

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Inaccessible galleries prompt pop-up trend

High costs and elitism force artists to show art in new ways, writes Rachel Gilmore.

Deirdre Sokolowski is no stranger to community organizing. After hosting multiple craft shows in and around Centretown, the local artist decided to branch out with a gallery event to feature emerging artists.

To her surprise, galleries didn't seem quite as excited about the idea.

When requesting a quote from a local gallery for the five-hour event she was told it would cost her \$10,000.

"I just found it very discouraging and I almost didn't put on a show," she said.

While Sokolowski eventually found a gallery that would only charge her a couple hundred dollars for the evening, she still depended on crowd funding to make the event happen.

Sokolowski's story isn't uncommon.

Galleries have a reputation for being inaccessible. Between a perceived elitism and the prohibi-

tive costs, emerging artists are being forced to find alternative ways of showcasing their art. That's where the idea of a "pop-up gallery" comes in.

Doubling as a DIY gallery, cafés, sandwich shops and other non-traditional spaces are starting to showcase local art. Local artists have turned to these sorts of locations to get their art seen as pop-ups provide a more accessible option than many galleries.

Benjamin Woodyard is an artist who works at Pressed, a sandwich shop on Gladstone Avenue. His workplace is one of several Centretown spaces, like the Manx and Oz Kafe, that showcase local art. Woodyard organizes events at the shop to showcase new work.

"It also allows me to show a lot of emerging artists that wouldn't otherwise get shown," says Woodyard.

As an artist, Woodyard says he prefers these kinds of community-oriented, accessible spaces.

"I haven't even approached other kinds of galleries. I've just gone where I feel more comfortable going," he says.

The community element that pop-ups offer is sometimes missing from highbrow gallery spaces, according to Woodyard. Sokolowski was directly confronted with this issue when trying to put together her gallery



Rachel Gilmore, Centretown News

Brendan A. de Montigny, owner of PDA Projects, helped organize a pop-up art show last week at Studio B in the Glebe.

event.

"If you don't have credentials, or have a resume already made up of artistic achievements — especially if you haven't been to arts school — I find it's really hard to find a venue that will take you seriously," she says.

That elitist mentality is another reason why accessible DIY spaces are becoming more common, according to Woodyard.

While artists such as Sokolowski may be feeling discomfort around galleries, not all of these seemingly exclusive venues are ignoring the pleas for greater accessibility.

Brendan A. de Montigny is the director and owner of PDA Projects on Elgin Street, an art gallery that, according to their website "favours inclusion over exclusivity."

He says he constantly struggles with the balance between art as a business and art for art's sake.

"I love showing art. And I have to have that balance between emerging (an) emerging (artist), and emerging someone that is already sort of playing both fields," he says.

Galleries are businesses and, as a result, need money. That's something that galleries have increasingly struggled with since the 2008 recession, according to de Montigny.

"I actually have no ill (will) towards any gallery in Ottawa. If you're existing and surviving, you're already doing something right," he says.

De Montigny's gallery not only exists, but uses its existence to combat the exclusive reputation of his industry. He focuses on inclusivity for women and people of colour.

"I think we're starting to sort of crack that glass ceiling a little bit," he says.

De Montigny says he does this

by speaking with his artists and keeping a close eye on the community. He even collaborates with artists to put together showcases in pop-up venues.

While de Montigny acknowledges that there is an issue with elitism in galleries, he paints a hopeful picture for the future.

"(We're) coming out of an era in Canada where culture was not on the main menu. It was off the menu completely," says de Montigny.

However, between developments at the NAC and Arts Court as well as the increase in galleries and pop-ups, culture is fighting its way back to Ottawa's menu, according to de Montigny. That can only be good news for struggling, emerging artists.

According to de Montigny, Ottawa is no longer the town that fun forgot. It is inching its way towards becoming the town that fun remembers.

Local comic stores needn't fear corporate giants



Viewpoint

Jenn Ko

Earlier this month a comic-loving friend told me Walmart is planning to put dedicated graphic novel sections in its superstores across North America.

With surprising animation, the normally introverted Batman enthusiast painted a picture of doom and gloom for the future business of local comic book stores.

The skies have opened! The end is nigh! The dark night returns! he cried.

I assured him there is no need to call in the Avengers. A me-

ga-competitor like Walmart can be daunting, but Centretown's quirky comic shops are more than up to the challenge.

As the comic universe continues to surge in popular society, these small spaces offer loyal geeks a gateway to a more genuine dimension.

The Comic Book Shoppe at Bank Street and Lisgar Street is as crowded and colourful as the pages of a classic *X-Men* issue. Punchy tunes fill the store — everything from rock classics to pop-punk to the one hit wonders of the nineties.

