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GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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A Juggernaut Art Dealer Comes to the Bay Area, with Big-Name Works in Tow

Janelle Zara



David Ireland's "Untitled (Large Triptych)," circa 1974, is one of the works on display in the inaugural exhibition at the new Gagosian gallery in San Francisco. Credit Photo by Jay Jones. © The 500 Capp Street Foundation. Courtesy 500 Capp Street Foundation and Gagosian Gallery.

The forthcoming Gagosian San Francisco can be found in just about the perfect place: Upstairs are the art printmakers Crown Point Press; San Francisco heavyweight dealer John Berggruen is soon to relocate next door; and just across the street is the most important neighbor of all, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, whose new 235,000-square-foot expansion is the year's most-hyped opening. For the art world, the block is nothing short of a juggernaut — and one that was unlikely to escape the attention of the equally larger-than-life dealer Larry Gagosian. “The emerging collector base in Silicon Valley and the reopening of SFMOMA made it a perfect time to open in San Francisco,” he says.

On May 18, the latest addition to the Gagosian empire opens with “Plane.Site,” a powerhouse, cross-generational group show curated by the New York gallery director Sam Orlofsky and featuring works by artists including Louise Bourgeois, Joe Bradley and Rachel Whiteread. Its conception, Orlofsky says, began with the artists Mark Grotjahn and Richard Serra, whose monumental “Sequence,” 2006, faces the gallery through the glass walls of SFMOMA's lobby.

“What they had in common was making works in both sculpture and works on paper,” he says; this kernel of similarity eventually evolved into a dialogue between two- and three-dimensional art.

Each of the artists — a list that grew to include the Bay Area’s late Richard Diebenkorn and David Ireland, as well as Picasso, Warhol and Giacometti — is represented by both a sculpture and a drawing, sketch or collage. Tatiana Trouvé, for example, draws in copper in two ways: once on paper, in a collage of studies sketched between 2012 and 2015, and again in “I tempi doppi,” 2014, with continuous loops of copper wire evocative of lines scribbled into space. And Roy Lichtenstein’s vibrantly colored 1990 sculpture “Mobile III” pops in a sunny, skylit corner of the gallery — and foregrounds his preliminary colored-pencil sketch for the same work, mounted to the wall nearby. Also on view are previously unseen sculptures by Diebenkorn and Cy Twombly, emphasizing the gallery’s close relationships with artist estates. (“We play to our strengths,” Orlofsky says.)

At Gagosian San Francisco, the programming will roll out slowly — just three or four shows in the first year, far fewer than the seven or eight per year typically shown in New York, where openings are a “more ingrained part of people’s cultural schedule,” Orlofsky says. While many international blue-chip galleries have lately have been flocking to the art scene in Los Angeles, where Gagosian Beverly Hills opened in 1995, the Northern California scene is still a burgeoning one. Gagosian San Francisco is positioned to court not only the well-established San Francisco collector base, but also the emerging collectors of Silicon Valley — thanks in no small part to its powerful neighbor. “Silicon Valley is quite separate; it’s about an hour away, but SFMOMA has the best outreach to any audience in the Bay Area,” says the Gagosian San Francisco director Anna Gavazzi Asseily, formerly of the gallery in London. “They have an important education program — and that’s how it starts.”

Correction: May 4, 2016

An earlier version of this article misstated where the artists Mark Grotjahn and Richard Serra are based. Serra is based in New York and Nova Scotia and Grotjahn in Los Angeles. Although both were born in the Bay Area, neither currently lives or works there.