



## **PROMISE OF POWER** **Lower East Side Dealers**

Identifying New York's next "hot" neighborhood is ritual sport among the city's trend-watchers. In the past few years, as the transformation of the once-barren Chelsea into the contemporary art world's established epicenter has become ancient history, those with a taste for the cutting edges have sought to anoint a successor. This year's candidate, succeeding Williamsburg and the short-lived Harlem, is the Lower East Side, specifically the fashionably down-at-the-heels blocks below Houston Street and east of the Bowery lined with trendy boutiques and restaurants. Already the neighborhood has a pantheon of pioneer gallerists that includes, from left, Melissa Bent, Mirabelle Marden, Michele Maccarone and Lia Gangitano. The neighborhood's success as a gallery destination depends on the strength of its early settlers, and this group, while young, has bona fides. The senior figure is Gangitano, who founded her own not-for-profit gallery Participant (95 Rivington Street) after spending four years as curator of the now-closed Thread Waxing Space in SoHo. Before that, she did a decade-long stint as an associate curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. Participant's offerings are interdisciplinary, ranging from film and video to performance art to literary readings. Marden (the daughter of painters Brice and Helen Marden) and Bent seem to have captured the raw energy of the neighborhood and channeled it back into their gallery, Rivington Arms (102 Rivington Street). The women, who met at Sarah Lawrence College, are showing work by young artists that is both provocative and affordable. Maccarone, who runs a self-named gallery a few blocks away (45 Canal Street), was the director of the heavyweight Chelsea dealership Luhring Augustine for four years. Emphasizing site-specific installations, she works with a handful of artists who have gained recognition in Europe. It remains to be seen whether the Lower East Side will become a vibrant alternative to the high-priced, high-stakes art world of Chelsea—as the East Village was to SoHo in the 1980s. But even if the neighborhood fizzles, we suspect we'll be hearing more from these women in the years to come.