

NYC gallerist brings her **SAVVY TASTE** in contemporary art to St. Augustine



# UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Natasha Bowdoin, *Gardenhead 01*, cut paper, ink and gouache mounted on panel, 25" x 5" x 26", 2015.

**R**ecently-ish relocated from New York City to St. Augustine, gallerist Monya Rowe has been described as a doyenne of the downtown (NYC) art scene, while her shows have gotten notice from *The New York Times*, *Harper's*, and *KUNSTforum*. Now she is in The Oldest City, building relationships with museums and academic institutions.

I wish I could say that I stumbled across Monya Rowe Gallery wholly unaware, that my curiosity led me to this St. Augustine-via-New York City gem. Tripping across the intimate space filled with relevant art would feel like more than just an extraordinary story, it would feel hallucinatory. For though I am here to have a pragmatic chat with Rowe about relocation and philosophy, there's still something fantastically narrative and novel about a lauded curator/gallerist setting up shop in a small spot of sun-bleached Northeast Florida.

As we sat down and talked about loyalty, art fairs, and travel in the Rohde Avenue space, several ideas came to the fore and stayed. "I have really great relationships with my artists, they've all been showing [with me] for a really long time, and all have had solo shows here," Rowe said. She then went on to explain that since she'd decided to leave the city after 12 years on the Lower East Side, she'd worked to secure NYC gallery representation for her artists who also still have representation with Monya Rowe, and was pleased that two found a home with the Tibor de Nagy Gallery on Fifth Avenue.

Talking about selecting artists to work with, she said, "Often it comes down to taste and practical considerations. Who do I like — it's as simple as that." Rowe compared the relationships she has with her artists to marriages that require trust, support, and communication, "... if you are in it for the long haul."

Rowe sees the sometimes undiscussed principle of trust as key to her success with gallery/artist. A sudden influx of fame and money can sometimes challenge the fidelity towards both aesthetics and business in these very same relationships. Rowe has successfully helped, and watched, artists who've shown in her space ascend to greater prominence. "There is loyalty involved — on both ends,"

said Rowe. "I look for that and I try to give that and be very open and up front with artists, and a lot of galleries aren't."

Taste and trust: Two hard-to-quantify ideas are presented in short succession in our conversation and they go to the heart of the gallery-artist relationship. The often-lambasted idea of taste is one that has never fully vacated the locus of the art world, and Rowe's successes illustrate that point. "I am interested in the formal as much as I am the psychological in terms of the work I choose to show. Galleries are essentially tastemakers, and they have a huge impact on the landscape of contemporary art; before work is shown at museums, it is shown in galleries."

In discussing gallery artist Natasha Bowdoin's work (Bowdoin has a solo show opening at the space May 11), Rowe focuses on the manner in which the works are made, as much as the ideas the pieces support. "[Her work] is incredibly well made, so I am responding to the craftsmanship, aesthetic, and idea." Bowdoin's pieces tackle ideas of ambiguity, placeness, and a relationship to nature mediated by literature.

Inevitably our conversation touched on art fairs, and here Rowe was candid, saying that she thought they are "... not going away. [But] it is great to see things you normally wouldn't and it's great exposure to meet new people. The downside is, it is a selling environment, and it can be hard for smaller galleries."

Rowe also acknowledged the opportunities afforded to artists, curators, and collectors alike at fairs, "Traveling is an important part of experiencing what is really going on in contemporary art. I like to see what my peers are showing and what galleries/museums in different cities are showing. It's also a way to broaden your horizons in looking for artists."

Considering the impact Rowe has had on NYC, and her potential impact on the First Coast, it might do well to follow Jerry Saltz's lead: He included the Ann Toebe show mounted at Monya Rowe Gallery as one of the 10 best of 2015. As for me, I'll look forward to her hallucinatorily good taste, and gladly travel down I-95 to view it.

**Madeleine Peck Wagner**  
mail@folioweekly.com

**NATASHA BOWDOIN:**  
**New Work**  
Opening reception 6-8 p.m.  
May 11, Monya Rowe Gallery,  
St. Augustine. Through June 24.  
monyarowegallery.com