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## Defying Recessions, Riots and Disasters : Art: Gallery owner Sue Spaid is among the new crop of young art dealers who are opening doors for L.A.'s latest generation of emerging talent.

*Fast Track: Up and Comers in Arts and Entertainment*

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In her L.A. gallery's cluttered office, Sue Spaid is hunkered over the telephone with the editor of a magazine of art world gossip. She's raving about the turnout for her artist Carole Caroompas' show at the SoHo gallery P.P.O.W. She hints that all the truly important collectors and writers were in attendance despite competition from a reception for the more famous artist David Salle at the posh Larry Gagosian Gallery. Her remarks are impertinent, daring and typical of the upstart gallery owner. "I was just generating some hysteria," she explains with a naughty laugh.

Spaid is one of L.A.'s new crop of young art dealers, which also includes Richard Telles and Kim Light with their eponymous galleries, TRI's Rory Devine, 1301's Brian Butler and Food House's Randy Sommer. Seemingly undeterred by recessions, riots and natural disasters, these dealers have opened galleries to support emerging talent. They are showing the latest generation of art-school graduates as well as 40-something artists who may have been overlooked in the delirious 1980s. They take pride in championing Los Angeles artists.

Spaid opened her storefront gallery at 7454 1/2 Beverly Blvd. in 1990 and quickly gained an audience among artists, critics and the more adventuresome collectors. Her most noteworthy campaign has been on behalf of Caroompas, an artist who has had an influential and devoted following but whose work was long considered too overtly sexual and difficult for galleries coping with the effects of the recession.

Spaid is a willing fan. "I'm obsessed with art that has an equal blend of style and content," she says. "To me, beauty is not about appearance, beauty is an incomparable task."

Caroompas says she was willing to be without a gallery for five years, waiting for someone who would be truly dedicated to her style of work. She recalls that one dealer admired her paintings, which are often about issues of gender and representation, but urged her to "get rid of the penises." Caroompas compares such a response to Spaid. "If Sue believes in something, she really goes for it. She brought back a lot of visibility for me. She's not looking at it as a sale but as the building of a career."

Although Caroompas was among the first to join the gallery, her first show wasn't until June of 1992. Spaid uses this example to explain her system of "targeting" a specific audience for an artist's work. "I spent six months planning Carole's show. I must have sent out 40 sets of slides contacting people in New York like gallery owners, museum people and critics. I feel like when the show opens, it's almost too late."

Spaid's efforts led indirectly to Caroompas' inclusion in last year's biennial exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, and to the commitment from P.P.O.W.

"One of my biggest successes has been getting my artists shows in New York," Spaid says. "I try to find matches of personalities and styles. All the L.A. dealers told me that I would never be able to get the New York dealers to pay me a percentage for showing my artists and every one of them has done it."

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Such efforts have paid off. Her artists Nancy Evans and Carter Potter are now represented by respected New York galleries Joe Fawbush and Jose Freire, respectively. And she reports another achievement with pride: "All but one of my artists have been in museum shows in the last year."

Spaid speaks in the rapid, no-nonsense tones of big business. The shadowy euphemisms of gallery artspeak are mercifully missing from her forthright demeanor. A woman with sharp blue eyes and a healthy flush in her cheeks, she carries herself with a bouncy, electric impatience as though enthusiasm were coursing through her veins. While many art dealers share her passion, few have her business experience.

Spaid's resume reads like the fast lane of a freeway forced onto an unpredictable detour. Her earliest years were spent in Saudi Arabia, where her father worked as a petroleum engineer. Her family indulged in European vacations and she remembers the visits to art museums as an early influence. After earning degrees in chemical engineering and economics from the University of Texas in Austin, Spaid moved to Manhattan where she worked at a series of securities firms.

Between 1986 and 1988, Spaid was a broker of international bonds for the British firm S. G. Warburg Securities. The surprise turn-off took place when she found herself developing "a huge addiction." To art.

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In 1989, Spaid moved to Los Angeles to promote and sell a calculator she had programmed to figure percentages on junk bonds. That market collapsed three months after her arrival. Fortunately, she had made a one-year commitment to Gary Kornblau to work as advertising director for the journal *Art Issues*. Simultaneously, she threw herself into writing about art on a free-lance basis, a career that pays only nominally better than minimum wage.

Spaid was undaunted. "It seemed the galleries here were only showing New York and European artists. I had a dedication to create something in L.A. that I could export to New York and Europe. A lot of L.A. dealers made a compromise by importing so much. What do they get in return?" Spaid convinced a friend in New York to back her gallery with a stipend of \$3,000 a month. When she opened in June of 1990, she was 28 years old. After eight months, the backer left Spaid to do it on her own.

To support the gallery, she took a series of part-time jobs, and she still rides the bus to work. "What I do is more important than the glamour of being an art dealer," she says. For Spaid, collecting art is a way of supporting a view of what the culture should be. Yet, she believes in art collecting as long-term investment. "If you're a rich person, you're better off buying art than pretending to make some rate of return off a gallery as a business. My artists' prices have outperformed the stock and bond markets. The people in the art world who make money are the people who buy art."