



Urban contemporary artists Paul Rogers and Ryan Jaenke turn Artchitecture Gallery's blank canvas into a work of art for the gallery's first show.

Breaking Down Walls

Artchitecture Gallery shows where street art intersects with a vision.

by **Tori Woods**

When the doors of Artchitecture Gallery finally opened to the public in August, director Bill Rupnik wasn't sure what to expect.

He had two kegs of beer, 40 bottles of wine, a room full of urban contemporary art and high hopes. By the end of the night, he had ran out of beer, sold 12 pieces and seen more than 200 people come through. Now the artist-turned-gallery owner has exhibits planned through 2008.

"I want to provide artists with opportunities they wouldn't get at other galleries," Rupnik says. "I'm bringing street art into a gallery setting. I think it belongs here, and no one else in Cleveland is doing it."

To get to this point, Rupnik gutted and rebuilt the space he occupies at the Loftworks Building in the Superior-St. Clair neighborhood. It took time and effort — nine months of labor that Rupnik and a friend poured into the project.

When Rupnik, 30, toured the Loftworks Building in his search for a live/work space, he loved the building, but felt the lofts weren't large enough to be-

come the gallery he envisioned. When the building's owner, Cliff Hershman, showed him the vacant storefront space with high ceilings and tons of potential, Rupnik was sold.

"I walked in and immediately knew it was perfect," Rupnik says. "I slept on it, and called Cliff the next morning and said, 'Let's do this.'"

The night Rupnik was given the key, he immediately tore out the gray carpeting that covered the walls. With his credit card and loans from friends and family, he began building his dream — demolition, construction, dry walling, electrical work and painting — while still working 9-to-5 at Jakprints. Rupnik and his friend Jake Mauzy put in 16- to 18-hour days every weekend, crafting the gallery and the living areas for Rupnik (who lived there throughout the renovation).

"Luckily Jake worked for Chipotle and beers" Rupnik says with a chuckle.

There were delays, but the completed place feels spacious thanks to a front wall full of windows, cathedral-style ceilings and painted ductwork. The white walls

serve as a blank canvas for artists to hang their work or even to paint new work on the walls themselves.

The artists for Rupnik's opening exhibition, Paul Rogers and Ryan Jaenke, installed found-object art, over-sized pieces and intricate paintings. Their aesthetic represents the sort of art Rupnik hopes to fill his gallery with in the coming year — urban contemporary, or street art.

Artchitecture Gallery's current exhibit, *Hangin' Out With My Friends In The Backyard*, will be on display through Nov. 23. It features Akron native Jay Croft, who owns a skate shop and designs skateboard graphics and shoes. Croft's work is filled with Pop Art colors and innocent, playful images with not-so-innocent undertones. This will be his first solo exhibit.

"I have the right location for the right reasons," Rupnik says. "And this city has the right artists."

1667 E. 40th St., Unit 1A, Cleveland, (216) 533-5575; open Saturdays and Sundays noon to 4 p.m., weekdays by appointment; for more information, visit www.artchitecturegallery.com.