New Exhibition at NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery Examines the New York Art Scene of the 1950s and 60s

October 3, 2017

The NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery (NYUAD Art Gallery) is pleased to announce that its fall exhibition, Inventing Downtown: Artist-Run Galleries in New York City, 1952–1965, will open to the public tomorrow, October 4. This exhibition brings to Abu Dhabi a major collection of historical artworks, and was organized by the Grey Art Gallery, New York University’s fine art museum in New York City.

This major museum survey continues NYUAD Art Gallery’s exploration of artistic community, now through the lens of New York of the 1950s and 60s, when the artists of "Downtown" Manhattan paved the way for New York City’s rise as a cultural capital.

Inventing Downtown gathers over 200 very early works of over 50 artists. The artists range from the well-known (Dan Flavin, Louise Nevelson, Yayoi Kusama, Alex Katz, Mark di Suvero, Claes Oldenburg, Red Groms, and Yoko Ono) to many who deserve to be better-
known (Ed Clark, Emilio Cruz, Lois Dodd, Rosalyn Drexler, Sally Hazelet Drummond, Jean Follett, Lester Johnson, Boris Lurie, and Aldo Tambellini).

Inventing Downtown examines the New York art scene between the peak of Abstract Expressionism in the early 1950s and the rise of Pop Art and Minimalism in the early 1960s. During this time, artists helped expand the definition of what constituted downtown Manhattan. Establishing co-operative and artist-run galleries that triggered new aesthetic directions, they also extended eastward the parameters of what was considered “downtown,” toward the tenements and industrial buildings of Lower Manhattan. These spaces would help shape the artworks they created and exhibited.

Organized by the Grey Art Gallery, Inventing Downtown is the first major museum exhibition to survey these vital years from the vantage point of fourteen key artist-run galleries. The show reveals a scene that was much more diverse than has previously been acknowledged, and includes works by over 50 artists who pursued abstraction and figuration alongside those who ventured into installation and performance art.

This is a rare opportunity to see some of the earliest breakthrough works of these artists, including the painting, Ada Ada (1959), by celebrated figurative artist Alex Katz, a major early “infinity net” painting by Yayoi Kusama, and an assemblage by Dan Flavin from the year when he developed his trademark light-bulb installations. Photographers John Cohen and Danny Lyon’s images show scenes from a New York City now lost in time, alongside documents and photographs from the art receptions, happenings, and correspondence around these artist-run spaces.

Open from October 4th – January 13th at the NYUAD Art Gallery, Inventing Downtown is curated by Melissa Rachleff, a clinical associate professor in the Department of Art and Art Professions at NYU’s Steinhardt School.

Maya Allison, Founding Director and Chief Curator of the NYUAD Art Gallery, said: “Inventing Downtown further explores the ways in which artists develop communities with a DIY spirit, giving rise to major creative breakthroughs. Following on our exhibition But We Cannot See Them, in which we surveyed a particular avant-garde artist community in the UAE, this exhibition continues the discussion, now through the lens of New York in the 1950s. This is also a landmark moment for our academic museum, as this is our first major museum-loaned show, with works from over 100 museums and collectors in the US. We are very proud to be hosting Inventing Downtown: as part of our mission to connect art and art history globally to questions that we face here and now, we look forward to an active public dialogue around this important scholarly exhibition.”

The exhibition opens to the public starting on Wednesday, October 4, daily (except Sundays) from 12-8pm, with guided tours for individuals or groups available by appointment. Inventing Downtown will be complemented by a full public program of events and talks for
all ages, taking place throughout the exhibition. For more information, please visit The Art Gallery’s website at www.nyuad-artgallery.org.

Inventing Downtown: Artist-Run Galleries in New York City, 1952–1965
4 October 2017–13 January 2018
NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery
Visitor hours: Monday – Saturday, 12 pm – 8 pm (closed Sundays)
Admission: The NYUAD Art Gallery is free and open to the public