

Kate Bryan

Words Kirk Truman **Portraits** Joseph Lynn

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Kate and I are walking around a familiar setting, only it has been turned a little on its head. We're passing through the library in the reception area up into the newly revived Soho House, Greek Street, on its opening day. As you approach the shape of the familiar oval bar, you begin struggling to understand whereabouts in the former building you are. What is the Greek Street site we once knew, and the Kettners we didn't? There's a real elegance about the place, and the feeling that you're walking about the future of the Soho House brand. Every wall, installation and artwork tell a new story which connects the past of Soho with the new. That's where Kate Bryan comes in, Head of Collections at Soho House & Co.

Soho House is about feeling perfectly at home away from home and afar, when you're perfectly not. Let me give you the quick backstory which most Sohoties will already be familiar with. Back in the 1990's, founder Nick Jones sought to open a new private members club at 40 Greek Street. This marked the birth of Soho House, and the eventual expansion and franchising of the brand across London, on into the US and Europe. 23 years on since the first Soho House opened its doors, entrepreneur Nick Jones has expanded the brand to cover lifestyle, design, interiors and even the creation of an in-house publication, House Notes. The soul and essence of the brand has remained and evolved over the years. It is these few elements which are still ever present in the recently reopened doors of no. 40 Greek Street. The DNA is the same, only the walls, the bars and corridors have changed. Some however (in a good way) are beyond recognition.



The new no. 40 Greek Street sees Kettner's next door and the original Soho House meet in the middle. Kate Bryan openly tells me as we begin talking: "I was always a Groucho girl really..." she laughs. Although she spends her time at The Groucho Club and two neighbourhood Soho House's, she's equally fond of the life and soul of both clubs. Kate writes and talks about art, having presented programmes for Sky Arts, Sky Arte Italia and presented and contributed to episodes of BBC2's Culture Show. Come October 2016, Kate came to be appointed Head of Collections at Soho House. This role is some respects unusual, exciting and unknown. As I speak with a number of Soho House members and employees, it quickly becomes clear that Kate's important and dynamic role is little known amongst those walking about the House's London has to offer. "Before I arrived here 18 months ago, the art curation was always done by a brilliant external curator, Francesca Gavin" says Kate, "It was an organic thing, there was never any intention to build this enormous art collection at Soho House. It happened slowly and evolved organically. What started out as an experiment in having work on our walls has exploded into the collection which we have today. Ultimately, the collections were becoming victims of their own success. Somebody would come in to curate a space, and then leave it be. Eventually, what was really

needed was somebody to nurture the art of the Houses, that's how my permanent role came about. There was nobody really in the company who was focal on art until I came in, there was nobody to be its custodian. When I first met founder Nick Jones, it became clear quite quickly that we were going to have to start again and think about the responsibility and curation of art across all Houses. My role is an opportunity to acquire art globally and future proof the already outstanding collection of work while enhancing the art strategy and identity of Soho House."

With the reopening and reimagining of 40 Greek Street, Kate faced the challenge of bringing new life (and art) to the walls, and interiors of the new, enhanced and dynamic House. "In the case of the last few houses which have opened, the art has been factored into the interiors in an entirely new way. In the example of Malibu Beach, it is more grown up and there is more colour" she says, "with 40 Greek Street, I have worked closely to help curate the art and alongside with the interiors and architectural teams. The decisions around where the art must go and what it would be had to be made way in advanced so that the spaces could respond and react to each and every art piece."

There are a number collections which appear on the walls of 40 Greek



Street which you may not know the backstory of from the relationship with Soho's characters and supporting young artists in London. While walking the corridors of the newly opened house, Kate tells me of Walk the Line; a series of 20 drawings drawn by a series of notable artists in pencil without removing their pencil from the page. However, Kate laughs some of them endeavoured to cheat. It was how they broke the rules which fascinated me. Another collection, perhaps my favourite is the 40/40/40 collection. This particular collection is made of 40 pieces of work, by 40 artists all under the age of 40. I hope that we're on the same page? "The art at 40 Greek Street is a cultural conversation and a homage to the story of Soho. All of our design decisions and activities are done internally, so each building requires a plan of action for the walls and the stories we want to tell within the space. We are in constant collaboration in order to give the artists we work with the best spaces and platforms for their work" she says. Today, Soho House has accumulated a large collection of art in excess of 3,000 pieces across their many Houses worldwide. Kate's role takes her across the globe from house to house, meaning she has come to be at the centre of the each location of the brand, in London and afar. Kate's eyes and instincts are one of the reasons your own eyes liken to the aesthetic of the newly reopened 40 Greek Street. Next time you wander about your own house, look a little closer, and think on the stories the walls of each location tell. Behind these stories is Kate Bryan. ■

