

WHAT GALLERIES WANT

PDN TALKS TO FOUR GALLERY DIRECTORS TO FIND OUT WHICH PHOTOGRAPHERS THEY SIGNED IN THE PAST TWO YEARS, HOW THEY FOUND THEM AND WHAT CONVINCED THEM TO MAKE THE LEAP FROM LIKING A PHOTOGRAPHER'S WORK TO GIVING IT SPACE IN THEIR GALLERIES.

BY HOLLY STUART HUGHES

Facing a shaky economy, galleries in recent years have cut back the number of exhibitions they mount to keep their overhead low. That means fewer spots for the artists who are already on the galleries' rosters, and more obstacles for photographers who are seeking gallery representation. In this climate, what inspires a gallery director to take a risk and sign a new photographer? We asked the owners of four galleries to tell us about the new artists they've taken on in the past two to three years. They explain not only how they found them, but what convinced them either to exhibit and sell a few prints, or to embark on a long-term commitment to exhibit and promote a photographer's work into the future.

CLAMPART NEW YORK CITY

In January, Brian Clamp debuted the work of Gregory Halpern at his gallery, ClampArt in New York City, which shows contemporary photography and painting. They met when Halpern showed Clamp his work at a portfolio review organized by Project 5, a collaboration involving ClampArt and four other Chelsea galleries. At the time, Halpern was working on another body of work, which he hoped to publish as his third book. "That was impressive," Clamp notes, "that he already had his third book coming out and he's a relatively young guy." As the book, titled *A*, approached its publication date, they decided to do a show.

In their initial meeting, Clamp says, "It was a pleasure hearing him talk about the work." He adds, "It's a big, big plus if an artist can talk about their work in a coherent fashion and if it's clear they understand their work in relation not only to other contemporary work but also to historical projects. That gives me more confidence about wanting to work with them." In the case of Halpern, who teaches at the Rochester Institute of Technology, Clamp says, "There are curators who are going to be doing studio visits and it's good to know he'll be making a good impression."

In the summer of 2010, ClampArt exhibited "Intertidal," a show by Jesse Burke, whom he had signed several months before, and shown at the Pulse Contemporary Art Fair in Miami. More than a year before, Burke showed Clamp his portfolio at Review Santa Fe, at the recommendation of another gallerist. "When he opened his portfolio, I was pleased to see that I was already familiar with the work. He had published a book with



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Opposite page: An image from Gregory Halpern's exhibition "A." Above: "Gladiator" by Jesse Burke (left) and "New Homes" by Amy Stein (right). All three artists are represented by ClampArt.

Decode [a small publisher in Seattle] that I liked." Over the four days at Review Santa Fe, Burke and Clamp got to talk. "He continued to stay in touch, I continued to keep an eye on what he was doing. Eventually it grew into representation, about a year later." After representing Burke's work for a time, Clamp decided to do a show.

Clamp notes that Burke's path to having a gallery in New York City was similar to that of Amy Stein, another artist Clamp represents, whom he also met first at Review Santa Fe. Though both are based on the East Coast, "They started showing on the West Coast or in Europe before their work made it to New York." Often, he says, "Artists get their feet wet in another market outside New York and then the work finds its way back to New York City."

When he met Stein, she had received her Masters of Fine Art from New York City's School of Visual Arts, and her portfolio contained a few images in a series that she would eventually expand and publish as a book, *Domesticated*. Soon after their meeting, he recalls, "Her name just kept popping up." He saw one of her prints in a benefit auction, for example, and he served as a juror for contests she entered. "The more times I see something, the more confident I feel about showing it in the gallery." Her galleries also began bringing her prints to art fairs. "I'm often walking around art fairs with clients and that's a chance to gauge their reaction when they see the work in person," Clamp observes. "If [artists] have shown in galleries and art fairs, you can get a sense of what the public reaction will be and how well it might sell." He adds, however, that waiting until an artist has a proven track record of sales before representing them carries a risk for a gallery. "If their three best images are already sold out, it may be too late to take on that body of work."

He advises emerging artists not to spend money to travel to portfolio reviews until they're comfortable showing and talking about their work—both with reviewers and with other photographers they're likely to meet at the event. "Sometimes people show

their work to other artists who know me and know my esthetic, who will say: 'You really have to show this to Brian.'" He adds, "As an emerging artist, you want your work to be seen by as many people as possible, and there are many ways to go about that."

MONROE GALLERY SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

A native New Yorker, Sidney Monroe worked for years with galleries in New York City. His wife, Michelle, is an artist who for a time worked at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum. They knew the late photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt, and through him, became acquainted with many photographers who had worked for *Life* magazine. After 9/11, when they left New York City and decided to open the Monroe Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, they built on those connections and established a reputation among collectors for representing classic documentary photography from the likes of Carl Mydans, Margaret Bourke-White, John Loengard, Gordon Parks, Bill Eppridge, Charles Moore and Ernst Haas. Increasingly, however, they are showing contemporary photographers. "We've felt strongly over the last several years that we wanted to make a move into more current photography and work with contemporary photographers who are following in the footsteps of the classic photographers we represent," Sidney Monroe says. He notes that none of the artists he represents created their work to be shown in galleries, but he looks for work that achieves what he calls "a fine-art quality" and also represents "a significant moment in history."

Deciding whether or not to add a photographer to the gallery's roster means managing expectations. "There are ten or 15 photographers we'd jump at the chance to have at the gallery, but what would it mean for the other photographers we currently represent?" One solution has been to do group shows on a theme, such as "human rights," Monroe says, "to put everyone in the spotlight."

The Monroes participate in occasional portfolio reviews, and also follow photojournalists' work in newspapers, magazines, Web sites and blogs. They discovered the previously unpublished images that New Jersey photographer Rikki Reich shot