



## II. Q&A: Q Asks, Q Answers

**1969 GALLERY'S QUANG BAO  
INTERVIEWS HIMSELF**

*What artwork did you wake up with this morning?*

James Bowles' *Goliath* (2022). It reminded me how deeply the Marlboro Man is lodged into our cultural consciousness. In Bowles' case, the masculinity comes with a vulnerable oh-no head clutch, like his car just blew up.

*Are you going to exhibit it, maybe try to sell it?*

Honestly, I sometimes forget I'm supposed to place these things into collections.

*So then...*

I'm sure James would respect me more if I sold it. Most artists hate gallerists just a little bit for how distracted we get.

*What do you mean?*

I don't think artists realize how hard it is to run a contemporary art space. There are roughly 8 billion people on earth. I can assure you that almost none of them want to spend money on art. The art market is still too small, and it takes real effort to succeed in it.

*But you're known as a painting gallery and admired for that. Someone at the CAN Ibiza Art Fair called you "The King of Painting." And you seem a favorite gallery to poach from.*

I don't care about any of what you just said, except the poaching part. To do all the early, heavy lifting only to have an artist exit or taken is heart-breaking.

*What's the toughest part of owning a gallery?*

I think I just told you.

*No, I mean about the actual work.*

The administrative labor is heavy. Since no two artists, artworks or exhibitions are ever the same, we recast previews, installations, press releases, from scratch every 6-8 weeks.

It's the ultimate professional Groundhog Day.

*It sounds like a lot. Are there hidden difficulties?*

When an artist leaves. I think I just said that again because we just experienced it. We've been riding this relationship together — a gallery and the artist — burrowing our way towards the semblance of a career, and then the road forks. It's a breakup that feels like a rejection. I never dump an artist. I prefer to let them exit so it's not burdensome wherever they end up. I'm okay to be on the losing end of gossip.

*You're not cynical about the art world then?*

Not at all. I love watching the pretense, and every once in a while I find these golden moments, usually when I'm alone in front of artworks. I like the lingering effects of art.

*I'd ask but it sounds too intimate to venture into.*

It's actually quite public, even in an artist's studio. Mostly, I watch the person, which is sometimes me, looking at an artwork. And sometimes, you'll see the person try to dance with a sculpture or walk into a painting. The body tells the truth. The talking is noise. Talking about art can make me cynical. That part I cop to.

*Has it been a dream to own a gallery in New York City?*

Hardly. The idea that an individual can come in at any time and say anything is not my idea of a good time.

*Then why do it? I hear the hours are never-ending.*

I'm not a person with real transferable professional skills. I can read upside down. I can edit your memoir. Opening a space was my way of having a "living magazine" of ideas and images. I'm not really motivated by money or notoriety. I only care to be around creativity and what humankind can make. I go home for my pleasures.

*Which are?*

I'm not admitting to anything, but you know who you are.

*Tell us about hot, new artists you're after.*

It's amazing how often I get asked this nowadays. I'm averse to the word "hot" because it's followed by the word "cool." It would be bad for business to answer. I'm not stingy. I'm quite loving and generous. But I prefer to go public with an artist once we've figured out our working relationship.

*Where do you discover artists?*

I make studio visits at MFA programs. I usually ask 1969's artists who they like. We have meetings every other Friday at the gallery to discuss new artists. Collectors barge in with names. It's never just me. And honestly, I don't care to be the first or the one to discover anyone. We're an emerging art gallery with a focus on emerging artists and we're doing well so inevitably people form their opinions and our reputation gets made.

*And what makes you eventually decide you want to work with an artist?*

The art, the promise of future work ahead, the ease and fit of the relationship, my intuition. If artists can talk convincingly about art, have a good work ethic, are fun to be around, then that's helpful and influences our decisions.

*So then what is the deciding factor; what other things are you looking for?*

There is no single deciding factor, and if there were, I'm not sure I'd give up so easily still. It's some combination of all or none of the things mentioned above.

*Okay, so if you can't definitively say why you would work with an artist, what is something that might stop you from working with someone?*

Some artists can create works that are immediately visually







arresting for a multitude of reasons, but if they have difficulty expressing or putting into words what exactly their works are speaking to, it makes the bureaucracy of putting on an exhibition — things like writing press releases and exhibition texts — much more complicated. Sometimes the work can outweigh that, sometimes it can't. There is a lot to consider in making these calls.

*Whatever your selection process is, it seems to be working. You certainly can't negate six years of success.*

A collector gave me \$50,000 just to buy whatever I thought would be work by promising artists we were exhibiting in 2023. Of course, I blew through the money already paying overdue expenses and trying to get to another expensive art fair. She will understand, and I'm not going to fail her or neg on her faith in me. I guess I'm good with the homework if someone's willing to ante up for me to do it.

*Why spend so much money on art fairs? What role do they play?*

Art fairs bring cross-sections of the art world together. We have sold to museums from our booth and that was an important lesson. Expanding the gallery's audience, meeting gallerists from different countries, seeing artworks in person — fairs are a four-day bazaar. (Our next fair is the Dallas Art Fair (April, 2023) with Mark Ryan Chariker and Radu Oreian.)

*What is the difference in context then? What difference does it make?*

These fairs present an opportunity to connect with galleries, artists, and the art world. Strong relationships are the foundation of 1969 Gallery, and I think you'd be hard pressed to find an environment that gathers as many like-minded individuals as the international art fair circuit.

*"Like-minded?"*

1969 has exhibited booths in Basel, Switzerland, CDMX, Mexico, Ibiza, Spain, as well as in New York, Miami, and Los Angeles. In all those places we have encountered people who







are there to see everything. When you have an exhibition, group or solo, at a gallery, the people in attendance are there to see one or a handful of artists they likely already know about. A fair by its very nature is more exploratory and invites a different crowd with the same sort of intentions. A lot happens at art fairs.

*And what are those intentions?*

I think I just said...to see everything. You could spend a whole day walking through a fair uncovering works and artists you had never heard of before and still not have made it through all of the fair's programming and the satellite fairs. Some people go to fairs to buy work, certainly, but it's also an opportunity to see the ever-expanding scope of the contemporary art world.

*Will you name a few that you've been looking at? A gallery is like a broadcasting station.*

Actually, thank you for inviting me to do this interview with myself. It's very self-absorbed and indulgent so I appreciate it. In return, here are four promising new artists - Sarah Lee, July Guzman, Angela Anh Nguyen and Morgan Mandalay.

*What can we expect from 1969 Gallery in 2023?*

Solo exhibitions by four of our represented artists, and quite a bit more that I can't speak to.

*If you can't speak to it quite yet, why ask yourself the question?*

To give myself and everyone else something to think about.



Image 1: James Bowles, Goliath, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 177.8 x 101.6 cm, Photo: James Bowles

Image 2: Angela Anh Nguyen, NY Rug, Detail, Approx. 122 x 213.5 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Albertz Benda, New York | Los Angeles

Image 3: Sarah Lee, Night breeze, 2023, oil on canvas, 152.4 x 177.8 cm, Photo: Sebastian Bach

Image 4: Morgan Mandalay, Inspiration & Stagnation, 2022  
oil on canvas in artist's frame, 152.4 x 106.7 cm, Photo: Adam Reich

Image 5: July Guzman, Don't Inhale, 2021, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 60.9 cm, Photo: Adam Reich