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Don't be Haightin'

The garage arts are strong in Calgary
Published December 2, 2010 by [Caitlind R.C. Brown](#) in [Visual Arts](#)

Haight Gallery is the newest addition to Calgary's independent do-it-yourself galleries. Just as the underground theatre scene in Calgary puts on plays in living rooms, artists who either cannot or will not show their work in publicly accessible commercial galleries are inherently attracted to a household space.

A project of recent Alberta College of Art and Design grad Matthew Mark, and located in the northwest's Banff Trail neighbourhood, Haight Gallery's opening show is *Hunting Elephants*, featuring work by Calgary favourites Jack Bride, Richard Brown, Atom Deguire, Shawn Mankowske, Nate Mcleod, Tyler Los-Jones and Ryan Scott. This group appears a good fit for Haight's garage space: all these dudes, in one way or another, are in love with alternative art spaces.

In 2007, Los-Jones and Scott were involved with the founding and evolution of 809 Gallery, a garage gallery in Kensington that was open for 809 days before being disbanded. Los-Jones also helped found Local Library, an all-ages art and music venue located in Central United Church, (incidentally, Local Library just won a Mayor's Arts Award for Innovation in Community Outreach). Brown, an ACAD professor, moonlights as the frontman of Sleepy Panther, a pyjama rock band famous for art gigs. Sleepy Panther's most imminent gig is at an upcoming fundraiser for The Bakery Collective, a studio group located inside the old Alberta Boot Factory. To complete the circle, The Bakery Collective also includes — guess who? — McLeod and Mark.

The point is this: Calgary's arts reputation is not good, but it is strong. As an artist, if you expect to stay in this city, improvisation is essential and, sometimes, building your own resources is necessary. Mark named his gallery after San Francisco's crossroads, Haight and Ashbury, and the "youth who took refuge there, who refused to accept the roles they were handed, and distrusted power." Haight is falling into a long (secret) Calgary history of do-it-yourself artists, combating "high real estate rates and cost of living" by building alternative spaces in closets and sheds. Haight Gallery is another healthy step towards empowering artists to claim their own turf.

And for a first crack at the can, Haight certainly nails "white cube" — Mark can officially brag that he has the cleanest garage in the city. The space has been cleared of almost all garagey ephemera, with a faux wall covering the garage door, and a clean, white finish. The only architectural element giving the space away is an overhead garage door track and a series of mandatory heaters. To top it off, the works curated by Mark, with the exception of one or two less precise pieces, are sharp and crisp, adding to a tidiness atypical of most garage galleries.

Bride's gyrating geometric rainbow painting welcomes the viewer into the space and introduces an unintentional esthetic theme: Many of the works showcase hard lines and clean workmanship. In the middle of paintings and prints, Deguire's sculptural candy dispenser tosses up the 2-D mix and tantalizes the taste buds. A precise and beautiful cloud painting, characteristic of all of Brown's recent work, hangs by the door: a strong ending to the exhibition. While the show is inconsistent in places (so many artists, so little time), it is marked with signs of a good beginning. The space itself is commendable and absolutely rife with possibility.

To be an artist in a professional, self-sustaining context (to be an artist who intends to still be making work 10, 20 and 50 years from now) is one-part maintaining an active practice, and one-part finding consistent places to show one's work.... Oh yeah, and finding a way to get paid to do these things. Haight Gallery's intention is to assist those who feel they are "constantly asking permission to be artists" and powerlessly striving against a city where the art scene is still emerging. And while the struggle may be hard, the hope is that — like any



DETAILS

Hunting Elephants

[Haight Gallery](#)
Tuesday, November 30 - Tuesday, December 14

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