

SEANKELLY

Lu, Kevin. "Natural Path." *Cultured*, 2016.



Lauren Kelly at the Sean Kelly gallery library;
Jose Dávila's Untitled, 2016.

NATURAL PATH

For Sean Kelly Director **Lauren Kelly**, it's all about the hunt. From Brooklyn coffee houses to Havana studios, Brook Mason follows her pursuit of the next great discovery.

PORTRAIT BY KEVIN LU

Among the cognoscenti in the high-octane art world, few can claim they cut their teeth working for a gallery during Art Basel, toiling long hours at age 16. Well, Lauren Kelly, now 32, whose father commands the influential Sean Kelly gallery, is a case in point.

"When I was in fourth grade and bringing friends home for play dates, they would gawk at the photographs of Marina Abramovic's naked body, whip in hand," says Kelly. "But I kind of just shrugged it off, like, 'Oh that's just Auntie Marina, no big deal,'" she adds, while seated in the gallery conference room under a Jeff Zimmerman chandelier.

But while her father has long overseen the careers of superstars like Kehinde Wiley, Rebecca Horn and Antony Gormley—not to mention the estates of Robert Rauschenberg and Poul Kjaerholm—Lauren has blazed a path when it comes to zeroing in on the newest batch of talent, with some artists just shy of 30 and totally selfhaught.

Take painter Hugo McCLOUD, whom she first spotted in a Brooklyn coffee house. After a number of visits to his Bushwick studio to study his

paintings constructed from industrial enamels, aluminum sheeting and tarpaper, which he stamped with his intricately carved wood blocks, she deftly set her sights on developing a solo show devoted to his latest oeuvre. Kelly also secured McCLOUD a group show at London's Arts Club.

"She's really like my mother for my art," says McCLOUD, who just returned from a trip to Manila with Kelly to study traditional Filipino wood carving techniques, among other indigenous arts. "She's encouraged me to aim for a larger scale and shoot for sharper colors like a vibrant red making for a pronounced contrast," he adds, pointing to a deeper dealer-artist conversation.

Six years ago, she brought to her father's attention Guadalajara-born Jose Dávila, who's best known for his sculpture exhibit, "A Line Is Written on Every Corner," composed of massive marble slabs bound by brightly colored straps. Dávila, who is also a trained architect, is currently having a solo show at Marfa Contemporary, and next year will present a monumental work in partnership with the Los Angeles Nomadic Division, exploring the

relationship between L.A. and Mexico for Pacific Standard Time.

Kelly has also been scouting out Cuba. During a studio visit, she came across painter Alejandro Campins, whose brooding landscapes have piqued the interest of many influential collectors. At the Sean Kelly gallery this spring, five of his works were quickly picked up, including one moody piece that caught the eye of a prominent museum's board member.

While she's quick to hop on a plane for a discovery, sometimes they appear a little closer to home. Peter Liversidge—the British conceptual text-based artist who currently has a solo show at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum—caught Kelly's eye at Art Basel in 2007 when he presented a solo booth for Art Statements. The two connected again when Liversidge took part in her family's residency program in Upstate New York. There, they drove around picking up yard sale signs, which ultimately were included in his wide-ranging installation *Free Signs*. "We'd always replace them with a generic one," defends Liversidge. "They made for a fantastic artwork!"