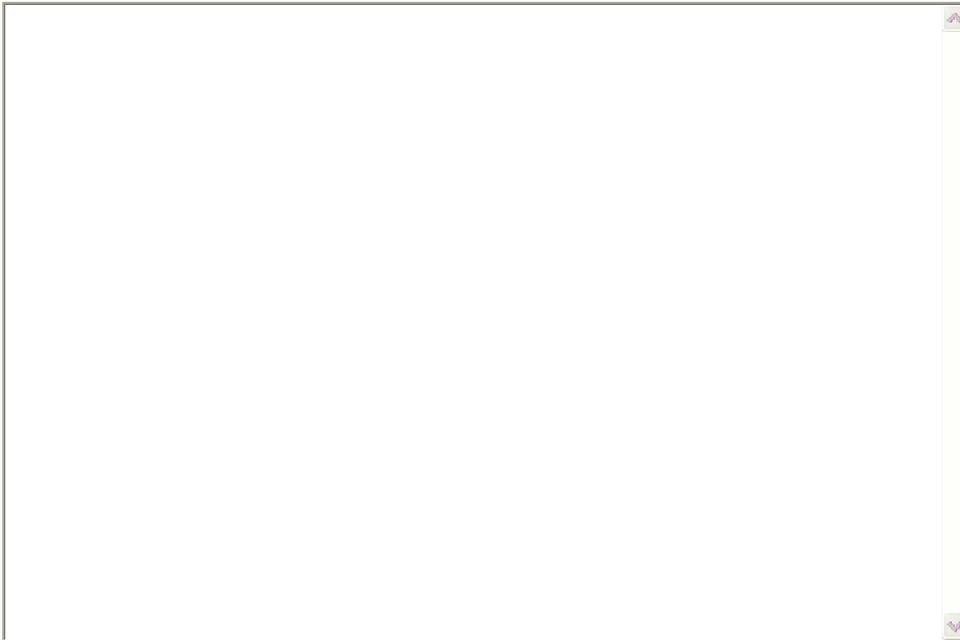


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Breaking the Art Rules

[Matthew Huisman](#) | Dec 15, 2009 | [Comments 1](#)



by [Matthew Huisman](#)

Four surrealist paintings hang on Luis D. Rosado's wall in his South Bronx apartment. The sequence of paintings by Rich Rethorn depicts a horrific version of the four seasons. Skin slowly melts off a zombie's head, eventually revealing a skull set in front of a post apocalyptic backdrop. An eyeball dangles from the skull, still connected to the socket, and stares back at the viewer.

"I wanted to put together a show that was thought provoking imagery," Rethorn, 45, said of the paintings. "It might be disturbing to some people. But usually when they're disturbed, that's when they're going to start to ask questions."

The paintings were part of the November exhibit at LDR Studio Gallery, a gallery that operates out of the 28-year-old Rosado's apartment at 134th Street and Alexander Avenue. For Rosado, it's more than just a hobby, it's a lifestyle.

"I feel like my calling was in the South Bronx and I wanted to do my own thing," Rosado said of his gallery. "I wanted to break all the rules. Call me crazy, but I think I'm doing it."

Rosado's gallery, which bears his initials, is celebrating its second anniversary in December with champagne. But before he can pop the cork on the affair, Rosado has to remove the previous month's exhibit with help from artist and curator Rethorn.



Luis D. Rosado in his apartment art gallery on the second anniversary of the studio. Photo by Matthew Huisman

To maintain his artist's lifestyle, Rosado holds down two jobs, runs his own architecture photography business and sleeps four hours a day. Rosado is emblematic of the diverse artistic community of the South Bronx that seeks independence from the restraints of large, corporate galleries while exploring alternative outlets for their creative energy. The South Bronx gives artists the canvas to develop their unique style and exhibit their work the way they see it.

Seven blocks north of Rosado's apartment gallery is another apartment-turned-gallery, the Bronx Blue Bedroom Project, started two years ago by Blanka Amezkua. Born in Mexico and raised in California, Amezkua left the Golden State five years ago for the Bronx.

Amezkua's idea for the Bronx Blue Bedroom Project was a creative reaction to the emotions she felt after losing her nephew in a car crash in 2006. Amezkua took the death hard since she had never before experienced losing a loved-one who was so dear to her. A year later Amezkua painted her Mott Haven bedroom robin's-egg blue and thus was born the Blue Bedroom Project.

"In retrospect, that was part of my healing," Amezkua said. "It was an opening up of the most intimate space in my apartment." Amezkua now lives with her husband in Queens and makes the daily commute to her studio where she once lived.

Amezkua has invited Bronx artists like Laura Napier and Matthew Burkaw, whom she met through Artists in the Marketplace, a program run by the Bronx Museum of the Arts that provides artists with practical knowledge, to be part of her project. December's artist is Napier and she is planning a bit of trickery for gallery-goers.



Artist Laura Napier shows off her exhibit at the Bronx Blue Bedroom Project. Photo by Matthew Huisman

Two floors above Amezkua's blue bedroom, Napier is running a cable from her fifth floor bedroom window down the front of the building to Amezkua's gallery. The wire carries a live feed of Napier's bedroom – identical in size, shape and painted to match the original blue bedroom – to be transmitted on a television inside Amezkua's gallery. The bedroom door in the gallery will be closed with a sign posted that asks guests to keep the door closed. Patrons will be able to watch what's happening on the other side of the bedroom door on the television, or so they think.

"The idea is if people go in there and people are expecting to see themselves on the screen, they won't," Napier said of the exhibit. "I'm really interested to see how people behave."

