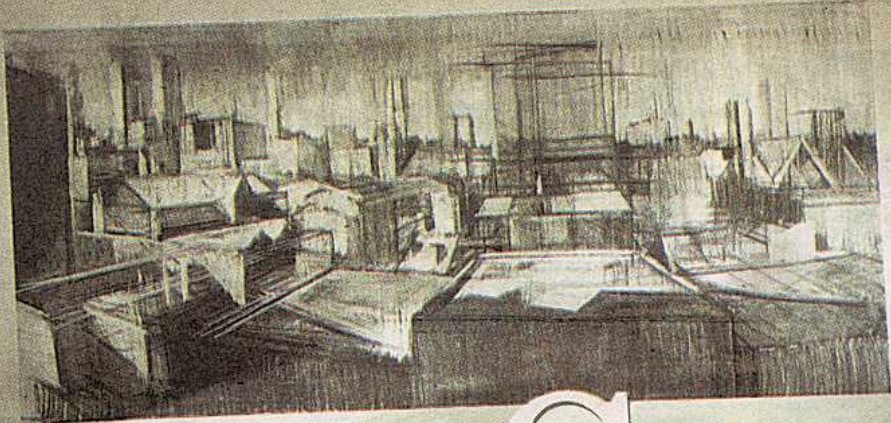


Weekend

Friday, October 6, 2006

<http://go.philly.com/weekend>



Come on in



Enjoy a free crawl through the creative sprawl of working Philadelphia artists. Page 24.

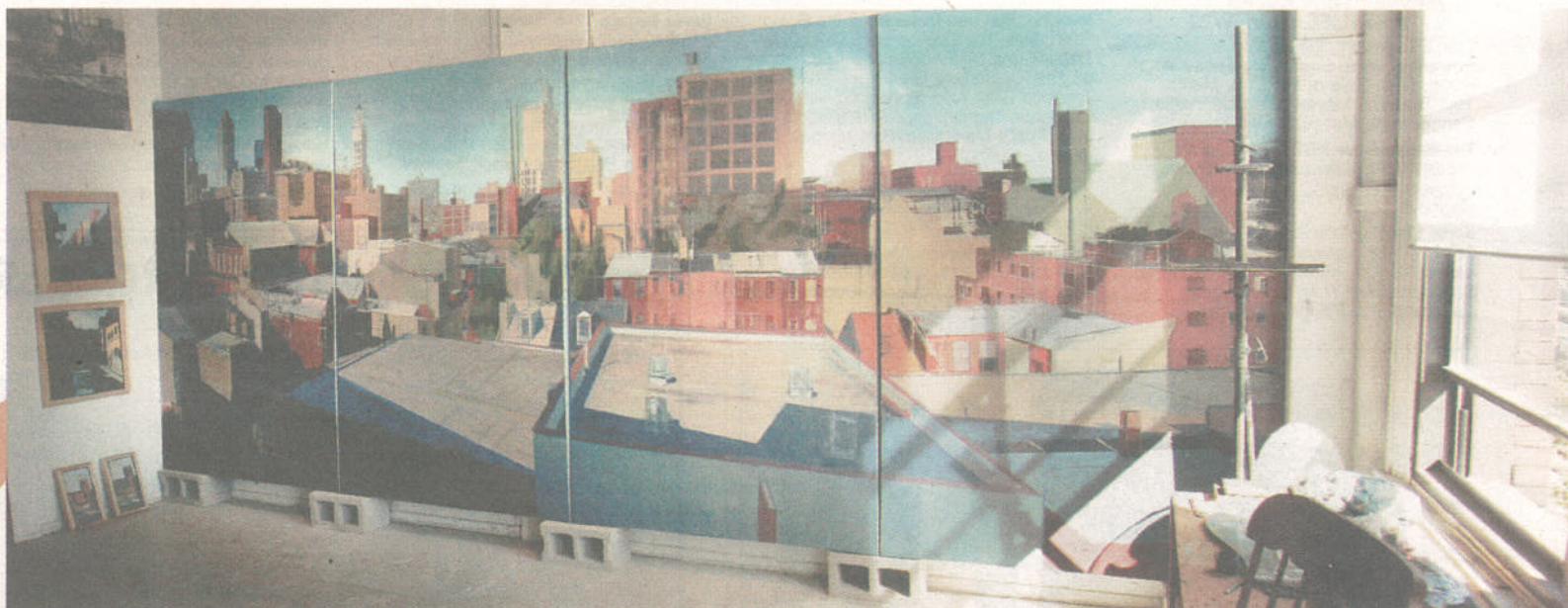
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By Matt Blanchard
FOR THE INQUIRER

What makes a grown woman spend her days in a basement, positioning rubber toys in and around plastic houses?

