

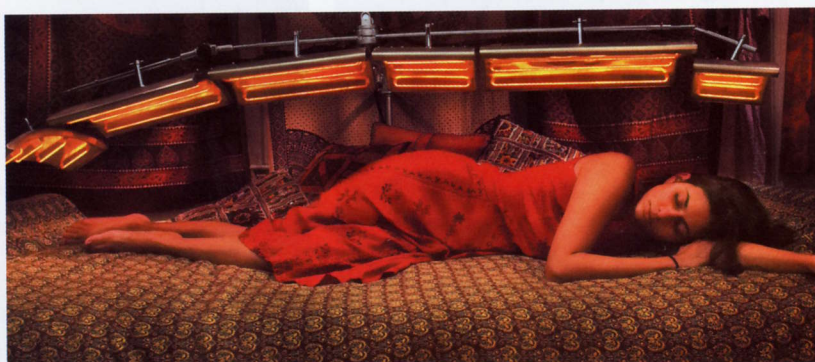
# Art Meets Commerce.

The backdrop for this writer's take on the Boston arts scene is that it's marked by a diminishing number of alternative spaces, as in non-mainstream places for artists to show their work. At the same time, the most established venues are expanding. This phenomenon means that visual artists are looking for an alternative to "alternative spaces" to drum up much-needed attention from, who else, curators in both the Boston establishment and elsewhere. Though there are still opportunities in niches supported by existing commercial ventures, the tradition of artwork being displayed in cafes just doesn't seem to cut it these days. For those looking for alternative spaces, and for those curators who are looking for talent, I propose three projects of note that may inspire us.

Cambridge-based artist Eric Starosielski has been included in many shows, has won awards, and has been written about in many publications. (I even had the honor of including some of his work in a show I curated back in the days of Somerville's Gallery Ber-shad.) Somehow, though, this talented artist is still in search of a space, alternative or otherwise, to hang his hat. Starosielski's current project, entitled Thermal Comfort Device, was installed in the windows of the high-end fashion retailer Barneys New York at their Chestnut Hill location last month.

Starosielski's window installation featured a beautifully fabricated stainless steel personal bed and body warmer. His creation assumes the role of a surrogate lover for those who sleep alone. Starosielski goes to the homes of singles, installs his device in their bedrooms, and takes their photograph while sleeping under its warm glow (For the record, that is how I first encountered his project). The photographs themselves are unmistakably fashion-inspired, and were on display with the device set up over a bedroom set.

Of course, there was a selection of



Top: Eric Starosielski examines his Thermal Comfort Device.  
Above: someone being comforted.

# Where are the Medici?

by Roland Smart

Barneys' clothing as part of the eye-catching display.

Because the Thermal Comfort Device was in a storefront window, one had to wonder if it too was for sale. And although I find the idea of buying a Thermal Comfort Device hilarious, in context of high-end gadget retailers there is something deeper going on in this work that takes advantage of Barneys' storefront and explains what's in it for Starostelski.

His work uses the language — the panache and sophistication and prefabrication — of advertising to subvert Barneys.

Yet from the retail clothing perspective it may appear that wearing something from Barneys can help you avoid the need for Starostelski's Thermal Comfort Device. Underlying Starostelski's slick images lies a subtext that suggests otherwise.

What I take from this that artists in search of exhibit space should be careful to know how their goals relate to the space he is using Barneys' space to develop his project rather than generate sales. Perhaps he'll find more singles to photograph or even get a commission, but it is Barneys that is in it for the sales.

