

## LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

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### Art's 'Meeting Point'

The Leila Heller Gallery Opens a New Space on 57th Street

By JACKIE BISCHOF [CONNECT](#)

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One of the rooms in Leila Heller's new 16,000-square-foot, six-floor art gallery. *Keith Bedford for The Wall Street Journal*

For almost 30 years, Leila Heller ran her gallery from the Upper East Side, making a name for herself as an art dealer and for her support of emerging and midcareer Middle Eastern artists, before setting up shop in 2010 on a gallery-lined stretch of West 25th Street.

Now, Ms. Heller is returning uptown with a 16,000-square-foot, six-floor space in Midtown Manhattan that she will operate in addition to the Chelsea location. The new gallery will open on Tuesday, with an inaugural exhibition on portraiture that will run through August.

"It's been my whole life," said Ms. Heller of being uptown. "I always knew I was going to go back."

The new location on West 57th Street will be headed up by Thomas Arnold, who spent 14 years as director of Mary Boone Gallery's locations in Chelsea and Midtown before leaving in 2012 to set up his own consulting firm.



Paul Morris, Leila Heller and Thomas Arnold Ramsay  
*de Give for The Wall Street Journal*

The exhibition, titled "Look at Me ... Portraits: Manet to the Present" is organized by Ms. Heller as well as Paul Morris, the founding director of the Armory Show, and Beth Rudin DeWoody, a curator and collector who has worked with the gallery in the past. It will include works by more than 170 artists, including Edgar Degas, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, Jean- Michel Basquiat and Shoja Azari, an Iranian-born filmmaker and artist whose work featured in Ms. Heller's Chelsea gallery last year.

Ms. DeWoody said Ms. Heller is up to the hurdles of the new space. "A space that size gives you great opportunities, but you also want to make sure that everything is top-quality, and you don't just fill it with stuff to fill the space," Ms. De Woody said. "If anyone has the energy, it's got to be Leila."



"I think the challenge is not different from what you have in any gallery space," said Mr. Arnold, "which is really just doing interesting shows and engaging the people who come to the gallery. It's just on a larger scale."

The gallery space will be spread across six floors overlooking bustling 57th Street, including a top floor made bright and airy by glass skylights. Four floors will be devoted to exhibition space, private viewing areas and offices, while one floor, with plywood ceilings and walls, will be available as an experimental space for artists, and another houses a 60-seat screening room and adjacent conference room.

Mr. Morris believes the gallery's ability to host a wide range of exhibitions will give it a competitive edge. "Artists love the idea of doing a show in not just a white box," he said. "If you want artists to come see your space, you want artists to do things with your space."



The facade of Leila Heller's new 16,000-square-foot, six-floor art gallery. *Keith Bedford for The Wall Street Journal*

The gallery is "really in the same spirit of what I've always wanted to do—have salons, to bring different groups of curators, collectors, writers together," Ms. Heller said.

Screenings, panel discussions and educational programs have often accompanied the shows she has put together with curators in the past.

In planning the expansion, Ms. Heller, who is originally from Iran and has master's degrees from George Washington University and the Sotheby's Institute of Art in London, said she also got an injection of energy from her 22-year-old son, Alexander Heller, who will assist in the uptown location while finishing his master's degree in art history.

"He sort of reinvigorated us," said Ms. Heller.

She spent two years looking for an uptown space and almost picked a location on the Upper East Side before finding the 57th Street location. She describes Midtown, already home to Mary Boone, Marian Goodman and Pace galleries, as "the middle of everything" and convenient for her clients, many of whom live in the area or stay in hotels while visiting.

"In way, the uptown space is going to be a bringing together [of] a gallery from the Lower East Side, together with a gallery from Chelsea with a gallery from the Upper East Side," said Ms. Heller. "It's sort of like a meeting point."