What makes a man find meaning in a blank jumble of buildings, and study the scene for months?

And what makes an off-duty office secretary bake dozens of cakes that no one will eat, and slather and stud them to thrilling excess with icing and candies?

The answer is that word *art*, a catch-all term and cover-all excuse for a host of strange behaviors.

But *art* seems a vanilla description for the hidden world of obsession, devotion and creative brilliance that will be on display this weekend and next for the Philadelphia Open Studios Tour (POST), an annual event that invites the public to wander freely through studios where Philadelphia's artists labor at photography, painting, ceramics, sculpture, drawing, textiles, and the baking of surrealist cakes.

Admission is free, and the idea is simple: This Saturday and Sunday, 57 studio locations west of Broad Street will be open from noon to 6 p.m. This includes the terrain from Chestnut Hill and Manayunk down to West Philly and Center City.

Next Saturday and Sunday, the focus shifts to east of Broad Street, where 68 more studio locations will open from Port Richmond down to Northern Liberties and South Philly.

Your bible will be the red-white-and-black POST booklet available in Center City shops and many studios. Otherwise, plan your touring after a visit to www.philaopenstudios.com.

More than 250 participating artists are neither hobbyists nor crackpots nor crafters: They're professionals, some quite successful, selected by the Center for Emerging Visual Artists, a multifaceted support and career development network headquartered in a swank apartment house on Rittenhouse Square.

As the center's Genevieve Coutroubis explains, POST allows the public to penetrate the vibrant

core of Philadelphia's contemporary art world, cluttered and paint-spattered regions in rowhouses and old factories, far from tourist headlines like the Philadelphia Museum of Art or the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

For art collectors and gallery dealers, POST allows an anonymous peek at rising stars. (Serious collectors should consider the trolley tour of Kensington and Port Richmond \$150 with lunch included.)

For those with kids, it's an educational field trip, and for suburban couples with urban ambitions, POST is a real estate tour, a convivial way to survey the condominium frontier in Northern Liberties or elsewhere and see how the city folk live.

"Once you have done POST, you'll wonder why you've never done it before," Coutroubis says.

Here are a few studios to consider this weekend.

West Philadelphia. For POST, the small building at 1370 S. 46th See POST on W26



Brook Hine's
porcelain
"Natural
Beauty," at
915 Spring
Garden.
LAURENCE
KESTERSON

here the art li

In their jumbled, paint-spattered rowhouses and factories, artists host POST, the Philadelphia Open Studios Tour.

education, who organized the family-oriented event.

Tour participants can watch a physics teacher re-create Benjamin Franklin's electricity experiments; explore the history of glass, and view objects unearthed during archaeological digs at Independence National Historical Park.

Called "Looking @ Glass," the tour will take place Saturday and Sunday in a three-block area in and around Chestnut between Second and Fifth Streets that

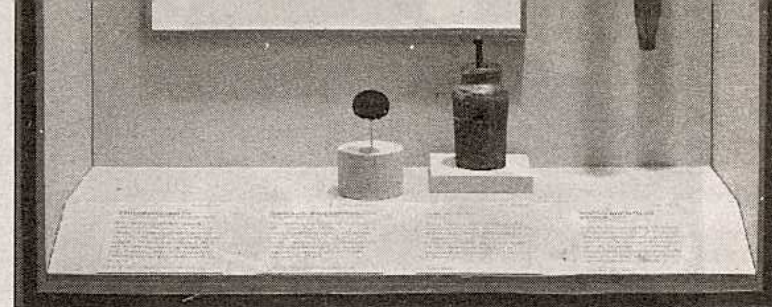
philosophical society's Benjamin Franklin Hall, 427 Chestnut, to watch a presentation by Robert Morse, "My Lab Partner, Benjamin Franklin." In it, the science teacher from St. Albans School in Washington will show what Franklin was up to in the 18th century, using contemporary electrostatic machines featuring glass spheres blown by Old City artists.

Then it's on to the Chemical Heritage Foundation at 315 Chestnut for an exhibition on the history of glass-making, and to the In-

Morse will use in his science demonstration.

Free, self-guided walking tours run Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Pick up a map and begin the tour at the Museum of the American Philosophical Society, 104 S. Fifth St. For more information, visit www.amphilsoc.org and click on Museum Exhibitions.

