

LOS ANGELES DOWNTOWN NEWS

Volume 33, Number 19

May 10, 2004

Row Revelry

Gallery Cluster Emerges in the Historic Core, but What's Next?

BY KRISTIN FRIEDRICH
CALENDAR EDITOR

Gallery owner Kjell Hagen thought there ought to be a formalized arts corridor in the Historic Core. But when the concept for a 26-block

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area known as Gallery Row went from dream to reality in just over a month, nobody was more surprised than Hagen.

"We've been playing catch up ever since," said Hagen, whose

friend Nic Cha Kim wrote the proposal that was embraced by the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council (DLANC) and approved by City Council last July.

On May 15, Gallery Row will be officially unveiled in Bidy Mason Park, between Broadway and Spring. That formality will probably be the most predictable part of the day; the rest is a flurry of free perfor-

mances and art installations, some in unusual spaces.

Gallery Row actually consists of two rows, on Spring and Main between Second and Ninth streets. In addition to the area's four tradi-

tional art spaces — Hagen's Inshallah, Groop, Bank Art and Gallery 727 — DLANC's Arts, Aesthetics and Culture (AAC) committee has created the see Gallery, page 8

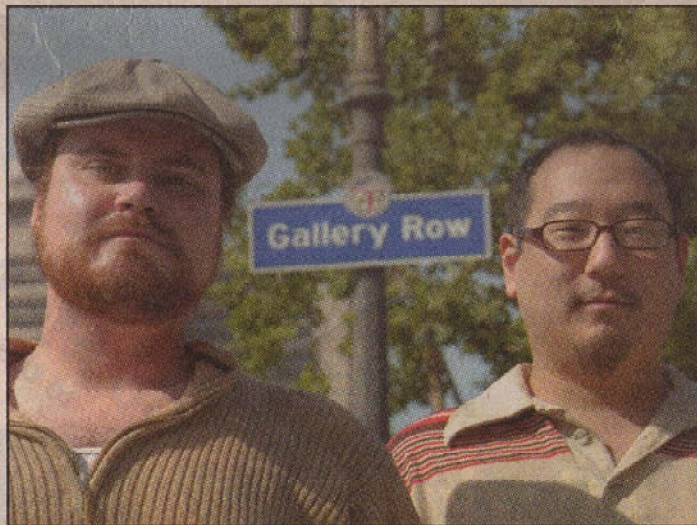


Photo by Gary Leonard

Kjell Hagen and Nic Cha Kim created the Gallery Row proposal last June.

Gallery

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Windows Display Project, which mounts dozens of installations inside vacant storefronts and office space. Most are viewable from the street while a few require visitors to enter the buildings.

The kick-off festivities combine the old and new guards of the Downtown art community. Veteran artist Gronk, for example, takes up the display windows of the Tomahawk Building at 814 S. Spring St., while emerging artist Launa Bacon's spider web installation is on the ground floor of the Continental Building at Fourth and Spring. Lillian Abel Calamari showcases work from her 11-year-old Project Hotel Alert, an art workshop for the homeless, in the St. George Hotel, while the old Interstate Bank edifice will host a daytime art store and a film and video forum in the evening.

At the Los Angeles Theatre Center, Kim has curated play readings, Brewery artist Richard Ankrom hangs neon in the lobby and artist Laura Merians' photography show *Cell-Outs and Phonies* unfolds in the basement, featuring pictures taken with cell phones.

Participants say an outlet for local art in the Central City is long overdue. "We've got the product, we've got the history, but we don't have a distribution point," said Downtown artist and resident Rick Robinson. "There's actually space for galleries all in one spot here. I think people

down here need to realize it's one of the best opportunities put before them."

After the Party

The question, of course, is what happens when the May 15 party ends. A few of the exhibits will last just the day, but some will continue.

Lilli Muller, who has held several body casting events in the Arts District over the last year, is hosting a plaster session and group art show at the 729 S. Spring St. lofts. She said she has permission to keep the show up for an additional month, and she is in talks with the owner to create a permanent art space.

AAC members agree that for now, Gallery Row is more an idea than a place. The City Council gave its blessing (Councilwoman Jan Perry calls it a "relationship builder") and DLANC paid for the way-finding street signs, but the real work lies ahead.

Part of the Gallery Row mission is simple outreach. DLANC's proposal outlined the financial incentives for opening galleries: Since the area is part of a Federal Empowerment Zone, entrepreneurs are entitled to loans, grants to restore historic facades, and discounts on electricity and business taxes. "These programs existed prior to Gallery Row, but I don't think many people in the creative community knew about them," said Kim.

Though they won't participate May 15, Mickey Kaplan's Modern Art Downtown, scheduled to open in the next few months, and Bert Green Fine Art, which opens in September at the Rosslyn Hotel at Fifth and Main, are also part of the Gallery Row col-

lective. AAC players hope more gallerists will come, and the committee will continue to look for property owners amenable to temporary window installations.

Another goal is to convince property owners of the benefits of an art space. Hagen admits that while gallery owners can't often pay as much rent as other stores, they can move into blighted areas and spruce up the streetscape. For the last several months, AAC reps have attended local Business Improvement District (BID) meetings, pitching galleries as catalysts for new business.

Those BID presentations snagged both Duane Cameron, president of System Property, and Ann Simons, of L&R Investments, companies which co-own the Broadway Spring Center. They donated the use of Biddy Mason Park, six display spaces and a validated parking lot. "It's good for the area," Cameron said, "and that street [Spring] needs all the help it can get right now."

There was some early resistance from smaller property owners who wanted to keep their storefronts vacant should filming opportunities arise, but momentum has grown even among them, said AAC member Kimba Rogers. "We're building a neighborhood, so they should be open to it."

Green, now owner of Circle Elephant Art on Hollywood Boulevard (he will change the name of his space when he moves), has worked with AAC for a year. "I opened in Los Feliz five years ago, and there was the same pioneer aspect. There was one gallery there and now there are nine," Green says. "I think that relocating is a lateral move for me now, but the potential Downtown is so much greater than where I am."

The Gallery Row unveiling is May 15, 1 p.m., at the Biddy Mason Park in the Broadway Spring Center Courtyard, 333 S. Spring St. Maps available for events to follow. (213) 380-5969 or galleryrow.org.