

# Day 15 - Dalanda Jalloh

The Chelsea art district located near Manhattan, New York is one of the most significant locations worldwide for sales of new works of contemporary art<sup>1</sup>. This fame can partly be attributed to the decline of the SoHo district, and the subsequent rise of Chelsea. There are many factors to consider when attempting to assess the success of Chelsea and understand what made this New York neighborhood into a leading art district.

Chelsea's rise was partly due to the real estate market<sup>1</sup>. From 1995-1999 rent prices climbed dramatically in SoHo due to an influx of clothing boutiques. This inflation of prices forced many people and galleries to move to Chelsea where the rent was affordable. With a rise in galleries moving to Chelsea, more people and art events flocked to the developing area. Art Basel is a very well known art fair across the globe. The majority of the galleries showcased in this art fair hail from the United States, with a majority from New York, and specifically the Chelsea region. Its presence in this art fair has helped to create a following and show the work the galleries of Chelsea, exposure that has helped to create a name for this art district.

In Chelsea, there are many galleries, some elite and others non-elite. There are many non-elite galleries in Chelsea, and some gallery owners claim to showcase art that is just "motivated by 'art for art's sake'". This large number of gallery owners helps to explain the "existence of dense concentrations of small galleries" which only adds to the intricacies of Chelsea as an art district<sup>1</sup>. Despite the high density of small non-elite galleries, elite galleries still thrive. Elite galleries in Chelsea are typically very easy to maneuver through, and enable the public to see the very best of contemporary artists with ease<sup>1</sup>. Ironically, many of the lesser, non-elite galleries require much more effort for viewers to look at the artwork because of ascending levels in many galleries (upper-level)<sup>1</sup>. Interestingly enough, elite and non-elite galleries both excel in Chelsea, and the region has success on both sectors of the art world.

Chelsea is characterized by numerous galleries and artists and continues to thrive. Artists in the area say that Chelsea galleries for the most part give them more freedom and opportunity than do not-for-profit museums and other institutions in New York or elsewhere. Such liberty in one's art career is another reason why Chelsea has become a great art district. Emerging artists and established artists alike are drawn to this district marked with changing styles. Chelsea has developed into an "occupational community of people who work in/run/own galleries" and it typically has all the positive attributes of a community.

The region is even characterized by its avant-garde reputation. Some of the success that Chelsea galleries have had stems from the audience who goes to view the artworks present there. If one wanted to be "with contemporary art in a hip social setting, Chelsea becomes the necessary--and reliable--place to go". If the "it" crowd all gathers in Chelsea, it is no wonder why other individuals in the art world would look to emulate them and visit these Chelsea galleries<sup>2</sup>. While visiting these galleries they would see art that depicts "major on-going issues in people's lives" allowing the public to relate to the artwork<sup>1</sup>. This characteristic of relevance has made Chelsea very successful. People's tastes and preferences are drawing them to this district. The art resonates with the audience's lives in an on-going, creative, and interactive way<sup>1</sup>. Even the city government has become a force that is working to preserve Chelsea as an arts district. In designating the "Special West Chelsea District" the city makes it an explicit goal to "encourage and support the growth of arts-related uses in the area"<sup>2</sup>.

Looking at the events that have taken place at Chelsea, it becomes clearer which factors led to the development of this great art district. Rising real estate prices in SoHo forced the initial move to Chelsea, where many artists and galleries established themselves. With the increasing population came increasing fame as noted by the large percentage of Chelsea galleries represented in major art fairs like Art Basel. The community enabled emerging artists and older artists to thrive, in addition to elite and non-elite galleries. Significant audiences came to view the artworks. The artwork speaks to the issues in people's lives and for now the Chelsea art district is characterized as one of the greatest art districts for contemporary art in the world.

Similar factors played a role in the success of one of London's newer art districts in Fitzrovia. Dealers moved into Fitzrovia after being attracted by its location and trendy image<sup>3</sup>. The area is very central and there is a lot more space to open a gallery than in the older district in East End London where some galleries were not as accessible. Internationally recognized dealers moved into Fitzrovia making the area more extravagant<sup>3</sup>. Like Chelsea, people can just drop by to see art in a gallery. This is something that cannot be done in East End.

Berlin has a similar story. Brunnenstrasse is a newer art district, typically for the younger and more avant-garde<sup>4</sup>. The older district, Auguststrasse, became oversaturated, expensive, and even mainstream. Like the Chelsea art district, Brunnenstrasse has low rents and an artsy vibe that attracts art dealers from everywhere, even New York<sup>4</sup>. Up-and-coming artists hailing from all over Berlin are also attracted to the region. In addition to all these new dealers, the region is characterized by boutiques, designer bars, and many renovated courtyards that add to the bohemian and fresh feel of the district that Auguststrasse did not have<sup>4</sup>. It seems as though similar factors influence the change in art districts across the globe.



**Picture of Brunnenstrasse in Berlin, Germany:**

**References:**

<sup>1</sup>Halle, David, & Tisa, Elisabeth. (2007). Contemporary Art: A 'Global' and Local Perspective via New York's Chelsea District. UC Los Angeles: California Center for Population Research.

<sup>2</sup>Harvey Molotch and Mark Treason, "Changing Art: Soho, Chelsea and the Dynamic Geography of Galleries in New York City," \_International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, \_Vol. 33.2, June 2009, pp 517-531.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&refer=muse&sid=asfJFKPvrd64>

<sup>4</sup><http://travel.nytimes.com/2007/03/25/travel/25surfacing.1.html>