Contact staff writer Julie Stoiber at 215-854-2468 or jstoiber@phillynews.com.



Green glass tubes for electrical experiments from the 1700s, of the type Benjamin Franklin used, illustrate the importance of glass to science. "Looking @ Glass" is presented by the American Philosophical Society.

Artists host tours of where their creativity lives

POST from W24

St. will offer both an aerial acrobatics show and what is surely the largest human head you'll encounter on the tour. Since it was commissioned by the city in 2003, a 9-foot-tall bust of Benjamin Franklin has been slowly taking shape under the careful hands of sculptor James Peniston, 32. Soon it will be cast in bronze, and planted at Fourth and Arch. Arrive at 2:30 or 4:30 this Saturday or Sunday to catch Jill Maio, architectural painter and trained trapeze artist, perform aerial acrobatics above the Ben head.

Center City. Architect Ed Bronstein left the profession to paint, and the wavering, warm, atmospheric vision of his canvases suggests the decision was a wise one. Bronstein is considered the founder of POST, which originally was run out of living rooms. His studio at 2404 Naudain St. makes a nice stop with nearby Raven's Wing Studio at 2301, the eccentric

roost of artists Betsy Alexander and Burnell Yow, lately noted for his Dolls of the Apocalypse, described as "the last toys of the last children on earth."

East Falls. Sherman Mills, a live/work loft redevelopment at 3510 Scotts Lane, will be abuzz with 17 participating artists, and should have a special pull on anyone with an affection for glassware. The East Falls Glassworks is here, as is Selvin Glass. On a far larger scale is the work of Kate Kamen, a multimedia sculptor whose monumental flower buds and swirling, ceiling-mounted constructions have graced such venues as the Philadelphia Flower Show.

Germantown. A former Urban Outfitters warehouse is now an artist colony, the Greene Street Artists Corp., set back from the road at 5225 Greene St. Here, eight POST artists live. On the first floor, find photographer David Taffet, whose work ranges

from glossy photos of slaughterhouse carcasses to his current obsession, photogravure, a technique of etching copper plates with dangerous chemicals to produce photography with the subtle expression of drawing.

Here are a few stops to savor next weekend.

Center City (North of Vine). The world of Charmaine Caire is a demented train set, where plastic toys act out mysterious allegories in the hallucinogenic bath of pink, green and blue-gelled studio lights. Caire, a photo-illustrator by trade, builds and photographs elaborate dioramas with cast-off toys and dolls in her basement studio at 340 N. 12th St. In "Pfizer," a rubber baby Sisyphus rolls a giant pill capsule up a rocky mount against a striking blue sky. She aims to sneak serious issues past her viewers' defenses in the naive proto-language of plastic toys. Using lights and a 1960s camera, Caire achieves playful, paranoid imag-

es more vivid, perhaps, than today's computer animation.

Spring Garden. The heavyweight of POST's second weekend is 915 Spring Garden St., a hulking warehouse for the old Reading Railroad converted into studios where 44 artists will show work. Start in Studio 420 with Ben Schwab, 28, whose vast cityscape paintings capture something photography cannot: a city hovering between past and present. On the canvas, Schwab erects a ghostly armature of architectural lines on which to hang his buildings, tan, white and red, which are themselves ghosts trying to become solid. The effect is quietly absorbing, and this is Schwab's goal.

South Philadelphia. Twenty paces off the Italian Market, in an alley called League Street, you will find Elaine Erne's entire menagerie: Beanie Bunny, Snuggle Bunny, Mr. Bunny, Mr. Possum and Mr. Bear. Each of these stuffed

animals lives in Erne's head, and in Erne's large-scale pencil drawings, each of them meets a violent death by hanging, stabbing or drowning. Erne, 40, says her work is about suffering silently, as children do, through the punishing round of disappointments called childhood. She's one of a half-dozen artists to be seen at 837 League St.

Kensington. Another must-see is the new Crane Arts complex, at 1400 N. American St., between Jefferson and Master, and the artist to start with is Amy Stevens, 31, whose cake photographs are sure-fire charmers. Begun with a kit from marthastewart.com, Stevens' mad confections explode the frantic perfectionism of the "recent resurgence of do-it-yourself domesticity." Her luscious, off-kilter cakes in electric pink and green seem to mock the perfect hostess, or perhaps set her free to follow wild fantasies with icing, eggs and flour.