



A New Day for RJD Gallery and its Artists

March 17, 2017

by Pat Rogers

It is a classic story—a triumphant return after tragedy, emerging even stronger and more determined. [RJD Gallery](#) in The Hamptons fits this bill. The art gallery, specializing in contemporary narrative portraiture and imaginative realism, had its building fall victim to the [raging fire](#) that destroyed nearly an entire block of Sag Harbor's Main Street on December 16, 2016.

In addition to the destruction of the gallery, 83 paintings on exhibit at the time of the blaze were lost, said gallerist Richard J. Demato in an interview held last week at his new location in Bridgehampton. Some of the artists hardest hit were [Margaret Bowland](#), [Margo Selski](#), [Frank Oriti](#) and [Jesse Lane](#). Some lost as many as five works, representing months of labor for each work, said Demato. Other artists suffered losses as well. Luckily, the gallery has an off-storage location so not all the art offered by the gallery was destroyed by the flames and smoke or the water used to quell the fire.

Demato's response to the crisis was immediate. Within hours after being awakened by the fire alarm at 6:16 a.m. and going to the scene, Demato issued an email: "... I must say and we fear that all of the art in the Gallery is lost...We love all of our art and it hurts us to see a loss on even one piece...We will secure a new space ASAP and truthfully the one thing we all need is for you to please paint new work so we may begin again."

Within six weeks, Demato had secured a new location and began the needed renovation. His commitment to the future, and the stamina to bridge the divide, have resulted in a brand-new gallery that triples the size of the former space. It also introduces an expansion to the gallery's roster and focus on evocative figuration.



RJD Gallery in Bridgehampton, NY. Photo courtesy of the gallery.

RJD Gallery begins its new chapter with a Grand Opening on Saturday, March 25, 2017 from 6 to 8 p.m. in Bridgehampton. Music, cocktails, art and general merriment are scheduled to welcome the public to discover the gallery's new location on Main Street. On view is the group show "Urban Revival," featuring art by [Phillip Thomas](#), [Alfred Conteh](#), Frank Oriti, [Drew Ernst](#), [Gabriel Moreno](#), [Jules Arthur](#), [Salvatore Alessi](#) and others. Click [here](#) for a preview on the exhibition.

There are noticeable differences between the Sag Harbor space and the new one in

Bridgehampton. The new gallery more than triples the size of the former space with around 3,000 square feet of exhibition space. The main gallery is now entirely located on the ground floor with art presented in three distinct spaces. Upstairs, a room featuring a solo show of [Andrea Kowch](#) prints will remain on permanent view.



RJD Gallery in Bridgehampton, NY. Artwork by Andrew Kowch. Photo courtesy of the gallery.

The design also signals something new: the RJD's subtle climb into a gallery of note is now evident in the space itself. Adopting a clean and upscale contemporary look, light fills the spaces (both natural and tracks of LED) with 25-foot high ceilings contributing to the airy atmosphere. The floors in the main exhibition areas are a bleached wood while terra cotta tiles line the floor of the rear gallery and lounge that anchors the overall gallery space.



RJD Gallery in Bridgehampton, NY. Photo courtesy of the gallery.

White leather benches and couches are installed invitingly to encourage visitors to sit, relax and spend time with the art. As in the former space, colored walls provide accents to gleaming white walls that otherwise predominate.



RJD Gallery in Bridgehampton, NY. Photo courtesy of the gallery.

"The gallery feels more like a mini museum where you can come back, sit on a bench and talk about the art," said Gallery Director Eve Gianni Corio.

The larger space has also allowed the gallery to present larger works with plenty of wall space between them so each piece resonates on its own.

"It has flow," she continued. "There's plenty of room so you can visually separate each piece and really see and appreciate the painting. We want people to come in and feel comfortable spending

time and talking about art. Richard's created a space where this is now possible and it reflects his taste in way that wasn't possible in Sag Harbor."



RJD Gallery in Bridgehampton, NY. Photo courtesy of the gallery.

Demato's personal interests manifest in other ways. Because he is a fan of large paintings, the gallery is exhibiting canvases that are 7 by 12 feet or 8 by 8 feet—dimensions that weren't easily accommodated in Sag Harbor. The addition of sculpture is another change. Demato, a longtime collector, said the enhanced quarters now allow three-dimensional works to become a regular part of the gallery's program.