Napier is using her lunch break from her job at the Bronx Council for the Arts to set up her upcoming December exhibit in the Bronx Blue Bedroom Project. The blue bedroom serves as a place where artists and the community interact and share art.

The South Bronx has a long artistic history dating back to the 70's when Stefan Eins founded Fashion Moda, a storefront art studio and melting pot where artists and the neighborhood mingled.

"There was hip hop, there was break-dancing, there was dj-ing and there was graffiti," said Lisa Kahane, a photographer who documented the Bronx during the 70's. "What happened at Moda was these people met with artists from downtown, so there was definitely a cross pollination of different art forms."

While The Bronx was experimenting with Fashion Moda, SoHo was becoming a booming art scene where galleries lined the blocks south of Houston Street. The same happened in Chelsea, as philanthropists poured more money into the Manhattan art scene.

"So you walk around and there are all these galleries all in one place," Kahane said. "That was the accepted art neighborhood."

When rent in Manhattan increased, artists sought out cheaper living accommodations and more space in the outer boroughs. Places like Williamsburg and Greenpoint in Brooklyn have seen an influx in artists who are gentrifying the communities they occupy. However, the art scene in the South Bronx, though, has never been able to grow quite as fast.

"It's up and coming but it's taking its time," Rosado said of the South Bronx art scene. Along with the tight-knit artistic community comes freedom from the corporate strings—a big selling point for Rosado.

"I just never really liked the fact that you had to pretty much be a prostitute to galleries about your art and yourself," Rosado said. "I'm not dogging Chelsea. It's just that I don't like the attitude within that art world. I know that eventually I would like to show in Chelsea, but I don't like the fact that it's become so corporate. They start forgetting about the art itself and it's all about business."



LDR Studio Gallery celebrated its second anniversary with champagne. Photo by Matthew Huisman

For Amekua the stigma that surrounds The Bronx started in the 70's with the housing crisis and more recently the violence that plagued the borough in the 90's. This has left the South Bronx with a reputation as an uncultured void in the city.

"It's a very different thing when you say Bronx or when you say Williamsburg or Chelsea," Amekua said. "The Bronx is viewed as the ugly duckling of New York." She did, however, praise the borough's diversity. "When you come from a place that is not as diverse, and you land in The Bronx, you see the richness of the culture. It's mindboggling."

The downside to keeping corporate money at bay, is that the South Bronx art movement has never gained enough momentum to pull in outside investors.

"It's like pulling teeth," said Barry Kostrinsky, a 25-year veteran of the South Bronx art scene. "There are a lot of artists who do their own thing. Everyone has so many things going on in their life."

Since the 80's Kostrinsky has been creating art, everything from oil landscapes to acrylic on found objects. He said that art is about self expression and being socially aware at the same time.

"Art is about blasting parameters," Kostrinsky said. "If you draw on garbage, you put it in perspective. It's not the Mona-fucking-Lisa, it's very real."

It's opening night for Rosado's gallery and he is popping another bottle of champagne for his guests. He smiles as he refills empty glasses and begins to take another stroll through the exhibit.

"I like the fact that I am an underground gallery," Rosado said. "I wake up in the morning and I eat art. I breathe art. I see art. It's just all over."

Rosado and Amekua have maintained their independence from corporate art galleries, deciding instead to go it alone financially. Their reward is the ability to showcase local art that is free and open to the community while exploring the limits of their own creativity.

"Everybody leaves and I just sit down on the floor, pop a bottle of champagne," Rosado said, "and just look at the artwork one by one."

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December 15, 2009 at 11:52 pm

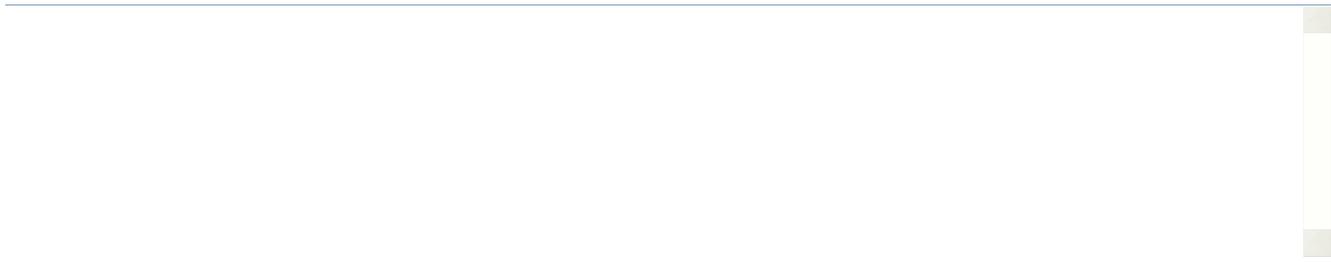
Thanks to Matthew and Bronx Ink – It’s a pleasure to be involved in the Bronx art scene. I hope to see its evolution and will continue to spread the word and create more art! – Rich

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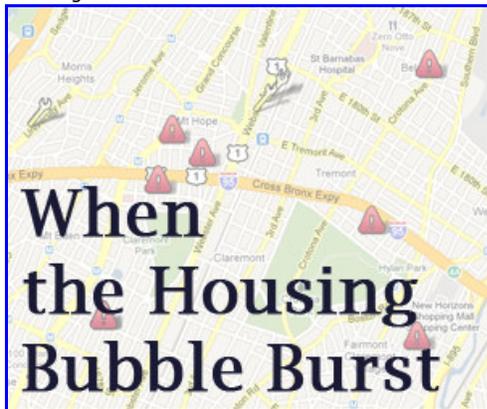
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