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Blurring the Distinction Between Gallery and Art

GUIDE

By David Boegaard

Recent years have seen a boom in the Durham art scene. From the now defunct Outsider Gallery, to zero-commission The Carrack to community arts events like Third Friday, Durham is an increasingly cosmopolitan place for professionals and students alike. Spectre Arts is trying to carve out its own space within Durham's suddenly thriving art market. In order to set themselves apart, they've taken the art opening tradition of an event with wine and good conversation, and turned it up to 11 by making each opening into a full-blown event.

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Spectre Arts opened a couple of years ago in a historic, century-old church in the Golden Belt District. They're still feeling their way forward in some ways, but that's because Spectre Arts is more than just another gallery -- it's trying to be a work of art itself. They are trying to make their space into an vivid, moving and wonder-provoking experience. Rather than paint or marble, however, Spectre Arts works in the medium of relationships and engagement. "We believe that art is a vital form of communication and social engagement," says Alicia Lange, Director of Spectre Arts. "Thus, we are dedicated to promoting contemporary

About The Author



David Boegaard
Staff Writer

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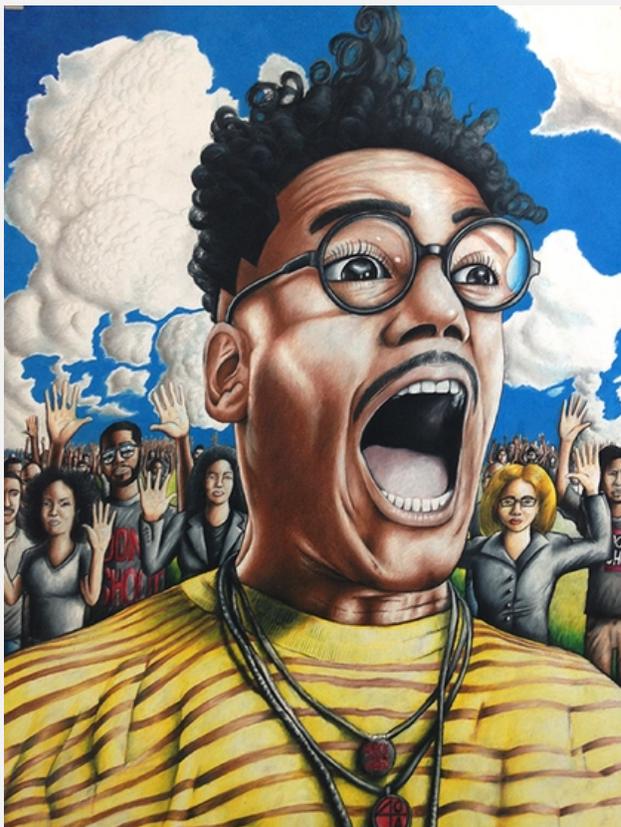
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visual and performative practices by stimulating dialog between artists and community."

Spectre has chosen this focus not only because they want to distinguish themselves, of course. Lange fervently believes that "art has a great impact on the breadth and wealth of the community for all." That's why Spectre has worked to make sure that their space is radically open and inviting. "Opening a space where people of any background or interest can come and view artwork allows them to understand their world and interests better as well as illustrate how work can enhance the life that surrounds them."

In order to create a dynamic context for the kind of art that changes minds and hearts, Spectre tries to ensure that their space welcomes all, and encourages dialogue between all, suggests Lange. "As a curator and former practicing artist, artists need to engage in a community that extends past their immediate circle of knowledge. It helps them grow their work and opens unforeseen opportunities."



Painting by Bobby Danger

It helps, of course, that Spectre is located in the midst of the beautiful Golden Belt District. They recently showed the vitality of the local community by hosting an exhibit of artists from the neighborhood, called Hey Neighbor "It was a wonderful exhibit that helped us to illustrate how important our creative atmosphere is and how we value our creative neighbors in the area with a wealth of beautiful and diverse work." Not only did Spectre host a lovely opening, but the closing reception featured jazz in their outside patio area.

Ultimately art galleries are marketplaces for the display and purchasing of art. But as Spectre has shown, the relationship need not be merely transactional. As is appropriate for a gallery in a church, Spectre is attempting to be a place for the sharing of a spark of transcendent realization. "Without this vision artists would not gain the essential creative spark they need and the community would be left with a dull environment," Lange muses.

So make sure you check out the art at Spectre Arts, and try to make it to one of

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their many events. Hopefully a particular work will compel so strongly that you'll purchase it, but you'll find inspiration regardless. And that's no accident, Lange suggests. "As a community of growing galleries and artist spaces we create a joyful energy and another option of things to do in Durham, NC."

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