

Artsy

“Inside the Growing Art Scene in London’s Fitzrovia Neighborhood”

By Tabish Khan

19 March 2024

ARTSY

Art Market

Inside the Growing Art Scene in London’s Fitzrovia Neighborhood

Tabish Khan



Exterior view of TJ Boulting, London. Courtesy of TJ Boulting.

While Mayfair has been the most established hub for London’s commercial galleries, it’s far from the only art hotspot in the British capital. Emerging and mid-size galleries have sprouted up in hubs from Shoreditch to Southwark in recent years, but no area has seen such a glut of new openings as Fitzrovia, which is situated northeast of Oxford Circus.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began easing, galleries have flocked to the gentile district in double figures, bolstering the area’s credentials as an integral part of

ALICE AMATI

London's commercial gallery scene, where established tastemakers rub shoulders with emerging trendsetters.

Fitzrovia is known for having a mix of residential properties and independent businesses alongside quieter streets that belie its Central London location. It emerged as a hotspot for creatives from the early 20th century: Notable residents and visitors included [Augustus John](#), Virginia Woolf, and George Orwell. "Fitzrovia has always possessed an air of excitement, of creativity, and of possibility," said gallerist [Rebecca Hossack](#), who opened her eponymous gallery in the area in 1987. "When I first came to Fitzrovia in the '80s, almost all of the 18th-century buildings were occupied by poets and writers, and today you can still find a lot of artists and creative people living here."

The gallerist admits "it's become more vibrant" since then, a sentiment that is shared by Nick Woolff, who moved his [Woolff Gallery](#) to the area from Shoreditch, East London, in 2007. "It has always been a creative area with independent shops and restaurants and businesses, [and] it's also an accessible area in Central London," he told Artsy.



Exterior view of Rebecca Hossack Art Gallery, London. Courtesy of Rebecca Hossack Art Gallery.

And since the COVID-19 pandemic began easing, several galleries have set up shop in the area. [Alice Amati](#) moved into her eponymous space in June 2023. "Fitzrovia has always been my number one choice when I was looking at potential places to

ALICE AMATI

open the gallery,” she said. “It is very central, yet it still retains a neighborly feeling, with many independent shops, cafés, and businesses.”

This location was also crucial for Niru Ratnam Gallery, which moved from Soho in January 2023. “I was interested in the building which was designed by the English early modernist Joseph Emberton [designer of the iconic HMV store on Oxford Street] for some time and have really liked Fitzrovia as an area for many years,” said the gallerist Niru Ratnam. “There are lots of interesting galleries who have opened here, who tend to be a bit younger and less blue-chip than Mayfair, but it’s also only a 10-minute walk from that latter area.”

Hannah Watson, director of [TJ Boulting](#), which moved across from Shoreditch in 2012, noted how the area “has retained its off-the-beaten-track but bang-in-the-center feeling, and that there is still a lot to discover here.”

Other galleries such as Edel Assanti have doubled down on the area. The gallery set up shop in Fitzrovia in 2015 and moved into a larger nearby space seven years later. “Fitzrovia has plenty of buildings with a characterful industrial architecture that we love,” said Jeremy Epstein, the gallery’s co-founder. “Many of our artists’ practices involve large-scale installations, so when we moved again in 2022, we decided to significantly expand our footprint and stay in the area rather than moving elsewhere.”



Exterior view of Niru Ratnam, London. Photo by Damian Griffiths. Courtesy of Niru Ratnam.

ALICE AMATI

As a result of the movement in the area, a community-driven approach between galleries has emerged. “It’s very collegial and supportive,” said George Marsh, co-

founder and director of Brooke Benington, which opened in Fitzrovia in October 2022. “A number of us have known each other for years and have supported and watched each other grow and develop, so it’s great for us to all be around the corner from each other now. And of course, there are plenty of new relationships being forged due to our proximity.”

The gallerist is mindful of directing visitors to other galleries in the area, and the collective of local galleries has even produced a physical Fitzrovia galleries map. “We meet up regularly to chat about how we can support one another,” Marsh added.

Local events have also helped strengthen those bonds. Hossack is the patron and director of the free Fitzrovia Arts Festival, which “celebrates the rich artistic culture of Fitzrovia by involving many of its talented internationally acclaimed artists, performers, and writers with a rich program.” This year will be its eighth edition. “It’s a truly remarkable event that brings together the entire community of Fitzrovia,” noted Hossack James Ryan, who opened [Grove Gallery](#) in 2020 and is its CEO. He agrees that the festival “unites galleries together,” bolstered by “the art tours clients can take part in to explore new galleries in the area in one day.”

Other events such as London Gallery Weekend—an annual three-day festival where each day focuses on a different area of the city—act as a “big plus” in getting visitors to hop between galleries, said Ian Rosenfeld of [Rosenfeld](#), who also noted that “the area has really blossomed [and]...people really enjoy being in the area.”