Competitors and friends duel it out on game nights in the basement. Shelves are stocked with new and old comic issues, waxy action figures, 20-sided rainbow dice, Magic cards, superhero underwear and more.

The guys and gals stocking them have special abilities of their own.

Need to know the issue where (SPOILER ALERT!) Spiderman's sweetheart Gwen Stacy falls to untimely her death? They have the answer. Want to debate which obscure antihero is most likely to defeat the Man of Steel in a sword fight? They can do that too. Walmart would be hard-pressed to match the staff's knowledge and customer service.

The promise of 40 per cent off the cover price may convince superstore browsers to convert into new readers, but the retail giant won't be able to replicate the livelier atmosphere of local comic book stores.

Although the Silver Snail a few blocks south of the Comic Book Shoppe dropped out of the market

last fall, Comet Comics, a new store, began its own story a month later just outside of Centretown at 1167 Bank St. Snail supporters have slowly moved their way there.

The announcement that Walmart is teaming up with Diamond Book Distributors, one of the largest distributors of graphic novels and pop-culture merchandise, comes after the second best year in DBD sales history and just before the release of *Deadpool*, the latest mask to smash the box offices.

Marvel Studio's cinematic success is spawning a growing comic culture in the human world. No longer are dark demons and selfless saviours a niche refuge designed solely for avid nerds.

Comic books have taken over Hollywood's big screens and are

edging into the small screens that stream Netflix.

Comic style artworks are even popping up in galleries across Centretown.

It's reasonable Walmart wants to tap into the popular market.

Carving out aisles for wholesale graphic novels adds another level of commercialization to the comic arts, but it cannot replicate the passion and community of the local geek store.

A fantastical subculture cannot be sold at x dollars and 99 cents. Magic does not fit into the realm of industrial white walls and discount household items.

For the Batman enthusiast who visits the Centretown shop every Wednesday on new comic day and sometimes Tuesdays "just in case," it's about much more than a cover price.

Star Trek symphony boldly goes to the NAC

By Jennifer Doede

Star Trek fans across Ottawa gathered at the National Arts Centre earlier this week to reminisce about the voyages of the Starship Enterprise amidst the sounds of classical music.

Star Trek Ultimate Voyage is a live symphony orchestra concert tour that performs in over 100 cities across North America in celebration of the popular television and film franchise's 50th anniversary.

The science fiction cult phenomenon began as a TV show featuring the adventures of Cpt. James T. Kirk – played by Canadian William Shatner – and the crew of the USS Enterprise on their five-year mission to explore new worlds, seek out new life, and to “boldly go where no man has gone before.”

As the series evolved and spawned 12 movies and eight spinoff series, many new characters and adventures would be introduced to entertain audiences for decades.

Audience members will have the opportunity to listen to popular musical pieces from Star Trek's history, performed by a live symphony orchestra, while

watching iconic footage from the TV show and films on a 12 metres wide screen.

Chris Gonsalves, an avid Star Trek fan from Kitchener, said that the symphonic celebration “is a very interesting re-imagining of a familiar intellectual property. I'm not sure anybody who does not have an established connection with the franchise would have any interest in the concert, since it's a pretty niche community.”

The fusion of pop culture and high culture through symphony orchestras provides an opportunity for pop culture fanatics to celebrate their fandoms.

William Echard, a music professor at Carleton University, says fusing pop culture and classical music is not as original an idea as people may perceive it to be.

“I don't think that this sort of blending is a new thing, and it generally just goes to show how fluid the underlying categories can be,” he says. “This is especially true of soundtrack music since right from the start it has drawn from both classical and popular styles and mixed them freely.”

• Read full story at centretownnews.ca



Dave Scharf, Centretown News

Chef Marc Lepine preps for evening service at his restaurant.

Local chef serves up a win at national culinary competition

By Natasha Grodzinski

Chef Marc Lepine returned to Ottawa from the West Coast with a gold medal and a reputation to match.

Lepine, head chef and owner of Atelier in Little Italy, won first place at the Canadian Culinary

Championships in Kelowna, B.C., in early February. This is his second gold medal from the competition. He previously won in 2012.

His big-finish dish was trout, with miso, molasses, a hoop made of tuile batter (an almond paste used for cookies) and a warm broth poured over the finished product. The judges raved about Lepine's dish.

“I didn't expect to win this time around,” says Lepine. “When we were in the competition, we did not feel confident about the first two parts, which is funny because we ended up winning all of them.”

The competition has three sections. In the first, competitors taste an unnamed wine and then make a dish to match it on a budget of \$400. Next is the Black Box challenge, where competitors are given a box with unknown ingredients inside. With only those ingredients, they must whip up 13 plates of the same dish for the judges.

