

HEAD: Brooklyn Art Cave exhibition 'Portals of Love' exemplifies growing BK art scene

DECK: Multi-medium exhibition showcases love through the eyes of 25 artists

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**BUSHWICK** — Brooklyn Art Cave transformed into a portal of love Friday night, Feb. 7, as artists, curators, friends and strangers gathered to experience the opening night of its newest exhibition at 897 Broadway.

"Portals of Love" curator Adriana Bugarin went above and beyond in her portrayal of the exhibition, which explored love through the eyes of others, with the help of 25 artists across mediums. The space glowed with pink and red lights, artwork lined the walls and love-themed music played as viewers took in the scene.

Brooklyn Art Cave, a minority-owned art center in Bushwick, provides a space for local artists to showcase and sell their works. Art Cave helps artists reach audiences they would otherwise not be able to find on their own. The uniquely Brooklyn gallery also provides a safe space for artists across mediums to network with each other.

The exhibition, curated by Bugarin, was supported by work from Alex Z., Winkie da Kidd, Steven Rodriguez and Diana. Around 160 people attended the opening night. The event featured performances from jazz singer Priya, band Maximum Love Timeline and singer/songwriter Jasper Jones.

The exhibition showed art through several mediums, including oil paintings, scrapbooking, photography, puppetry and music. There was even a guided meditation to encourage viewers to connect with the theme of love.

Like many of the artists in attendance, Curator Steven Rodriguez found his passion for photography through Art Cave. Rodriguez didn't see himself as an artistic person until exploring art at Art Cave.

“We get taught that art is a cute picture or it's not as valuable as all these other very valuable practices. For me, art really creates realities,” Rodriguez said.

According to Bugarin, Art Cave is a place for artists to show their perspective on the world. “Portals of Love” is an opportunity for viewers to see love through the different artists’ perspectives.

“All these artists we see now, this is how they think, that's how they see the world,” said Bugarin. “This is their inner world, that there would be no other way to even comprehend it or visualize it other than them sharing with us.”

While many art museums and galleries in New York City cater to already established artists, Art Cave prides itself on being a center for people who are just beginning. It gives young local artists a community and space to kickstart their journey as an artist.

“We do not discriminate. We allow everyone who wants to be an artist to be an artist,” said Winkie da Kidd. “We invite them into our space and become family with them. I think it's a beautiful experience to be able to share that with everybody.”

Another distinct quality of Art Cave is the way it gathers artists for an exhibition. Rather than reaching out to specific artists, Bugarin posted on social media that Art Cave was looking for artists of any medium to present their work at the exhibition. Anyone who saw the posting had an opportunity to apply for the exhibition — a uniquely democratic way for artists to gain exposure.

“If you're ready to invest in yourself, we're going to invest with you, to give you our expertise when it comes to marketing, promotion, collectors and a little bit of everything,” Z. said.

The minority-owned center provides opportunities for young artists, but also for minorities hoping to break into the art world. According to Rodriguez, they welcome everyone with open arms without discriminating.

Bushwick has long been known for street art and graffiti. The [Bushwick Collective](#) was formed in 2012 by Joseph Ficalora as an attempt to honor his father's murder in 1991. Other neighborhoods in Brooklyn, [like Red Hook](#), have become known for their artistic community, where a sense of community bolsters artists and empowers them to make a living from nontraditional paths.

For minorities in New York City, making a career in art might seem unreachable. It can be impossible for artists from low-income backgrounds, marginalized communities or those without connections to gallery owners and big-name artists to get featured in a traditional Manhattan gallery. Z. noted that he felt out of place as a marginalized person going to art exhibitions, but Art Cave made art attainable and accessible.

"One of the most valuable aspects of giving a voice to a lot of minorities is that it creates this spark. It literally changes your life," said Bugarin.

"Growing up, you don't feel like it's accessible to you. Having spaces like Brooklyn Art Cave ignites that flame."

Though the center is for local artists, Z. said they have artists from all over who come to showcase their creations. Portals of Love alone showcased artists from Texas, Canada, Japan and more.

"We work within the community first, and second is outside of our community," Z. said. He described Brooklyn's growing and increasingly legitimate art scene, noting that "People want to come here."

Jazz singer Priya gave the first performance of the night at the exhibition, singing classic love songs. Because it is also Black History Month, Priya decided to perform Etta James's "At Last" as a tribute to Black artists. Her performance showed love as a form of liberation.

"I think of a 'Portal' as a wish. One day they're going to show up, or one day maybe I'll reach that place of self love," Priya said.

Maximum Love Timeline followed Priya's performance with a set exploring love and growth, including sun and flower puppets. The night ended with singer and songwriter Jasper Jones's performance, which explored themes of shadows and light.

The walls were adorned with photos, oil paintings and a comic book strip. Javi Martinez started writing comics six years ago, and after becoming impatient with finding an illustrator, started drawing the comics himself. Martinez showed four comic scenes designed to show love during a time of chaos. According to Martinez, the exhibition was an opportunity for him to showcase his art in a new environment.

"Getting exposure is always important, especially in New York City, where there's so many artists. It's kind of hard to stick out from the crowd sometimes, so Brooklyn Art Cave does a good job," Martinez said.

Artist Pam Yuan submitted her oil paintings for the exhibition, and each one replicated a historical painting through the lens of self love. Yuan's interpretation of "Portals of Love" draws attention to self love through oil paintings. Yuan used a pearl motif, to represent beauty and pain. When clams get debris in their shells, they excrete something that eventually turns into a pearl; Yuan's paintings of clams and pearls represent pain and beauty from self love.

"I think that self love is the ultimate 'Portal of Love.' Your relationship with yourself radiates into all the other relationships you have," Yuan said.

"Portals of Love" closed Sunday night, but there are many events on the horizon for [Brooklyn Art Cave](#). Starting Thursday, Feb. 13, it will showcase the work of Brooklyn artist Stephanie Borkowski, followed by SpokenMoon Open Mic night on Friday, Feb. 14.