



LISA BEMCO/Los Angeles Times

ROSAMUND FELSEN was a mainstay at Santa Monica's Bergamot Station but appreciates the light in her new downtown gallery and the hustle and bustle outside.

A welcome move to downtown

Carolina Miranda

Rosamund Felsen embraces the grit

There are a lot of reasons that longtime L.A. gallerist Rosamund Felsen is in love with her new exhibition space in downtown Los Angeles.

There is the light, a soft, filtered glow that pours down from the skylights onto a series of bright abstractions by Encinitas-based Kim MacConnel. There is the continuous rumble of the busy industrial street outside, with its mechanical parade of graffiti-bombed trucks and seafood delivery vans.

And, above all, there is the location: just south of the Arts District, in the same light-industrial building that houses Clyde Beswick's CB1 Gallery, part of a growing network of important downtown exhibition spaces.



An installation view of painter Kim MacConnel's exhibition "Avenida Revolucion" at Rosamund Felsen's new gallery in downtown Los Angeles. (Grant Mudford)

ROSAMUND FELSEN GALLERY

For two decades, Felsen has been a mainstay at Santa Monica's Bergamot Station. But a combination of factors (among them: a nightmarish daily commute from Los Feliz) had her looking for a new spot. Downtown, however, wasn't her first choice. In fact, it took a little nudging to get her to this gritty stretch of Santa Fe Avenue, south of the 10 Freeway.

"Clyde had talked to me about it before he even got his place, but I was like, 'Um, hmm, ah, um,'" she says, mimicking her own hesitation. "I had found a space in Frogtown — really quiet and really great. But it was really big, and I didn't want to do it alone. I took people there, but no one wanted to go because it was off the beaten path."

So she gave Beswick a ring and arranged to meet the building's owner. They hit it off. Within three days she had signed a lease. That was roughly six weeks ago.

"It's been great," she says. "I've known Clyde a long time, and we get to be together."

Felsen's is the latest art space to decamp from Santa Monica's Bergamot station, which has been beleaguered by development issues. Earlier this year, Frank Lloyd shut down his eponymous space entirely, choosing to work as a private dealer from Pasadena. And this week, the Santa Monica Museum of Art announced that it would stage one more exhibition in its Bergamot gallery before it retreats to an office in Century City so that it might plot a future location. (My colleague Mike Boehm reported on the museum's departure this week.)

Whether the troubles at Bergamot inspired Felsen's move, she won't say. But the move across town, part of a general eastward migration of art spaces, puts her in buzzier terrain, amid hot spots such as the Mistake Room, Night Gallery and Francois Ghebaly.

"Paul Schimmel has been through," she says of the former Museum of Contemporary Art curator in the process of establishing a downtown space in collaboration with Swiss gallerists Hauser & Wirth. "There has also been a curator from the Hammer. There are a lot of serious collectors who come through. And there are so many artists downtown, and they come through."

Migration patterns

Certainly, Felsen, who has operated a gallery in Los Angeles for almost four decades, has been around to see several cycles of gallery migrations.

"I've seen the center move here and here and here," she says. "First it was La Cienega, then it was Santa Monica Boulevard, then it was West Hollywood and then it was Santa Monica. And now this is one of the areas that has become a center."

Now 81, Felsen is casual and compact, with a direct, deadpan manner — not the sort of dealer perennially in "sell" mode. For her, it is all about the art. And over her career, she has represented key California artists at crucial points in their careers: Chris Burden, Paul McCarthy, Mike Kelley, Lari Pittman, Karen Carson, Jason Rhoades ... the

list goes on.

Born and raised in Pasadena to a middle-class family (her father ran a machine shop for the defense industry), Felsen got married in the early 1950s instead of going to college, she says, "because that's what you did."

She landed in the art world not because she studied it or even deeply yearned for it, but because she fell into it. It happened in the mid-1960s, when her second husband, Stanley Felsen, teamed with collector Stanley Grinstein and master printer Kenneth Tyler to open Gemini G.E.L., the now legendary West Coast print shop.

"The only way it was going to work was if it was work by the top artists," Felsen says.

And that's what they got: established New York figures such as Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Ellsworth Kelly and Claes Oldenburg. Felsen did the paperwork, managed the shipping and kept track of Gemini's myriad moving parts.

"Bob Rauschenberg said I was the world's most beautiful shipping clerk," she says. "Then John Coplans called me about a job at the Pasadena Museum of Art."

An innovator

A number of the artists she worked with — Burden, Pittman, Kelley and McCarthy — were included in the seminal 1992 exhibition "Helter Skelter" at MOCA. And she was the first to exhibit Burden's kinetic piece "The Big Wheel," a monstrous 8-foot iron wheel that is put in motion with a motorcycle — generating enough power to explode through a brick wall if for some reason the wheel became disconnected from its spoke. (The sculpture is now part of the permanent collection at MOCA).

Beswick, a former collector who got to know Felsen because he regularly bought work from her gallery back in the 1980s, says he is thrilled to have her as a neighbor in downtown.

"I respect her so much," he says. "To some extent she is a role model. She is one of the first gallerists I met when I moved to L.A."

Now she is set to carve a niche for herself in downtown. A few days before the inaugural show at the new space — a solo exhibit of MacConnell's bright, textile-inspired abstractions — she already has everything in place: the works have been hung, the storage area tidied up, announcements have gone out. MacConnel cruises the gallery giving



MacConnell surrounded by his work from his solo show at Felsen. The works were inspired by textile and painting traditions in Latin America and Africa, where the artist has traveled extensively. (Grant Mudford / Rosamund Felsen Gallery)

ROSAMUND FEISEN GALLERY

everything a final inspection.

He is showing a series from the late '80s — inspired by the pattern and feel of Kuba cloth and Mexican velvet paintings — from a time when he was dreaming of moving to Tijuana. (Hence the name of the show "Avenida Revolucion," after the city's main thoroughfare.) MacConell and Feisen have an easygoing rapport. He has been part of the gallery's stable since 2003 (as is his wife, sculptor Jean Lowe). He says he is excited to be inaugurating the new space.

"The natural light is beautiful," he says. "And the setting reminds me of SoHo in the late '60s or early '70s — when it was completely industrial."

It is a quality Feisen has come to admire too. One of her favorite perches inside the new space is a bench that faces the street and allows her to observe the comings and goings on Santa Fe Avenue.

"It's such a show," she says. "These great big trucks going by with these brightly painted signs and murals."

She invites me to the bench, where we share cell phone photos of our respective dogs (hers is a Staffordshire Terrier named Bobby Kennedy) and then we sit in silence and watch traffic. A white truck stops just beyond the glass doors bearing a garish painting advertising fake crabmeat. It is followed by another the color of French's mustard. There is a lull and then traffic resumes. A car, advertising a screen-printing company, zips past. It is covered in an indescribable Celtic lines-meets-barbed-wire tattoo pattern. Feisen gives me a knowing grin.

"At first I thought this was so noisy," she says. "Now I just love it."



L.A. gallerist Rosamund Feisen has been in business since 1978, during which time she has represented dozens of artists from California and beyond. This week she inaugurates a brand new space in downtown. (Luis Sinco / Los Angeles Times)

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**Kim
MacConell,
'Avenida
Revolucion'**

Where: Rosamund Feisen
Gallery, 1923 S. Santa Fe
Ave., downtown Los
Angeles

When: Through May 16
Info: (310) 828-8488,
rosamundfeisen.com

Online at *Los Angeles Times*:

latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-rosamund-feisen-inaugurates-new-downtown-space-20150416-column.html#baee=1