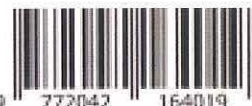


ART&MUSIC

THE SAATCHI GALLERY MAGAZINE

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*Hackney Special: Bob and Roberta Smith • Gavin Turk • Kirsten Glass • The Canals Project
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ART MAKES CHILDREN POWERFUL

ARBEIT



A number of galleries and artist-run spaces have emerged in Hackney Wick over the last few years, largely thanks to its relative affordability and location. Both factors are a big pull for artists, allowing them to focus on their work without the pressure of exorbitant rents or the distraction of wall-to-wall coffee outlets, but still close enough to the action to not feel too isolated.

It's this, together with Hackney Wick's industrial feel and 'vibe' which has led to claims (possibly apocryphal) that more artists and studio spaces per square metre are crammed into the area than anywhere else in the world. No doubt the denizens of Berlin and Brooklyn would have something to say about that.

Arbeit is one of a number of key galleries that have taken the lead in making their presence felt in the area. The gallery was founded in 2010 by Hajni Semsei and Nimrod Vardi and was initially based in Bethnal Green before moving to their expansive current space in White Post Lane, located in the area's industrial heartland, with The Yard theatre, Space Studios, Schwarz Gallery, and Crate Brewery nearby. It has evolved from a low-key exhibition space to a bigger, more inclusive enterprise

by taking over a large warehouse, which includes studio space for local artists, designers and creatives, while accommodating a decent-sized exhibition space.

Establishing itself through word-of-mouth reputation and media presence, the gallery collaborates with local and international organisations, as well as curating their own programme. A recent film season, *London Seizure*, curated by Carmen Billows, showcased a number of documentaries about Hackney and the capital's gentrification and saw Arbeit join forces with the local Lab Film Festival, attracting a sizeable crowd in the process. This, in turn, forged a whole number of relationships with like-minded artists and creative people in the locality.

Inevitably, the encroaching gentrification in the area, exacerbated by last year's Olympics, remains a threat. The events of summer 2012 promised a lasting legacy of 'regeneration' – a euphemism for rising rents and property developers which for artists is synonymous with being priced out. Semsei, though, insists that for now the gallery is in the right location. "Hackney Wick is still a good mixture of artists,

creative types and non-artists, residential and industrial areas", he insists.

Since relocating to the Wick, Arbeit has also hosted 'The Pop-Up', a series of talks about utilising spontaneous spaces in London, featuring speakers from a number of pop-up organisations. These included Dan Calladine from Londonpopups, Jack Brown and Sadie Edginton from Exchange projects and as well as Shawnee Keck representing Hackney Council. This in turn inspired and galvanised members of the audience to be involved or attempt to run their own pop-ups, using temporary spaces across the capital.

The frequently disorganised nature of art in the area, when compared with more central locations, is something that Arbeit plan to address. According to Nimrod Vardi, "What we are trying to do is involve as many artists as possible, and create collaborations between business and art... bringing them a bit closer. Hackney Wick is a perfect location for that, as it still has a definite artistic characteristic to it, along with a whole new creative commercial industry moving in. It'll be exciting to bridge the two."

— DOMINIC SIMPSON