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# Pluralism, With Bug Zappers and Doll People

A Critic's Guide to the Best of the Lower East Side

By KEN JOHNSON APRIL 3, 2014

WHEN the [New Museum](#) announced plans in 2002 to move from SoHo to the Bowery, on the Lower East Side, it caused much head scratching in the New York art world. With only about a half-dozen galleries there — a decidedly not chic mix of small businesses and industry and tenement housing — it seemed a strange decision to venture so far off the scene's usual map.

How times have changed. Now the Lower East Side is home to more than 100 galleries. With the neighborhood's myriad boutiques and restaurants, gentrification has prevailed. You don't find here the shows of blue-chip artists like Richard Serra and Jeff Koons, but what you'll see generally reflects the pluralistic mix you'd see in Chelsea or in big art fairs like the Armory Show.

Has the Lower East Side reached a tipping point? Surely it's a sign of something that the behemoth Gagosian Gallery opened a pop-up branch on Thursday night with a [show](#) of sculptures by the Swiss art star Urs Fischer, in a former bank building at 104 Delancey Street, at Ludlow Street.

The district's galleries are spread out mainly within a seven-by-nine-block rectangle between the East Village and Chinatown. The rectangle is bordered by East Houston to the north, Canal to the south, the Bowery to the west and Clinton Street to the east. The following selection of galleries begins in the northeast corner.



Laurie Simmons's "Brunette/Black Dress/OrangeRoom," an example of Kigurumi costume play, at Salon 94 Bowery. Agaton Strom for The New York Times

**SALON 94 BOWERY** [Laurie Simmons](#) has been using photography to investigate stereotypical representations of femininity for many years. The large, glossy color photographs in "[Kigurumi, Dollers and How We See](#)" picture unknown people in costumes with whole-head masks that make them resemble big-eyed, teenage-girl dolls. Kigurumi is a subgenre of Japanese "cosplay" (costume play). Shot in the oddly diminutive rooms of a derelict house, the photographs create an intriguing tension between reality and fantasy.