sloppy."

They laugh.

"Fashion and art are coming closer together," says Tinch.

"Fashion ads in *Artforum!*" says Romero. "You never saw that before. Fashion designers are being inspired by artists."

"You look at fashion," says Newman, "and it looks like art, and you look at art and it looks like fashion."

"But a lot of people are uncomfortable with that," says Tinch. "I think the danger of art and fashion coming too close together is that artists will be chasing the flavor of the month, and the scope and depth of their work will be lost."

A couple of weeks later, on a muggy weekday afternoon, quizzical passersby peer through a window on Grand Street that has been painted to say NICOLA COSTANTINO: HUMAN FURRIER. The place is set up to look like a fancy SoHo dress shop, full of rubbery pink jackets, dresses, corsets—all of which, on closer inspection, appear to be made of human skin, patterned with nipples and casts of anuses.

"Incredible, right?" says Amalia Dayan.

This is Deitch Projects—one of two galleries owned by star art dealer Jeffrey Deitch—and Dayan is its 28-year-old director. "People really can't take their eyes off this," she says.

Nothing would seem to be more difficult to discuss with refinement than garments made from people, but Dayan—who is, of course, strikingly beautiful, a dark-haired Israeli with pale green eyes—manages. Her accent helps.

"It is see-lee-con," she says of the fabric. "I think it's amazing, really original. It's pushing the definition of art—what is art? What is fashion? What is design?" she asks.

Tough questions. What she's wearing is easier to guess—it's chic and black. "It is a Gucci skirt," says Dayan, "and a vintage top I got at the flea market in Chelsea"—an outfit that puts her squarely in the middle of the fashion moment, par for the course for gallerinas, who've fallen into step with the young women artists currently influencing fashion trends.

"Costantino's work is visceral but very elegant," Dayan continues. "Go ahead, touch it. It's a very strong comment about the classical human body and the grotesque body and identity issues."

As for her own identity, it's more of a pedigree—her grandfather's name was Moshe, and he was that same fierce general with the eye patch. Whatever her background, Jeffrey Deitch says later, on the phone, she is "one of the most impressive people of her generation in the art world today."

Deitch himself started out working backstage at the John Weber Gallery 25 years ago, "hanging paintings, answering telephones. That's how you learn," he says.

"But the most important thing is to have a sensitivity to the art," he adds, "to understand what makes a work significant—which requires a set of

skills not that different from what the artists have.

"There aren't that many people who get it."

The Damien Hirst show at the new Gagosian Gallery in September is—at a time when every artist seems to be want to be a rock star—the true rock-star event. Hundreds of art lovers are waiting outside in drizzling rain, pushing to get in.

Inside, the gallerinas have gained easy entrance, along with a long list of celebrities from Steve Martin to Martha Stewart. There are gallerinas in backless halter tops, in embroidered, fringed jeans and vintage peasant shirts, in striped '70s dresses, and of course, in Prada. There are gallerinas who—but for their multiple languages, degrees, and ability to converse intelligently about Tintoretto—could not be distinguished from aspiring female rock stars themselves.

The show includes gynecological chairs submerged underwater and bags of trash.

Kristine Bell is here, but she doesn't seem to care much for the show—she takes it in, wrinkling her perfect nose. She seems to be searching for the comment that will put her feelings into words most diplomatically.

She looks around at all the artists, all the gallerinas. "It's like an amusement park," she says. ■