

# Dino Eli, Owner-Curator, Provocateur, Settles In

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Tobi Elkin

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□ Dino Eli, owner and curator of both Dino Eli Gallery and Orchard Windows Gallery. Photo by A. Jesse Jiryu Davis for The Lo-Down

One day this fall, I was meandering south down gallery dotted Orchard Street. and bumped into Dino Eli. I found him doing his customary ritual dance—floating between the eponymous Dino Eli Gallery and Orchard Windows Gallery, a tiny space just steps away. Eli is the founder and curatorial director of both spaces.

Equal parts impresario and provocateur, he created a stir in May when his Windows Gallery mounted a show dubbed "Porno Paintings" that some LES parents complained about (the gallery is across the street from P.S. 42).

Showcasing emerging artists and avant-garde work, along with performance pieces, Eli's artists and his plate-spinning antics have begun to catch the eye of the art world and collectors.

I recently spoke with Eli about his galleries and his plans.

**Tobi Elkin:** You've got two spaces on Orchard Street. Tell me about why you chose Orchard. and why do you have two galleries?

**Dino Eli:** Orchard Windows Gallery opened in October 2010. I wanted to give emerging artists opportunities to have solo shows and I wanted to build an art gallery. They started off as weekly shows. I knew I had to be different because there are a lot of galleries in the neighborhood.

When I saw the place and the windows, I figured why not throw a show every week. There was a buzz right way. You'd be surprised at how many people walk by and stare at the windows. I would take submissions at the door although now it's more through online submissions. We have one show per week at the Windows Gallery.

I opened Dino Eli Gallery in October. It also shows emerging artists but I'll use that gallery to try to bring in some bigger artists if I can. The most recent show was Artist on the Prowl featuring four artists including David Tamargo and Gregory de la Haba. Art Basel flew in the Trash Queen for it. They pitched me a group show.

**TE:** What's your background in and involvement with art?

**DE:** I was born and raised in New York, went to FIT for two years. I've worked in retail, as a waiter, as an actor for years. I've always loved art but it wasn't until I took an art history class in college that I fell in love with art.

I'm lucky to have good friends who come in and help out.

**TE:** Tell me about your stable of artists for each gallery. How do you find them?

**DE:** We started doing some juried shows, so we put some ads out. Between the web, word of mouth and since I've opened the new gallery, submissions have doubled. The only time I don't take submissions is when I've having a reception with a solo show. I show the work and depending on peoples' reaction, then we will talk about representation. For sales, I take no more than 40%. The truth is the galleries are not so much about making money right now. It's about staying alive and staying open to continue what I'm doing. I'm sure the money will come.

□ From Jason Woodside's opening for "Black Flags and Blue Faces," at Orchard Windows Gallery this past August. Photo via Orchard Windows Gallery website.

**TE:** What styles do you gravitate towards?

**DE:** You can't just accept everyone. I throw a group show where I fit 40 artists in the Windows Gallery. I'm not so snobbish about art. I know what I like. If it's something I don't like, it doesn't necessarily mean they're rejected. I send the work to other people to see what they think. I'm reviewing submissions all the time. I'm being more selective with work for the Dino Eli Gallery.

**TE:** When I stopped in at the Windows Gallery a few weeks ago, you had some Barbie dolls piled up on the floor. You told me you'd slept next to the piles. What was that all about?

**DE:** I do a little performance art. That night I'd done a performance with a wedding dress and the dolls that complimented the show that was on view. I've also slept on the flag, on an ironing board, on a ladder. I try to extend what's going on with a particular show. The reaction is great. I'm introducing more performances along with the shows.

**TE:** Where is the art market now? How would you characterize it?

**DE:** I'm new in this business, making big waves. In time, I will be able to build a stronger collector base. I've made 14 or 15 sales in the year I'm open, but I've had 100 shows. The biggest sale was \$3,500. We're going to start bringing in some prints and doing more to encourage sales. We'll be set up for Internet sales in about a month or two.

The collectors are definitely coming in. There's a buzz on the gallery. And I'm in the hottest gallery district in Manhattan right now. There are eight galleries on Orchard now. For me, it's about staying open and continuing to do what I'm doing and, of course, the money is going to come.

**TE:** What's your approach to running the gallery?

**DE:** No one comes in and out of the gallery without meeting me. There's so much to talk about and I don't want that cold feeling of having someone sit behind a desk and no one's talking. Of course I don't talk to them if they don't want to talk.

With artists, I evaluate their work very quickly. It makes me happy. Sometimes they come in with an entire portfolio. It makes someone's day when they're told they're approved. For about 75% of our artists, we're their first solo show.

Orchard Windows Gallery, founded in 2010, specializes in showing the work of emerging and under-represented artists. OWG is located at 37 Orchard St. The Dino Eli Gallery is at 81 Hester St. Both galleries are open 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. Phone: 917.995.1001.

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