ALICE AMATI



Exterior view of Alice Amati, London. Photo by Tom Carter. Courtesy of Alice Amati.

Indeed, Epstein of Edel Assanti, a co-founder of the gallery weekend, notes that the diversity of exhibitions from galleries in the area is a major draw for visitors. “Visitors can easily lose themselves for a whole day in the area discovering the diverse range of shows on offer at any given time,” he said.

Building upon that diversity of art is Ab-Anbar Gallery, which moved into the area in September 2023. “We saw the opportunity to contrast the typical gallery offerings found in Fitzrovia by presenting a program that focuses strongly on diasporic voices and intersectional identities,” said Salman Matinfar, the gallery’s co-founding director. “We wanted to create a space where a diverse array of art and artists that have not necessarily had the chance to be seen in the West could be celebrated—and while doing so, enriching the area.”

The cost was another major factor for the galleries that have chosen Fitzrovia as their home. Maria Valeria Biondo, director of Des Bains, opened her gallery in Fitzrovia in June 2023 from East London, which, she said, “has become so trendy that prices are comparable to Central London prices. “That made Central London more appealing as it is easier for people from all over the city to reach it,” she told Artsy.

ALICE AMATI

[Workplace](#) moved to the area after two spaces across East London and Marylebone. “It has a real energy to it, and rent negotiations at that post-COVID time were relatively affordable,” said Miles Thurlow, the gallery's founder.



Exterior view of Workplace, London. Photo by Tom Carter. Courtesy of Workplace, UK.

Whether the influx of galleries is a long-term trend, only time will tell. Some are adamant it will remain an arts hub. Hossack is bullish. “Fitzrovia has always had a very bohemian atmosphere...[it’s] a place for artists and creatives to flourish,” she told Artsy. “I don’t see that changing any time soon.”

Ryan of Grove Gallery agrees. “Fitzrovia will always be a pull for galleries as it has a creative hub clients are drawn to,” he said. Kate Kirby, associate director of Addis Fine Art, which has just celebrated eight years in Fitzrovia, shares a similar view, too. “London is constantly changing, as are the ambitions and networks of our artists,” she said. “Our commitment is always to our artists and audiences, rather

than particular areas or properties, but we certainly intend to continue expanding our network here in Fitzrovia.”

But other galleries caution that the area is still at risk—like London as a whole—of an often volatile rental market. “I find it very hard to speculate, especially with the current political climate,” said Workplace’s Thurlow. “In the end landlords push up

ALICE AMATI

the prices as galleries cluster and demand increases and then as the rents get hiked, less established galleries find somewhere else and the process repeats. There's a lot going for the area and I really like being here, but we remain pragmatic."

Some galleries have left the area, such as Alison Jacques and [Pilar Corrias](#), which moved to Mayfair; and Castor, which recently left the area for a new space in a Grade 2 listed church in Islington, North London. "[It] was a challenge I couldn't turn down, with the potential to create a truly unique and special gallery destination in London," said Andy Wicks, Castor's director. Looking back on his two decades in the art world, Wicks suggests the program of the gallery is often more important than the area. "I've seen areas such as Bethnal Green, Clerkenwell, and Fitzrovia lose popularity, have barren years and now build up again," he said. "I truly believe quality, consistency, and innovation shine through more than just a postcode."



Exterior view of TJ Boutling, London. Photo courtesy of TJ Boutling.

But for the area, it's clear a spillover effect of its bubbling art scene is apparent, with nearby Bloomsbury a case in point. Herald St, which opened its second space there in 2017, has seen "a noticeable uptick in energy of late." It has also "collaborated with other Bloomsbury galleries to make a walking map of the area, and try to coordinate our openings and events," said a spokesperson for the gallery. Grace

ALICE AMATI

Schofield, director of Union Pacific, who moved to Bloomsbury in October 2023, also highlights the walking map and that “it’s a lovely community.”

“The area seems to be undergoing regeneration...and I think there are long-term plans to try and to join it into the Covent Garden/Oxford Street shopping districts,” she said. “We hope it doesn’t go too far in that direction and remains more museum-y and bookish.”

The proximity of other galleries is also a boon for Phillida Reid, who opened her eponymous gallery in Bloomsbury in 2022. “The energy of the new and relocated galleries opening in Bloomsbury...has felt very enjoyable and beneficial to all,” said the gallerist. “Visitors greatly appreciate the proximity and the range of programs within walking distance.”

Fitzrovia has a long history associated with the arts and this recent influx of galleries to the area has resulted in a renewed and sprawling diversity of exhibitions and sense of community. In an infamously precarious London real estate environment, its growth has been one of resounding—and hopefully lasting—success. As Maria Valeria Biondo of Des Bains said: “When you find a good place, stick to it, as much as you can—or until someone evicts you.”