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PLASTER

All hail the Bethnal Green art boom

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Olivia Allen reports from the front line of the Bethnal Green art renaissance thanks to a crop of chic new galleries and a little help from Millie Bobby Brown

2023 may have been a year brimming with cutting-edge culture and sparkling literary moments, but for me, there was one voice that reigned supreme: child star/ beauty-mogul/Beatles fan, Millie Bobby Brown. Drawn from the annals of her Nanny Ruth's hazy memory, the questionable prose in MBB's *Nineteen Steps* simultaneously raised questions about the integrity of a ghostwriter and drew attention to an East London hotspot close to my heart, Bethnal Green.

A stone's throw from the painfully memefied haunts of Broadway Market and London Fields, the area is once again having its moment in the spotlight with a crop of chic new galleries paying homage to the past and dotting the streets of E2, making BG the place to be and be seen come 6 pm.

Despite the post-covid resurgence and the Tiktokification of E Pellicci's, the streets of Bethnal have been a longstanding and much-loved location for The Scene. Blast back to the '90s when Maureen Paley was making moves as the OG pioneer of East London, bringing Wolfgang Tillmans, Gillian Wearing and a large chunk of the YBAs to the inhabitants of Cambridge Heath and beyond. Fast forward 20 years or so, Good Squish scrunchies and Wales Bonner Sambas run riot but the sentiment remains. Down by Three Colts Lane, Herald St has been flying the East London flag since 2005, with Project Native Informant taking on the Institution one show at a time and **mother's tankstation** following suit with its programme of global contemporary artists.

Around 10m around the corner, Rose Easton's eponymous gallery, complete with plush pink carpet, has been expertly combining art and fashion with playful shows for the past two years, including by Mexican artist Arlette. A little further north, Neven gallery sits in a refurbished cab driver's office. With stylishly clad crowds spilling out into the various adjoining vape shops at the inaugural show last September and at each opening since, the gallery's success seems to speak for itself.

Weaving closer to London Fields, Antonia Marsh set up Soft Opening's second space on Minerva St in 2019 to much acclaim and was more recently joined by neighbouring baby gallery, Sherbet Green, in 2022. With this ever-growing creative cohort populating the route to Columbia Road, it appears there's no time like the present to add another stop on the Spittle-approved Thursday night route.

And if the galleries get too much, Claire de Rouen is a great place to peruse the latest issue of *Crosscurrent* and other chic coffee table mags that are sure to impress your industry-adjacent Hinge date after one too many pints at The Approach. The Gallery Café is the perfect place to pretend it's 2002, as confirmed by its cameo in a TikTok slideshow set to a Billy Idol song and captioned "London cafes that make you feel like you're in a noughties movie" which recently cropped up on my feed. The menu is very lentil heavy and there's even a chapel round the back for when post-opening hangxiety is so bad you have to seek spiritual refuge before another stint on the circuit.



Three Colts Lane is brimming with exciting new galleries and OG spaces including Herald St, Project Native Informant and mother's tankstation