The opening exhibition, "Urban Revival," features work by three sculptors, all of whom are new to the gallery: Alfred Conteh, Gabriel Moreno and [Veronique Guerrieri](#). While the works are all figurative, they could not be more different.

Conteh's sculptures have a rawness and extend energy between their expressive lines and abstracted figures that exudes emotion. Guerrieri's ultra-contemporary pop sculptures are slick, eye-catching and narrative in a different way. Look for *Lapinou* (big-Rabbit) at the Grand Opening for a one-to-one encounter. Moreno's work bridges the divide between with busts of a mythical kind, presenting contemporary women whose visages are hand-engraved with lettering and characters that could be hieroglyphs or tattoos.

"Urban Revival" also shares another of Demato's passions—collecting paintings by American master realists. Excited by the new gallery space, Demato is now offering works from his private collection; works by [Jaime Wyeth](#) and [Bo Bartlett](#) can be viewed by appointment. The connection between these masters and the artists on view can be found in the art itself. From technical and stylistic influences to narrative elements, works from Andrea Kowch echo (and may seem reminiscent of) both Jamie and Andrew Wyeth. Artists such as Drew Ernst and [Arcmanoro Niles](#) have studied under Bo Bartlett and [Eric Fischl](#) respectively.

Andrea Kowch's work has been represented exclusively by RJD Gallery for years. Her work is in high demand with client orders taking up most of the artist's time, in addition to preparing for a solo show scheduled for later this year. To keep up with interest and to allow entrance to beginning collectors, RJD expanded its offerings of limited edition prints and has given her prints their own exhibition space. Located upstairs, the 400-square-foot gallery presents 9 different prints in a permanent solo exhibition.



RJD Gallery in Bridgehampton, NY. Photo courtesy of the gallery.

Sitting in the new gallery lounge last week, Demato said has no regrets. He feels his immediate reaction following the fire to press forward was the correct one. To make the transition happen quickly, Demato put his money where his art is and leased the new space and began construction right away. Soon, the insurance company will issue a check for the damage cause by the fire. The quick response also means the gallery can continue supporting area non-profits like The Retreat without missing a beat. Giving back to the community in this way is something he looks forward to continuing in Bridgehampton.

While gallery artists are making works that seems to possess extra verve from their own traumatic journey, said Corio, overall the transition has been challenging all around.

“It’s definitely been a hard journey,” said Corio, pointing out that all the artists have stuck with the gallery. “I know all of the artists feel safe and secure with the gallery. It’s a family and a team. Sometimes you have to go through an ending so something positive can grow.”

“I also think there’s a feeling that he’s got your back,” she said of Demato’s actions throughout the ordeal.

Demato is thankful for the support of the Sag Harbor community—both before and after the fire—and will miss the village where he started and grew his business. He’s also thankful for the future that lies ahead. Bridgehampton is a solid choice for the gallery to grow, he said, and he now joins established galleries that have long made Bridgehampton their home, such as Mark Borghi and Kathryn Markel Fine Arts, located across the street and a block away from RJD.

“I love what I do and see only good things,” he said. “It’s a fresh start.”



RJD Gallery Director Eve Gianni Corio and owner Richard J. Demato in the new gallery. Photo by Pat Rogers.

BASIC FACTS: RJD Gallery’s Grand Opening Celebration will take place on Saturday, March 25, 2017 from 6 to 8 p.m. The celebration features music, cocktails and art as well as the chance to explore RJD’s new home. Coinciding with the Grand Opening is the Opening Reception for the exhibition “Urban Revival” featuring work by Alfred Conteh, Drew Ernst, Gabriel Moreno, Phillip Thomas, Margaret Bowland, Jules Arthur and others. “Urban Revival” remains on view from March 25 to April 17, 2017. www.rjdgallery.com

RJD Gallery is located at 2385 Main Street, Bridgehampton, NY 11932.

For a preview on the exhibition, read "[‘Urban Revival’ Debuts RJD Gallery’s New Location in Bridgehampton.](#)"

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