

Perrotin

Art House

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BEAR MARKET Right: Emmanuel Perrotin in his Paris home with *O.T.*, a painting by Thilo Heinzmann, whom he represents. Left: Work by Perrotin's artists fills the living room, where a foam and feather sculpture by Paola Pivi hangs over a taxidermied pig by Wim Delvoe, a painting by Bernard Frize, a Maurizio Cattelan photograph of the Hollywood sign and two works by Elmgreen & Dragset, including a sculpture of a maid titled *Irina*. For all art credits throughout, see page 126.



ART HOUSE

For years, dealer Emmanuel Perrotin has been a mover and shaker who lives as energetically as he sells art. Now he's settling into a Paris apartment and a new five-story gallery in New York City.

BY JOSHUA LEVINE PHOTOGRAPHY BY FREDERIK VERCRUYSSE

FORMOST OF THE 25 or so years that Emmanuel Perrotin was building his Paris art gallery into a global operation, he never really had a proper place to call home. When he started out in 1989, he bunked down in a tiny back room off his gallery on the rue de Turbigo. Sixteen years later, when he moved the gallery to the rue de Turenne, he slept in a kind of "ship's cabin" of a place over what is now the gallery's bookstore. If he wasn't there, you could probably find him crashing in hotels on the international art fair circuit—from Art Basel in Miami to Art Basel in Switzerland.

That all changed three years ago when Perrotin, 48, moved into a grand duplex in an imposing *hôtel particulier* in Paris's third arrondissement. It's still only a few doors down from the gallery. And yes, all he has to do is stroll out of his tall French doors and across a narrow strip of garden to reach the Salle de Bal, a ballroom in the adjoining Hôtel d'Ecquevilly that Perrotin converted to a gallery annex in

2014. On a recent winter evening, as on so many others, waiters were setting up for a bash, rolling large gas heaters onto the terrace; Perrotin is renowned for his swinging parties, where pop-star pals like the duo behind Daft Punk might be cajoled into playing a little something.

The apartment itself seems almost like another gallery annex. It is very elegant, to be sure, but it's difficult for the Vladimir Kagan sofa or the Paul Frankl dining room set to command attention when a giant blue bear by Paola Pivi looms overhead and a tattooed, taxidermied pig by Wim Delvoe squats nearby.

Works by most of Perrotin's heavy hitters—Takashi Murakami and Maurizio Cattelan first and foremost—are scattered everywhere. In fact, there's almost nothing here that isn't by one of Perrotin's artists, as if the apartment were fixed up to show how the work might look in an actual residence.

Perrotin goes back a very long way with many of the artists he works with. Their chumminess is a big part of

his success, not to mention his formula for fending off poachers, who have only gotten bolder as his artists have grown in esteem. Where many people have family photos on display, Perrotin has a cabinet of jokey memorabilia from his artists. A gold-plated tile with greenish splotches was used to test the effects of pigeon and seagull poop on the enormous gold sculptures Murakami was installing in the gardens of Versailles during his 2010 exhibit. There's a tiny replica of the red rhino Xavier Veilhan exhibited in 1999 at Paris's Centre Pompidou.

So it means something when Perrotin shows me a silver frame that he's just filled with photos of his girlfriend, Lorena Vergani, who is soon to give birth to their first child. "I bought the frame a long time ago but I just never got around to filling it," says Perrotin. "I had the feeling that it might jinx things before I really settled down, and now *voilà!* Here I am finally set up in life." There's a Christmas tree—a real one, not an artist's commentary on Christmas—and wooden train tracks have been laid out on the floor to await the arrival of his 4-year-old daughter, who lives in Berlin with Perrotin's ex, museum director Patricia Kamp.

The people who work with him are happy about all this. "Emmanuel is very generous, but intense," says Peggy LeBoeuf, his right hand for over 20 years. "For us, it's good that he's with someone. It makes him much calmer."

