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Over the Hill

Art Walk showcases downtown's growing scene

BY SOPHIA LOUISA LEE

Downtown Los Angeles is becoming one of Southern California's cultural epicenters. Amid a storm of residential construction, architecture both old and new adds to the ambience of the Downtown Los Angeles Art Walk, which unites about 30 area galleries the second Thursday of each month for a creative tour.

M.J. Higgins Fine Art and Furnishings on South Main Street was the birthplace of the Gallery Row Organization and The Gallery Row District. But the gallery, housed in an 1896 building, may soon have to find a new home - the City of Los Angeles has begun eminent domain proceedings.

"Just as well," says co-owner Martha Higgins. "We've outgrown the place."

Still, the gallery has a nightlife all its own. Unbeknownst to many, the building has an underground space once known as a speakeasy owned by infamous gangster Al Capone. With the secret password, you can converge with other art lovers into the wee hours of the morning.

One might think M.J. Higgins is the start of the art walk. But even though the Museum of Contemporary Art and the L.A. Artcore Center are a bit off the beaten path, they are technically at the top of the map.

The Art Walk, however, can start anywhere - DASH buses offer free rides for participants from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m., and most galleries are within walking distance of each other.

Dover Abrams, once a gallerist at the former Lankershim Gallery (now NoHo Gallery LA in North Hollywood), started Infusion Gallery to be part of Downtown's Gallery Row. "It's a good place for us to be," says Abrams. "We help each other out, and we work well together."

Next door to Infusion is The Hive, a coop of several young artists who keep their studio space as part of the gallery. Keeping art affordable to the masses, The Hive's back room sells art items for \$50 or less.

Live painting by various artists is something that occurs on a regular basis, especially during Art Walk. "People are interested. They want to watch. A lot of people show up late at night and it gets really crowded," says artist Walt Hall.

In seemingly every area of congregated galleries, there is some sort of art party going on - whether people are buying art or simply enjoying being in its presence.

Even between the galleries there is art, thanks to Phantom Galleries LA. Using vacant storefront windows as temporary exhibition space, artists are given the opportunity to display their works on a much broader scale.

One such current space has transcended into "Migration Study," an exhibition of 24 artists' representations of multiculturalism in Los Angeles.

Liza Simone, the driving force behind Phantom Galleries LA, has even expanded to locations in Pasadena and Beverly Hills.

"The project gives local artists an opportunity to exhibit their work, while fostering economic development by drawing attention to available retail space," says Simone.

The non-profit art organization Pharamka Art shares close proximity with the Bert Green Gallery and the Red Dot Gallery. Live music can be found outside while people gallery hop. The famous El Nopal Press is also a neighbor, as is the INMO Gallery.



SOPHIA LOUISA LEE



Galleries open their doors on the second Thursday of each month.

Public options for seeing art and being part of the scene seem limitless. Two new galleries were recently added to the Art Walk: Morono Kiang Gallery and ground-floor@santeecourt. The cultural growth continues.

"It's a cool place to be," says artist Mark Acetelli, who lives in his studio near all the art action.

Whether you prefer traditional or more contemporary art, you can find it during Downtown LA's monthly Art Walk. ✨

For a full list of participating galleries, visit www.downtownartwalk.com.

Portrait of The Week



Robert Evans



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