

## Galleries | Damien Hirst's new

space is part of a growing hub south of the Thames – but will artists be priced out? Gareth Harris reports

W eary commuters packed into trains arriving at London Waterloo will soon be able to see major works of art up-close, thanks to Damien Hirst. The artist's long-awaited gallery in Lambeth, on the south side of the Thames, is draped with a large-scale LED screen visible from the railway tracks that skirt the arches opposite the new 37,000 sq ft space.

Artists' works will be showcased across the exterior of the Newport Street Gallery, the core of which has been fashioned from three Victorian buildings, formerly studios that churned out scenery paintings for West End theatres in the 1920s. The digital billboard stands where the theatrical production posters once hung – a marketing masterstroke typical of Hirst.

The striking gallery, designed by British architects Caruso St John, takes up a sizeable portion of the street, its zigzag roof jutting into the skyline and the bright white lettering of a "pharmacy2" sign standing out in an urban setting dotted with social housing estates.

"Damien has a long connection with the building, which he purchased in 2003," says a spokesperson for Hirst. "It used to be one of his studios. The high ceilings are perfectly suited to displaying art, so it made sense to develop the gallery there."

The former Young British Artist (YBA) will stage group and solo exhibitions in the space, drawn from his extensive Murderer collection. Jeff Koons and Richard Prince feature, but Hirst's holdings also contain some surprises, including works by indigenous American artists from the Pacific Northwest, such as Don Yeomans and James Hart. The venue is to open in October with an exhibition of paintings by the late British artist John Hoyland. "I believe art should be experienced by as many people as possible, and I've felt guilty owning work that is stored away in boxes where no one can see it," says Hirst.

This latest £25m addition to his art empire forms part of a growing art hub south of the Thames. Five minutes' walk away is a new five-storey permanent home for commercial gallery Cabinet. The purpose-built property, which stands on the site of the former Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens (see sidebar), is backed by London-based collector and publisher Charles Asprey.

Cabinet, founded in Brixton in 1991 and currently based in Old Street, has worked with high-profile names such as Martin Creed and Tris Vonna-Michell. "The original plan to relocate dates back nearly a decade, when Cabinet



# London's art transplant

From top: Damien Hirst's Newport Street Gallery; the Gasworks art studio space; how Gasworks should look after renovation; publisher and art collector Charles Asprey

Below left: 1859 photograph of the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens  
Kover: Gasworks  
HAT Projects/Bethany Clarke, Lambeth Archive  
1859 photograph from Vauxhall Gardens  
A History by David E. Cole and Alan Borg Orale  
University Press, ESS



directors Martin McGeown and Andrew Wheatley began a conversation with the artists with whom they work and their friend Charles Asprey about designing a permanent location for the gallery," a spokesman says. McGeown says that Cabinet, which moves to its new base next spring, "has been itinerant for 20 years, at the mercy of rent hikes; this was the way to break that cycle".

But there is already a contemporary art haven in the area. Standing beside the Oval cricket ground in nearby Kennington is Gasworks, a studio space for international and local artists active



## From pleasure garden to developer's dreamland

Its history lives on in its name: Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. Framed on one side by grimy railway arches that house nightclubs, Portuguese cafés and a gay sauna, and on the other by a children's city farm, the gardens sit within a dense carpet of social housing. Now a public park, complete with playground and pigeons, the gardens are overlooked by the postmodern deco bulk of M16's riverside headquarters. There is pleasure here of a sort, but it is a very different picture from the one found between the 17th and 19th centuries.

In those days, this was London's premier nightspot, an Arcadian landscape that by night was strung with thousands of twinkling lanterns and bathed in the sound of orchestral music, chatter and clinking silverware. For a shilling, anyone could enjoy an evening of illicit liaisons or peacock displays of the latest silks. And it was an unusually classless place – although the wealthy could hire supper boxes for privacy or increased visibility.

The advent of the railways and changes in fashion killed off this form of pleasure but the frisson of sexuality survived. Now the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, a famous gay and drag cabaret venue, is under threat and has become the subject of one of London's preservation campaigns.

