

Detroit Revisited

ART



Art adviser and Motor City native Todd Levin paints a more balanced picture of his hometown.

BY MARINA CASHDAN
PORTRAIT BY ROB KULISEK

"I think my job is to get the hell out of the way," says Todd Levin, a New York-based art adviser and the curator of "Another Look at Detroit," a group exhibition opening on June 26 at Marianne Boesky Gallery and Marlborough Chelsea in Manhattan (through Aug. 9). "I'm here to organize this and then let the works speak for themselves." Though he's curated nine shows in the last five years, Levin is known in the art world as someone who works with major art collectors to build world-renowned collections. But with this exhibition, Levin shifts his focus from his clients' interests to an urban community and environment he loves: Motor City.

Born and raised in Detroit, Levin wanted to present a more balanced view of the Midwestern city—not what he calls the "ruin porn" so frequently depicted in social media. Though the region's grittiness isn't fictional, Levin hopes to offer what he describes as "the real Detroit that I know and where tons of young people are doing amazing things." To highlight this, Levin accompanied Marianne Boesky, Marlborough Chelsea director Max Levai, and curator Amanda Schmitt on a trip there. The four visited many artist studios. "I was reminded that hope can reside in art,"

Levai says. "Todd also provided an excellent and all-encompassing perspective on the city's artistic tradition in comparison with its social, economic, and cultural conditions."

Boesky, too, wanted Levin to change the stereotype of a city she has close ties to. Both her parents were born and raised there, and it was a regular destination for her when she was growing up. "We want to shine a bright light," she says, "on this once-shining city that continues to contribute to the arts."

With works spanning more than 150 years—from 19th-century watercolorist William James Bennett to contemporary artists Scott Reeder and the late Mike Kelley, all of whom have lived or worked in Detroit, or were inspired by it—the show, like the city, is sprawling. Levai and Boesky's spacious Chelsea galleries will accommodate Levin's grand vision; since both dealers wanted to realize the show, they teamed up to do so. "This [show] isn't in any way trying to purport that this is Detroit," Levin says. "It's very open-ended, generous, and nonspecific." For a rapidly changing city, one balancing economic woes and ambitious redevelopment, open-ended is all too appropriate.