

SEEING THINGS IN BLACK & WHITE

BY TATYANA OKSHTEYN

This season marks the 10th anniversary of Black & White Gallery/Project Space—a great reason to celebrate. I opened the gallery to the public in 2002 as a platform for artists to express a contemporary cultural perspective that was alternative to the mainstream. The gallery is considered, within that context, a pioneering influence, particularly in the field of site-specific installations.

I was born in Ukraine into a family of architects, writers, filmmakers and musicians. My father was an architect, one of my uncles was a famous film director who, together with Eisenstein was at the roots of the Soviet movie industry, and another uncle of mine was a famous writer and newspaper and magazine publisher, close friend and supporter of many prominent Soviet and international artists. I grew up in the atmosphere of constant creativity; talent surrounded me.

I came to the United States in 1980 after completing my MA degree in Linguistics and English Language and Literature. I went back to school and earned an MBA from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Upon graduation I worked in several major financial institutions. I decided to learn about American culture by throwing myself into the completely unknown—for me—territory of capitalist economics. It was all new and exciting, but my life at home continued to be all about art and artists. One day I woke up and realized that art had surpassed my interest in investment banking.

In the spring of 2002, I told my husband, who is an artist, that I had decided to open an art gallery. He responded, "What took you so long?" Six months later we moved to Williamsburg and I opened Black & White Gallery. It originated as a space for artists, and will forever continue to fill that promise.

In 2006 on the eve of the economic downturn and art market contraction, in an effort to support the upward trajectory of my artists' careers, I opened an additional space in then still-booming Chelsea. The Williamsburg location was kept as an outpost for new arrivals and showcase of more experimental work. From 2008-2010 galleries both in Chelsea and Williamsburg were going out of business at a pace of at least four per week. My prior business training and experience proved extremely valuable in getting through hard times.

In 2009, in an effort to reduce gallery dependence on sales, without jeopardizing the support of artists working in less traditional mediums and provide temporary studio space in an environment that was becoming hostile towards artists, a non-profit Black & White Project Space was founded. The real deal for me has always been to work with artists one-on-one, play a role in helping them make decisions about their careers and provide them with resources and opportunities. There's a great similarity between being an art director/curator/dealer and raising a family. Being a parent, a mother, means that you're responsible for helping someone develop to the best of their potential.

Since 2010, Black & White Gallery and Black & White Project Space co-exist and operate out of the gallery's original location in Williamsburg. I have always had a strong interest in the creative process and it seemed natural to have a place where art is created and exhibited. Black & White, in this manner, functions as a Kunsthalle, stimulating observation and discourse. □

