

The New York Times

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Where Blue-Chip Brands Meet Brassy Outliers

From Hot to Schlock: Holland Cotter Tours Chelsea Galleries

By **HOLLAND COTTER** and **PETE WELLS** APRIL 3, 2014

WITH upward of 200 galleries, Chelsea is still the largest and, cash-wise, the richest of the city's art districts. It's also a microcosm of the art industry, offering a range of current product, a ton of junk and some stimulating work. Apart from a few outlier galleries, its main boundaries have stayed consistent: 17th Street to 27th Street, 10th to 11th Avenues. Here, you'll find some of the largest commercial art spaces in town, possibly on earth; multisite franchises ([Gagosian](#), [Matthew Marks](#), [David Zwirner](#)); and a handful of reliably ambitious small galleries, which show some of the best work. Art district, not art neighborhood, most accurately describes this area, though that's changing. Apartment buildings are going up, along with the new Whitney Museum. And the High Line is bringing a fringe of green to dour streets. Painting is everywhere, but the most interesting work I saw was in sculpture, photography and video, with a continuing performance piece my attraction of choice.

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH Leigh Ledare began drawing notice in 2008 when he exhibited sexually explicit photographs of a woman he identified as his mother. Because of their implicitly Oedipal content, he became their real subject, as he continues to be in two more recent series at [Mitchell-Innes & Nash](#). Both are products of complicated ground rules.

For the first series, from 2011, he spent four days in a cabin in upstate New York, photographing his ex-wife, and he commissioned her new husband to photograph her in the same location later. Mr. Ledare then arranged the two sets of pictures side by side, inviting viewers to detect in them different emotional attitudes, meaning, in effect, to read into them what they will.

The second series was a commission from "an unidentified European woman with high-profile to political and media worlds" (a gallery statement), who asked Mr. Ledare to photograph her nude at home. He superimposed the images, the face obscured, on a front page of The New York Times, placing her nude body beside articles about a mass murder, [same-sex marriages](#) and Lucian Freud's death. Mr. Ledare brings the outside world into the psychosexual interior he's been locked in, and it's a relief. It was getting too stifling in there.

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH