

CREATIVE BRIEF

NEXT CHAPTER

Following her appointment at Marian Goodman Gallery, Dagny Janss Corcoran—the founder of Art Catalogues and a longtime fixture in the L.A. art scene—is broadening her reach to Paris.

BY MICHAEL SLENSKE



BOOK SMART Dagny Janss Corcoran (whose tattoo recreates Walter De Maria's polygonal element from *The 2000 Sculpture*) in her Art Catalogues space in Los Angeles among some of her inventory.

EVEN IN THE most esoteric international art circles there aren't many people who can pass as single-name entities. However, Dagny Janss Corcoran, the multihyphenate merchant behind the Los Angeles independent bookstore Art Catalogues, is one of them.

"We hired her as Dagny," says Philipp Kaiser, chief executive director of artists and programs at Marian Goodman Gallery, which recently appointed Corcoran as director of books and multiples. She'll be posted to Paris, the site of the gallery's only stand-alone bookstore, Librairie Marian Goodman. This isn't the first time Goodman has employed Corcoran. Babs Altoon, the widow of the late painter John Altoon, recruited Corcoran to work beside her at the L.A. location of Goodman's Multiples, Inc. half a century ago. Corcoran was a savvy young assistant who'd already been to Brazil assisting curator Walter Hopps when he organized the American delegation at the 1965 São Paulo Bienal. "I can't wait until she's fully there," says Kaiser of her new Paris position. "She'll bring good vibes."

"I don't know how I'm going to fit in, because I don't have a circle of friends there," says Corcoran on a breezy February afternoon in L.A. "My French is terrible. I can say, *'Oui, j'aimerais de la vodka avec de la glace.'*" Dressed in a linen Nehru-collar button-down, khakis and matching Toms espadrilles, she has the bearing of a beachy Lauren Bacall seated among Warhol, Twombly and Baldessari catalogs in the entryway of her Culver City shop, which will remain open while she's abroad. "The thing is, I really am a Californian," Corcoran says, "and Paris has always been a place that's interested in California."

Corcoran is a fourth-generation Californian on both sides, one who made her debut on the L.A. art scene in the '60s as the puckish daughter of the late bohemian real-estate tycoon turned art collector Edwin Janss Jr. The Janss Investment Corp. developed communities like Thousand Oaks, California, and ski resorts including Idaho's Sun Valley by day, while Janss entertained artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Dennis Hopper and those comprising L.A.'s Cool School by night. "My mother didn't understand the collecting or my father's new friends, these 'art people,'" recalls Corcoran. "One day Joe Goode delivered this Rauschenberg [sculpture] with a stuffed chicken in it—and my mother essentially said, 'It's the Rauschenberg or me.' My father chose the Rauschenberg."

That fateful choice set Corcoran on a similar trajectory. She became the soigné wife (now ex) of the art dealer James Corcoran, the father of her only child, Timothy. When asked about Timothy's age via text she replies: "I've been lying about my age for so long I now have to introduce my son as my younger brother.... Tim's age, like mine, cannot be revealed."

Her blond bob has appeared in various portraits by her friend David Hockney. Even her high-heeled legs were cast by Edward and Nancy Kienholz at their Berlin studio in 1980 and mounted to the front of a Playboy pinball machine for a feminist assemblage sculpture (*The Bronze Pinball Machine With Woman Affixed Also*). "There was a Warhol show going on, and Richard Jackson and I went out to dinner afterwards with Ed and Nancy. During dinner Ed kept looking at



FROM LEFT: DEREK KINZEL; DAVID HOCKNEY DAGNY CORCORAN LOS ANGELES 16TH MARCH 1982 COMPOSITE POLAROID 31 1/2 X 38 1/4 © DAVID HOCKNEY PHOTO CREDIT: RICHARD SCHMIDT; BOB COLACELLO THOMAS AMMANN DAGNY CORCORAN THE SAVOY, NEW YORK, 1981. VINTAGE GELATIN SILVER PRINT. © BOB COLACELLO, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND VITO SCHINABEL GALLERY

my hips. Finally he says to Nancy, 'What do you think of Dagny?'" recalls Corcoran. "Nancy says, 'Yes, big hips, no shovels.' That means I was wide across my body, but my legs were flat so I would fit on the pinball machine. Ed says, 'You want to pose? I've cast every hooker in Paris, but you're perfect.' I was drunk, so I just said, 'Sure.'"

These days people normally meet her as the easy-going entrepreneur behind Art Catalogues, which she opened in 1977 with some early assistance from Hopps, one of her father's closest friends and art advisers, who founded the Ferus Gallery with Kienholz and later became the director of the Pasadena Art Museum. When Norton Simon took over the PAM space for his private museum, Hopps informed Corcoran to hurry over before all the old PAM catalogs were trashed. "I must have put 750 books I got for \$1 each in the trunk of this old BMW," says Corcoran. "I had the inventory but no store." Four decades on, her inventory exceeds 10,000 titles of new, rare and out-of-print catalogs and loads of limited editions.