The pleasure gardens might have been a generator of commissions for artists painting backdrops and making sculptures, but art has had only a marginal presence here in recent

times. Until now. The new home of commercial gallery Cabinet appears to be based on the form of the orchestra platform and pavilion of the old pleasure gardens. Designed by Trevor Horne, it is a vote of confidence in the area for this sharp gallery to set up shop here.

Even Cabinet, though, is dwarfed by Vauxhall's biggest new art space: Damien Hirst's Newport Street Gallery. Set a little further along the railway arches, it seems to take up one entire side of the road, swallowing chunky industrial buildings and adding big new brick blocks crowned with a sawtooth roof. It is designed by Caruso St John, which is fast becoming Britain's gallery builder of choice (its new Mayfair Gagosian is due to open in October). Newport Street is recognisably Caruso's work – professional, meticulous, industrial, austere, a little dour – and it is slightly at odds with the exuberance of Hirst's work.

As a rule, architects and designers move into a low-cost, dilapidated area, make it fashionable, and are followed by developers and estate agents. Vauxhall is a curious reversal of that. Stretching along the south side of the Thames there is already a torrent of construction.

Hirst, though, has form in capturing the zeitgeist. Now he is cutting out the middleman, taking his work straight to the streets. Hirst was once the future of art. Now that one-time future is in Vauxhall.

Edwin Heathcote

since 1994. The trailblazing organisation has been a breeding ground for artists such as Yinka Shonibare, Goshka Macuga and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye.

Gasworks now has a new lease of life after major redevelopment. A preview of the refurbished space with director Alessio Antonioli reveals how the finer features of the Victorian building have been enhanced by British architects HAT Projects. Handsome brickwork and beams form an impressive backdrop for artists working across the 13 studios. The venue is due to reopen on September 24, with the first solo show in the expanded exhibition space dedicated to South African artist Kemang Wa Lehulere.

Antonioli explains that the owner agreed to sell the freehold for £1.1m. "By purchasing our property, we are much more in control of our future," he says. The revamp and freehold cost £2.1m in total (among the funders, Arts Council England awarded a £1.2m grant). As for why it has taken until now for south London to blossom as a centre for art, Antonioli says: "Arguably the south is dotted with brownfields rather than disused warehouses. This could have been one of the reasons why the area was more difficult to inhabit and transform without huge cash injections."

But beyond such large-scale redevelopment, artists' spaces are under threat. Tara Cranswick, director of art organisation V22, which provides workspaces across south-east London, says that encouraging and sustaining creative businesses must be part of city planning. She warns that otherwise London risks falling into a similar situation to Manhattan, where fewer and fewer artists can afford to live and work.

The Greater London Authority says it is in discussions about new artists' studio space with a number of commercial developers, including those involved in the Nine Elms regeneration project. This 227-hectare developmental behemoth, running from Lambeth Bridge to

## One gallery in the area says it 'has been itinerant for 20 years and at the mercy of rent hikes'

Battersea Power Station, will encompass 6.5m sq ft of commercial space, up to 11 hotels and 20,000 new homes (4,000 of them classed as affordable).

The scale of this riverside development is making some local arts professionals jittery. "It is going to be interesting to see how things pan out," says Joe Scotland, director of south London-based, non-profit art group Studio Voltaire. "I worry that cultural provision will only be given lip-service and not properly embedded within the plans."

Helen Fisher, programme director at Nine Elms, says: "It's the opposite of a gated community. Some elements will be for the residents only, but there will be arts and culture for everybody." On a gargantuan model of Nine Elms, she points out a "linear park" peppered with public art that will run the length of the residential and business quarter. This arts artery will take in a series of six sculptures installed permanently in Embassy Gardens, near to where the new US Embassy is being built. The first works for the project – including pieces by Sarah Lucas, Simon Fujiwara and Mohammed Qasim Ashfaq – are due to be unveiled in mid-October, funded by Embassy Gardens developer Ballymore.

South London has a rich history of artistic activity, with galleries and studios taking advantage of the relatively affordable rental market, says Scotland. But he warns: "As the property market continues to grow and our lease agreements come up, we are going to be priced out of the city."

The area is on the cusp of radical change. How it moves forward could determine whether London remains a relevant city for contemporary art.