Lepine says this was the most challenging part.

“You can practice beforehand,” Lepine says, “but only a bit. There were some things in there I had no idea how I would use.”

The win comes at the perfect time for Atelier, Lepine's restaurant located on Rochester Street. The restaurant recently expanded, now able to seat 45 patrons, nearly double their previous size. That expansion may come in handy with the fanfare following Lepine home from Kelowna.

“February is always a busy time in Ottawa, with Winterlude and everything. We'll be able to tell how much busier it is better in March and April,” says Lepine.

Atelier already has an upstanding reputation in the Ottawa food scene.

It is a tasting-based restaurant, with a 12 course menu of small

portions changing daily. Peter Hum, food critic for the Ottawa Citizen, says Atelier is a unique restaurant in the local culinary scene.

“There are other tasting menu based restaurants in Ottawa, but Marc's is the most ambitious, expensive and even challenging,” says Hum. “I've eaten just one dinner at Atelier, and it was fantastic; not just delicious but novel and thoughtful too.”

Michael Radford, head chef at the Whalesbone Oyster House on Bank Street, says Ottawa's restaurants are appreciated by travellers, even with neighbours like Montreal and Toronto.

“I think Ottawa has a good scene,” says Radford. “I hear positive comments on it from out-of-town customers all the time.”

Radford says those involved in the restaurant scene in Ottawa become family.

“We share ideas, bounce concepts between each other, and really just strive to make Ottawa the best it can be,” says Radford. “In fact, I was actually involved in helping out with a couple of diners that went on at his restaurant whilst he was in Kelowna.”

Whalesbone specializes in sustainable seafood, and Atelier uses creative methods to create small taster portions.

Even though their restaurants are different, Radford says it's just a matter of local chefs helping other local chefs.

Many news outlets in Ottawa refer to Lepine's cooking as molecular gastronomy, which looks into physically and chemically transforming the ingredients in dishes.

Lepine says he and his team base their techniques on trial and error.

“We try them out, we taste them, then we go back and make it again,” says Lepine. “We make it as close to perfection as we can.”



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City of Ottawa

Ross Rheume's painting *Aftermath* will be displayed at city hall until October.

Painting commemorates 1916 parliamentary fire

By Cassandra Wood

For at least the next year, a painting of a burned-out Parliament by Ottawa artist Ross Rheume will be displayed in the rotunda of city hall — a reminder of the 1916 fire that destroyed Canada's national legislature and that prompted various 100th anniversary commemorations this winter.

Rheume donated one of the four paintings from his Parliament Fire series to the City of Ottawa on Feb. 3 to mark the centenary of the tragic blaze, which also claimed the lives of seven people.

Titled *Aftermath*, the donated painting shows the Parliament buildings the morning after the fire, which destroyed Centre Block, when firefighters were still trying to put the flames out.

"I want to show the Parliament all covered in ice because it was so cold that the water they used to try to put the fire out formed these huge icicles on them," says Rheume. "So it's like a giant frozen sculpture."

Aftermath will be displayed at the Ottawa City Hall throughout the fire's centennial year, says Ryan Kenney, a spokesperson for Mayor Jim Watson.

Rheume says he likes doing history paintings in which the subject is some noteworthy moment from Canada's past.

"I find stories that interest me in Canada and I bring them to life by painting pictures of it," says Rheume.

He says part of the fun of history paintings is conducting research in advance and learning what makes Canada the country it is today.

"People tend to become interested in things they can see. So as soon as you see the images, you start asking questions," he says. "This is one of the reasons why I do it — so people will learn about Canada and its history."

Rheume's Parliament Fire collection also includes *Beginnings*, which shows the original Parliament Buildings from before

the fire, *Inferno*, which depicts the buildings at the height of the blaze, and *Reconstruction*, which captures the building of the present-day Centre Block.

"When the 100th anniversary was coming up, I contacted the mayor's office and asked, 'Would you guys be interested in this painting and display it?' So that's how it led to the donation."

Rheume says he decided to donate *Aftermath* to the city because it was his favourite painting out of the four.

This year's Parliament fire anniversary marks a focal point for

Canada and Ottawa, says Bytown Museum collections and exhibition manager Grant Vogl.

"It's the 100th anniversary, where the story of the fire moved out of people's memory and more into history," he says.

The museum has commemorated the anniversary with an exhibition titled *Forged in Fire: The Building and Burning of Parliament*, which opened in conjunction with Winterlude on Jan. 29 and will run until Oct. 31.

Vogl says the fire is getting a lot of attention, both locally and nationally.

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