It's not just domestic tranquillity that's making Perrotin less jumpy these days. His gallery weathered some very heavy seas in the past, but he believes he's finally managed to take on enough ballast to keep it from capsizing in any squall. In 2012, Perrotin opened a gallery in Hong Kong. In 2013, he opened one in the former Bank of New York Building on Madison Avenue in New York. Last year he bought a new bookshop and office space in Seoul, South Korea. This month, Perrotin inaugurates a new gallery at 130 Orchard Street on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Not long after, he'll open a big gallery in Tokyo's Roppongi neighborhood.

"You've either got to be very big or very small. The toughest thing is when you're a midsize gallery with about 25 employees," he says. (He now has 80 employees worldwide.) "I had a hell of a time getting over that hump—those were the worst years. But 2016 was very good, and I've gotten to the point where I can finally pause to reflect."

If Madison Avenue was Perrotin's New York toe-dip, Orchard Street is his big plunge. The old Beckenstein Fabrics factory gives him 25,000 square feet of space on five floors—roughly 10 times the size of his Madison Avenue gallery, which he's letting go. He can now present ambitious shows by established artists and newcomers; the opening exhibition features Iván Argote, a young Colombian installation artist and film director.

"Madison Avenue was OK, but really, in the end—*voilà!*," says Perrotin. "I didn't even have my own office. Now I'll have my own apartment in the gallery, so I can spend much more time in New York."

The way Perrotin sizes things up, the gallery business, or at least his gallery business, makes this peripatetic existence unavoidable. The frenzied parties, the grinding perpetual motion, New York, Japan, all of it. But behind the fun lies a terrible dread. It's

like that old Dr. Hook song: "When you're in love with a beautiful woman, you know it's hard... / Everybody wants to take your baby home."

Perrotin says as much himself. "For me, one of the factors that explains my drive to go so fast was always this fear of losing my artists."

"The competitiveness is real," says art adviser Sandy Heller. "If you've got an artist who sells for a lot of money, somebody's going to want a piece of that, and artists are self-aggrandizing. Emmanuel isn't doing all these things because he wants to. Those circuses aren't just fluff. They're part of the program. It's riskless for the artist when he jumps ship to a bigger gallery, but in Emmanuel's case, you haven't seen much of that."

Perrotin stumbled across Murakami, Cattelan and Damien Hirst in the early '90s, before any of them had attracted much notice. Perrotin had grown up a middle-class Paris kid with mediocre grades and little direction. An apprenticeship in a small gallery at age 16 changed that fast, and by age 23, he was selling Hirst's early Medicine Cabinets pieces out of his living room for \$2,000, a fee that covered the price of fabrication, transportation and payment to the artist, but didn't leave much for Perrotin.

He first met Murakami at a Yokohama, Japan, art fair in 1994. They took to each other immediately, but since neither spoke English, they communicated mostly by sending drawings back and forth. Two years later at New York's Gramercy International Art Fair (the precursor to today's Armory Show), Perrotin offered three T-shirts printed with Murakami's big-busted *Hiropon* figure. They sold out, and Perrotin proposed a solo show in Paris.

He prickles at the accusation that he just got lucky. "Everybody thinks that all I had to do was choose good artists, but it took 10 years with Takashi Murakami and Maurizio Cattelan before we had any success." A *Hiropon* statue by Murakami recently sold for \$15 million, but the first one Perrotin sold was priced at \$12,000. "I could only sell it for \$10,000," recalls Perrotin. "It cost \$8,000 to make, so Takashi got \$1,000 and I got \$1,000, which I used to pay the transport from Japan to Paris."

It's not just about footing the bill for paints and brushes. In 2000, Cattelan introduced Perrotin to a young Italian artist he knew named Paola Pivi, who was just out of art school. Pivi outlined a project she had conceived while working at the CERN physics lab in Switzerland. It would require 80 motors, 96 photoelectric switches and 1,440 tiny needles suspended on almost invisible thread. As a viewer approaches, the needles sway in harmony, like a school of fish. It took a company that made prototypes for NASA to build it.