After scoring the PAM trove, she set up shop inside a second-floor space on Santa Monica Boulevard above Corcoran's West Hollywood gallery. Though she didn't sell much at first, she created a scene with her boozy "Leftover Lunches," early iterations of the dinners at her apartment, which have become the L.A. art world's analog of Sue Mengers' legendary Hollywood salons. Much like her dinners, her lunches were filled with then-budding luminaries like Joe Goode, Don Bachardy and his partner, Christopher Isherwood, huddled around a glass-top table made by Charles

THE GREAT CONNECTOR
Left: Dagny Corcoran Los Angeles 16th March 1982, by David Hockney. Below: Thomas Ammann and Corcoran, photographed by Bob Colacello at The Savoy, New York, 1981.

arrived, she pivoted by developing bespoke libraries for a tightly held list of private collectors who wanted their art books to match (or exceed) the intellectual heft of their holdings.

Along the way, she nurtured clients and secured spaces for Art Catalogues at the Museum of Contemporary Art (2005–2009) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2010–2019). "I entered Los Angeles very late in its art history, and Dagny would tutor me about the old days," says LACMA director Michael Govan, who carved out an Art Catalogues space in the now-demolished Ahmanson Building. He fondly remembers the retro feel of Corcoran's beloved talks and events—be it actor Keanu Reeves conversing with his artist girlfriend Alexandra Grant or architect Kulapat Yantrasast moderating a discussion with his mentor Tadao Ando. "They were always really crowded, like talks were in the '60s—and there'd be very simple beer and wine in plastic cups," says Govan. "Then she'd have the artists and speakers to dinner. I loved that quality of it being a happening." Adds Kaiser, "At LACMA she created a real social space; it felt like she was the secret director of the institution."

The last of these happenings—with Govan and artist Thomas Demand—occurred in 2018, after which Corcoran moved her operation to its current Culver City space because the original LACMA campus was shuttering to make room for the forthcoming David Geffen Galleries. She joked with Govan and dealer Matthew Marks that she was running off to Paris to be a *bookiniste*. It just so happened that Doug Aitken was working on a catalog with the French publishing house and gallery Cahiers d'Art. On Aitken's recommendation, Staffan Ahrenberg, the owner of Cahiers d'Art, met with Corcoran, who divulged her Parisian fantasy. For a year starting in 2019, Ahrenberg enlisted Corcoran as a cross-generational L.A.-to-Paris envoy, one who has helped launch publications with Arthur Jafa and Frank Gehry. "Dagny had a very interesting role because she works with different artists, with galleries, with books, with clients," he says. "And she's also a researcher, and we do a lot of research."

To truly understand how Corcoran became this connector of the L.A. art world, one needs to attend a dinner party at her Century City aerie, which has towering views from Beverly Hills to downtown and is appointed with naughty Ken Price drawings. Like her late father, Corcoran prefers to play the role of participant rather than host. "She's a very impromptu chef, like her father," says Ed Ruscha, recalling the spectacle of Janss making "magic ice cream" with liquid nitrogen at parties at his Chateau Marmont apartment (Dagny was also in residence on a separate floor) in the '70s that attracted everyone from Billy Al

Arnoldi. "We frightened most of the early customers away, but we had a blast," says Corcoran, who later rented a space from Larry Gagossian (from 1982 to 1992). By the early '90s she was working with institutions like UCLA, ArtCenter College of Design and CalArts. Once Amazon

Bengston to Ed Boreal. In describing the magic of a typical Corcoran dinner, Nicodim Gallery director Ben Lee Ritchie Handler says, "I'll never forget sitting at the bar in Dagny's kitchen when David Hockney walks in and immediately starts ranting about the lack of public smoking options in Los Angeles before breaking into a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson."

Though mayonnaise is Corcoran's go-to in the kitchen, according to Kulapat Yantrasast, her dear friend of nearly a decade, "She's the one who glues everything together. Everyone being together in this small apartment...brings this humility. It's a place where money doesn't mean much. It's about whether you have something interesting to say."

"If she had her way, I feel like she would have wanted to create an arts club in that traditional sense that is about conversation around books," says Govan. "Dinner at Marian Goodman's house was not much different. There was this personal touch. And they shared a similarity of opinions about taking art really seriously, a commitment to the quality."

This eye for quality—from authoring monograph chronologies for Richard Jackson and the late Walter De Maria (her only tattoo re-creates the artist's polygonal element from *The 2000 Sculpture*) to taking an early interest in emerging talents like the late painter and Underground Museum founder Noah Davis, who once worked with her at MOCA—extends to every facet of her life. She recently curated an exhibition on view at Hauser & Wirth's Book Lab in L.A. detailing Richard Jackson's bookmaking process with a video of the artist painting all 450 pages of the new monograph that she authored. In addition to working on the *Multiples, Inc.: Artists & Photographs* exhibition (up through May 22 at Librairie Marian Goodman), Corcoran is planning a series of talks and programming with gallery artists, including a show with Nairy Baghramian to complement her solo exhibition in Paris in June.

Corcoran, who plans to relocate when the borders open up, says she hopes to return to L.A. every three months but also wants to travel around Europe: "A lot of my job is to find interesting projects and books." Whatever you do, don't call her a curator.

"I hate that word," she says. "I am more like an art adviser for books—a book adviser for hire and, more importantly, I am a merchant. I sell books. I do not collect them. I do not compete with my customers." ●

