

ART HOPPING

The city's white box galleries can seem intimidating to the uninitiated. To demystify the scene, editors *Nina Siegal* and *Anna Whitehouse* sent the *TOA* staff round town to check out the offerings (and sip some free wine) at Amsterdam's coolest contemporary art spots

WITZENHAUSEN GALLERY

This 25-year-old Jordaan gallery with a sister space in New York's Chelsea touts established relationships with serious art collectors and internationally recognised artists, including Harma Heikens and her disturbing take on figurines (think 'Precious Moments' gone wrong) and Ixone Sádaba, whose angst-ridden photographs explore spectral (dis)appearances and desolate, damaged landscapes.

Owner Jacob Witzenhausen prefers to keep operations intimate – as reflected by his tiny one-room Hazenstraat space – and focused on a circle of connoisseurs. 'Our clients tend to be collectors who've been in contact with artists for years and have expertise on the quality of art,' he explains. 'But everyone's more than welcome.'

As to his own curatorial eye, Witzenhausen prefers 'art that hides meaning beneath the surface', where genres and mediums combine in non-obvious ways, revealing their meaning only upon closer inspection. In May, he's presenting paintings that fit the bill: work by Oksana Badrak, a California-based Russian artist (featured in 2009's 'American Illustration'), whose surreal portraits of expressionless mannequins with animal heads for hats certainly leave plenty of room for further inspection.

Hazenstraat 60 (644 9898/witzenhausengallery.nl). Open Thur-Sat 12.00-18.00 or by appt. Marie-Charlotte Pezé

GALERIE FONS WELTERS

Hidden behind giant golden doors on a leafy Jordaan byway, this large, airy and bright gallery has been a Mecca for multidimensional artists since 1988.

The space is divided in two: in back, a surprise 100sqm is regularly devoted to one of Welters' stable of internationally acclaimed, edgy artists and, in front, the PlayStation, a platform the gallerist created in 2000, provides a springboard for emerging talent. Having two spaces 'is a way to experiment with the new talents,' says Welters. 'We expose them to a big audience and get an idea of their potential for future success.' This is how Belgian artist Jan de Cock, for example, went from the PlayStation to the back room within a year and ended up exhibited at New York's MoMA in 2008.

Welters is interested in art that mixes mediums and explores slightly anthropological territory, such as the works of Dutch artist Paulien Oltheten (see her work on page 22). In the same vein, Gabriel Lester's incredibly complex installations, mixing projections, videos, furniture and abstract sculptures are on show until 14 May, with a new exhibit centred on the themes of luck, fortune and coincidences. *Bloemstraat 140 (423 3046/fonswelters.nl). Open Tue-Sat 13.00-18.00.*

Marie-Charlotte Pezé