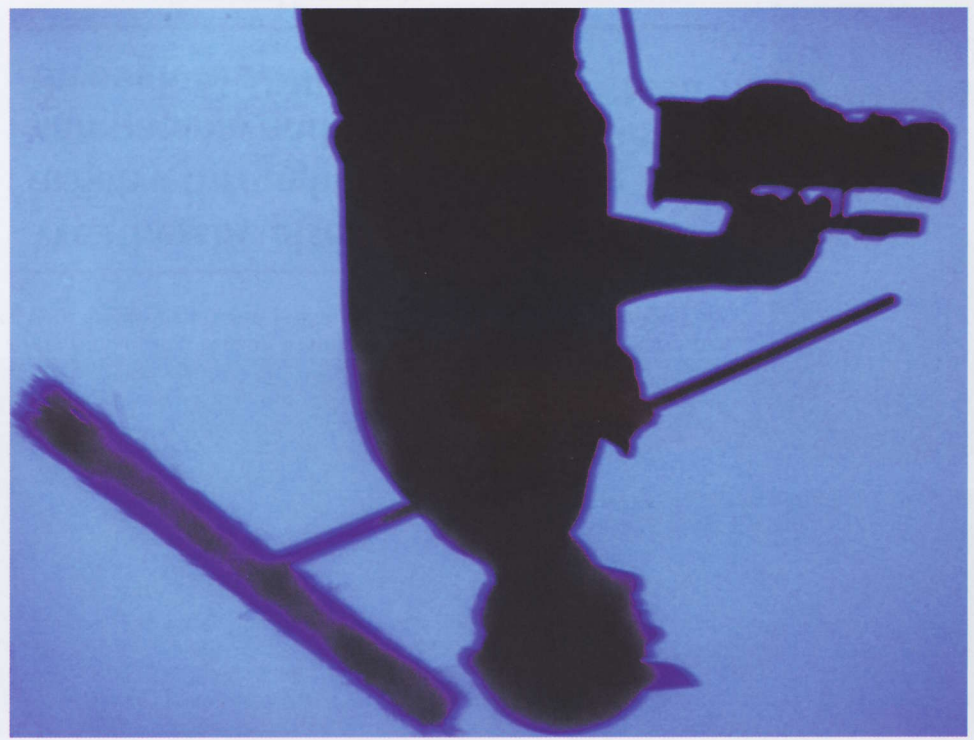
Boston-based artist Douglas Weatherby should be a familiar name because he has already caught the attention of the Boston establishment and was awarded the ICA Artista Prize last year. He exhibited at the Green Street Gallery in September where he turned a gallery renovation project into performance and installation artwork.

Weatherby's project is actually a company called Environmental Services that offers janitorial

Above: Douglas Weatherby on assignment. Right: a promotional piece.

and construction services. He uses debris from his jobsites to create site-specific installations that he documents with photographs and video. Weatherby also expresses his artistry through his advertising campaigns, and, better still, through his billing. It's a pretty cheeky concept that manages to reference many artistic traditions while also providing an hourly wage.

Weatherby was also part of an exhibition recently in Jamaica, Queens, entitled "Jamaica Flux: Workspaces & Windows" in October that explored the relationship between art and commerce. In his case, he gets his workspace as part of his job contracts. You supply the basement in need of cleaning; he gets a studio to work in until the job is done. And if you're lucky, you might get some artwork as part of the deal.



Though Wethersby's clients are paying him an hourly wage, part of their compensation is in the form of studio/exhibition space. I think there must be creative ways to interpret the Environmental Services approach without necessarily having to start a company per se. With construction projects springing up everywhere you turn in Boston, I often wonder at the opportunities to create installations, murals, and public art projects for an artist with initiative and a strong proposal. I think part of what makes Wethersby so inspiring is his advertisements, which represent an ambition to find projects rather than waiting for calls for work.

Boston-based painter Brendan Killian walks a friend's dog occasionally in Jamaica Plain. On one such occasion, rain started falling and he headed into a local pub to wait out the weather. There he met William Brokhof, a local realtor, who happens to be the owner of a very similar dog. Half an hour later they were discussing art and Killian

in it. The lubricating effect of an endless supply of wine doesn't inhibit the process either.

Also, there is a built-in word-of-mouth generator, with artists getting to show their work and hopefully sell something commission-free.

I must say that I was a bit skeptical about the art sales aspect of the collaboration, but there is a built-in kicker: when the house is sold, Brokhof buys




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invited Brokhof to visit his studio. Brokhof recently bought a home of his own and was potentially interested in finding art for his walls. Though he never made it to Killian's studio, he did send him an interesting e-mail the next week that suggested working together on a project that became known as Art House.

Brokhof's proposal offered two condos that were for sale as a space for Killian to curate an exhibition. In less than two months, they had scheduled an open house, filled the house with artwork, signed up a DJ, got a restaurant to donate food, and publicized the opening as an opportunity to see artwork and socialize while also checking out condos for sale.

To top of the community-based effort, they invited the local charity Horizons For the Homeless to set up an information table. Besides Killian's outstanding paintings, he included the work of 13 other artists.

Of course, it's easier to sell a house with artwork on the walls, especially one with lots of cool artsy people

a piece of artwork from the show as a housewarming gift for the new owners.



Top: Brendan Killian. Center: Killian's "Sheep Cloud." Above: "Horse."