

A Neighbor I'd Like to Have
Almog Cohen-Kashi
on *Merde!* (2022)
Leah Hennessey

May 2 – June 5, 2022



Leah Hennessey, *Merde!*, 2021 (still), 9:57, Courtesy the Artist.

Image description: An aerial view of a cityscape shows a crowded intersection, this image is overlaid with the face of a white woman wearing ruby lipstick.

BIG WINDOW

New York City is full of rats. You can't trust your neighbor, your doorman, and especially not your landlord. The files of the New York City Civil Court rectify that a telephonically advised Private Investigator was informed by the landlord of a West Village building about a woman who was running a commercial art gallery out of her residential apartment. The noted commercial activities include, without limitation, the following: exhibitions or displays of art for viewing and/or purchased by the general public, guests of the tenant, or third parties visiting the unit. Soon after, the name Alyssa Davis was added. The landlord of Apartment 1102 suggested that Ms. Davis was an irrational woman, and was included to complain about many other residents of the building to him and to anyone who would listen to her. These allegations are not confirmed, and we believe them to be false until proven otherwise. Let us suppose that one makes the acquaintance of a person who possesses alluring charm, but is impenetrable because she carries with her a secret; it would be reprehensible not to pry. Nonetheless, it was declared allowable for her landlord to send an undercover Private Investigator to try his hand at unraveling this enigmatic character.

Being the subject of inquiry suits Ms. Davis quite well. Someone close to the matter disclosed Ms. Davis' personal fascination with surveillance technology, and her interest in observing and recording visitors when first starting her eponymous gallery, Alyssa Davis Gallery. Ms. Davis thought of the ways in which she could incorporate hidden cameras in the corners of the space, or even occasionally embedded into the art itself. Eventually she built a 3D rendering of her gallery that lives on in an untraceable corner of the internet as a means of entombing the project and retaining agency, far from prying eyes. In hindsight, Ms. Davis found it quite refreshing that her landlord had opted to utilize such an antiquated means of espionage such as a Private Investigator. Records show that Ms. Davis has participated in commercial activities in Apartment 1102 for approximately 7 years. The doorman remarked that the subject had numerous guests, most notably at night for what appeared to be "parties," in conjunction with a steady flow of visitors throughout the week. Some guests were regulars, while others seemed to know very little about Ms. Davis. Those guests usually told the building security guard that they were here to see "the show upstairs." The doorman questioned what sparked these entanglements. What was everyone so eager to see upstairs? Were they business partners of Ms. Davis? Friends? These questions remain unresolved.

Ms. Davis was highly selective about her clientele. For a gallery run out of a domestic setting she was still an unsparing, remorseless art dealer who never hesitated to turn someone away if they did not earn her confidence. Although, the most curious thing about Ms. Davis' operation is that it does not appear to be overtly motivated by capital. In the 1960's and 70's New York was once a city rampant with artists who pushed away the hyper-commercial, though it appears that the market is now more prominent than ever and this has been accepted as the natural progression. How this shift happened right after a movement like Conceptualism may be baffling to some, but in practice it is more than logical. In turn, this rejection of a financial framework

gave an operation such as Alyssa Davis Gallery a sense of cachet. The idea that there is a space hidden on the 11th floor of a residential building that is perceived as being incentivized by anything but profit is likely the reason why many collectors were fascinated by Ms. Davis, and came to view her artists as transcendental figures that existed outside the parameters of the market. This is a grand and noble notion, however, this investigation is still in its essence a bourgeois drama, no matter how much either party tries to run away from it.

Ms. Davis is referenced as an operator throughout the case, though it is apparent that she can be best described as a “facilitator.” This operation is moreso a platform that marries her to a community of artists and thinkers, allowing her proximity to the looming questions of the cultural epoch unfolding before us. It is evident that Ms. Davis possesses an innate vision, allowing her to guide artists’ ideas by whispering exactly what they need to hear and in turn quelling any doubts they may have. The programing was startlingly coherent, with valiant exhibitions that were long on installation and short on painting.

As of April 4th, 2022 Alyssa Davis Gallery will no longer operate out of Apartment 1102. Additionally, Ms. Davis must decouple the name of her gallery with the address that once housed this project. The reality is that the dissolution is all a coverup for something more common, as many longtime residents of this city can imagine. There were no lease violations, rent was always paid on time and the only damages made to the apartment were not caused by our subject. On the surface, it doesn’t appear as though this series of events will be much of an issue for Ms. Davis. While she continues to be the intermediary of many groups, she remains elusive yet salient, like an embodiment of the very gallery she once ran. Or perhaps she could be better compared to the sea, as she always seems to be in motion. Picking up people and ideas as though they were grains of sand, moving them from one shore to another all the while giving them a polish particular to her.