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# Centre and periphery

## Establishing Galerie Allen in Paris

Caroline Hancock, *Paris*



Lodged in a busy street near one of the main Parisian train stations, Gare du Nord, and the picturesque tourist hub of Montmartre, Galerie Allen was founded in 2013 by the Sydney-born, Paris-based artist Mel O'Callaghan and her graphic designer husband Clemens Habicht together with the formerly Sydney-based independent curator Joseph Allen Shea. They currently collaborate closely with ten artists ranging from emerging to mid-career artists (and including an artist estate), working in all types of media in a rich cross-disciplinary fashion with a conceptual backbone. Performance and video are prominent. Quickly they have built a city-wide reputation as a friendly and serious space committed to quality presentations.

Caroline Hancock (CH): How did Galerie Allen come about? How would you describe its specificities?

Mel O'Callaghan (MO): In the late 1990s I often worked in artist-run spaces with friends in Australia.<sup>1</sup> As an artist represented in commercial galleries, I felt I had insight into what could work well. There was nothing premeditated; our conversations came at the right time.

Joseph Allen Shea (JAS): I was running the self-initiated Gallery A.S. in Sydney, creating experimental projects in different spaces of site-specific interest. Occasionally there was a commercial element to sustain the practice.

MO: Joseph curated a 16mm film of mine into a Gallery A.S. show called 'Motion/Pictures' in 2011 at the then-unused former Paramount Pictures distribution offices in Sydney.

JAS: The genesis was Mel's invitation to curate a temporary exhibition in her Paris studio. I applied for a curatorial residency and in 2013 came to the Cité Internationale des Arts in Montmartre for a one-year residency which led to me wanting to live here. Finding solutions out of desires is a fitting metaphor for the gallery's beginnings.

It is a really resourceful partnership; I can rely on Mel to inform our relationship with the artists. Often I am trying to be efficient and square, so an artist's input in the decision-making process is very important in how we structure our work. We seek to create sustainability for artists and exhibition-making – a framework through business, strong mutual beliefs and friendships.

MO: As an artist, what I look for in a gallery director is the sensibility to give me space, connections and curatorial accompaniment to make work in the best way possible. My involvement in Galerie Allen is not administrative or daily. My relation with the artists we work with is as an artist to an artist.

JAS: I believe we have something different to offer. My relations are not artist-to-dealer but, rather, artist-to-gallerist. We all need each other. People are drawn to the energy that goes into ambitious seemingly uncommercial work.

CH: How did you go about deciding which artists you would both like to work with?

MO: We are interested in the fact that each practice is totally unique, emerging from a profound dedication. The first artist we chose to work with was Maurice Blaussyld. He and I had