INSTALLMENT PLAN

Clockwise from right: Memorabilia on a bookshelf; a 1996 canvas by Maurizio Cattelan with pieces by Lothar Hempel and Germaine Richier; a courtyard entrance; a 2014 sculpture by Jean-Michel Othoniel in the garden; a curved Vladimir Kagan couch in the living room; a Klara Kristalova sculpture in front of a salon-style assemblage of works; Philip Aretander chairs under Othoniel drawings; Wim Delvoye's *Gothic Tower* and a piece by Pae White in the entrance hall.



"Emmanuel said, 'Are you crazy?'" recalls Pivi. "We did it. It cost as much as an apartment. He spent a fortune." Pivi has required various art supplies since then, among them: llamas, alligators, a 35-foot twin-engine airplane and 10,000 liters of whipped cream. "He just goes along with it," says Pivi. "With Emmanuel, it's like children playing together. I have had meetings with other galleries, which I always tell Emmanuel about, but it never works out. No fun."

IN 2009, Perrotin's whole enterprise almost came apart. The financial crisis had hit the contemporary art world hard. "I had \$6 million in canceled orders, and I had already spent the money," he recalls. "I had enormous personal problems—I was leaving my wife at the time, staying in hotels for nine months—and now I'm fighting to save the gallery. Everybody's telling me we're heading into a crisis, to start laying people off, to

circle the wagons. I said if we do that, we're going to be swept away and our biggest artists will leave."

Instead, Perrotin tacked hard in the other direction. His best defense has always been a good party. For this one, he rented a big boat called *Das Schiff*, moored on the Rhine. Pharrell Williams came. Perrotin had met Williams in Miami the year before and put him together with Murakami for the first of many collaborations. On the boat, Perrotin presented their sculpture, *Simple Things*, which renders such household commodities as a ketchup bottle, a bag of Doritos, a shoe and a cupcake in diamonds, rubies and other gemstones. (It sold for approximately \$2 million.) "It was not in the spirit of the times," Perrotin admits. Williams got up onstage and rapped a long improvised ode to Perrotin and Murakami before an audience that included Larry Gagosian and Jay Jopling, two of Perrotin's biggest competitors. (Damien Hirst, the one that got away, defected to

Jopling's White Cube gallery and is also represented by Gagosian.)

"Perrotin got to me when I was in a lost place," says Williams. "He put his arms around me. He's like an amazing big brother, and he's been very generous getting other artists to jibe with me. He's that guy. He knows I'd go anywhere for him."

Perrotin has come a long way since the gallery's darker days. With the opening of his Orchard Street and Japan galleries, he has hoisted himself to the top tier of a business that increasingly demands global heft. "He's definitely a key player in the contemporary art world," says Heller. But that only raises the stakes for staying there. "If you can't give your artists a show at MoMA, you've got to have a MoMA show for them in your gallery."

Perrotin is helping to shape the forces driving the global art business as much as he is shaped by them. Art galleries are stealing a page from the big French

luxury conglomerates Kering and LVMH, he says. There will be consolidation: Bigger galleries will team up with smaller "research" galleries, which are better positioned to unearth new talent. "It would be absolutely grotesque of me not to acknowledge that I'm closer to the Larry Gagosian business model," Perrotin says. "He changed the whole business, and I'm an enormous admirer of what he's built. I also admire someone like [the influential New York gallerist] Paula Cooper. She showed how you can be irreplaceable without having 80 employees. For me, though, coming into the business when I did, that was no longer possible."

The thing is, Perrotin can't stop because he just can't stop. It pains him, he says, but that's the way it is. "Every six months, this feeling of existential anguish comes back deep inside of me, and I say no. There's no time to enjoy yourself. That's the big problem right now." ●