



POPPIN' FRESH

Suddenly everything comes into focus for a gallery owner on the fringe

By Scott Edwards

The signs are there. It's just a matter of how closely we pay attention. In Brian Hanck's case, fate intervened by way of an actual sign. A "For Rent" posting, specifically.

After three years in New Hope, Hanck found himself weighing his options for the future of his Pop art gallery, ARTisZEN Arts. An always-tough parking situation was made worse in recent months with the start of construction on a high-end condo development just up the street. And, the rent, considering the size of the space he occupied, was becoming increasingly difficult to swallow. Plus, he had a baby on the way – his third.

Still, his heart was in New Hope, which was easy to understand as someone who considers himself "left-of-center" and an "out-of-the-box-thinker," characteristics that were central to New Hope's evolution as an artists' colony.

When business slowed in the winter months, Hanck developed Second Saturdays, a spin-off of the First Fridays concept, where art galleries are encouraged to host informal receptions and performances in an attempt to boost foot traffic. Much like the artists he represents, Hanck is always willing to take

chances, understanding that sometimes the ideas will not stick. But lately, his ideas felt more like they were masking a larger problem.

A random occurrence that in retrospect seems anything but drew a world of new possibilities into focus for Hanck. He was walking along North Main Street in Lambertville, NJ, when he spotted the aforementioned sign. The space it was advertising spoke to every one of his needs – high ceilings, much more room and parking out front. There was too much that appeared right about the situation for Hanck to believe that this was not where he was meant to land. "I originally had a studio. I called my Mechanic Street location a studio," Hanck says through a glazed expression, the result of relocating his art gallery and ushering his baby, a girl, into the world simultaneously. "Now I've moved into a gallery."

The Union Street gallery provides the physical space to expand Hanck's collection and unleash his wild imagination, the latter likely being the greatest catalyst for the move. In a region loaded with artistic outlets, Hanck's gallery is distinct in that he is one of the few that specializes in Pop, Modern and Abstract

art, or, as he defines it, "where you do things that aren't normally artistic and then make something of it." In this vein, he's set his immediate sights on expanding his offerings to include all that that entails, from traditional singer-songwriter nights to more experimental music performances.

Planned for Second Saturday in December, which Hanck will continue to participate in even though he is no longer coordinating it, ARTisZEN Arts will host an exhibition by mixed media artist Colleen Attara (whose work is pictured above, right) entitled "Peeking In, Looking Out." The collection will feature Attara's wonderfully imaginative cities and retro rooms that she creates from discarded windows and recycled Plexiglas and metal.

Awash in the fresh light of a new day, almost anything feels possible. Well, almost anything.

"I'd like to do more performance art," Hanck says. "I get a little nervous depending upon what type of performance, though, because I don't want to ruin the art that is in my gallery."

ARTisZEN Arts, 35 North Union Street, Lambertville, NJ; 609-773-0044. •