

A Peek Into Hell

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By [Bonnie Rosenberg](#)

Mike Felber wants to prove that there's more to Hell's Kitchen than an abundance of Thai restaurants, dive bars and tourist spillover from Times Square. "The general idea about Midtown is that it's about commerce and the bottom line," says Felber. "I wanted to bring attention to its artists. It's a counter-paradigm; it's not all about money."

Felber is the founder and president of the not-for-profit group Artists in the Kitchen. He splits his time between social work and art, and he plans to reveal the nabe's artistic treasures during the second Hell's Kitchen Artists in Studio Tour, running from May 21 through 23.

Over 50 venues—including the Fountain Gallery, Jim Seffens Studio, Mud, Sweat and Tears and apartment studios in the Manhattan Plaza buildings—are participating. The self-guided tour spans from West 34th to 59th Streets, with maps guiding guests from bar to gallery, studio to theater, with some other unusual venues in between. All forms of media will be represented along the way: Paintings, sculptures and photographs will adorn local establishments, exposing many artists to an entirely new audience. And the closing party will take place at Port 41.

"It's a great neighborhood, and we're finding out more and more how many artists are here," explains participating artist Janet Restino. "We're telling the world there's more here than Broadway shows."

Although opening up one's home or studio for the general public might give some pause, many artists involved in the event see it as a chance to expand the greater arts discussion. "We live very solitary lives as artists. You're locked in your studio for weeks, sometimes months at a time," explains figurative painter Scott Goodwillie. "I'm a very social person, and I enjoy people coming in. During the recession, any venue that brings in traffic and gets your name out helps."

Restino admits that she initially had a little apprehension. "But it turned out to be quite pleasant. The people that came were genuinely interested in art; there wasn't anybody that was casing the joint."

While its mission is Midtown-centric, not all of the artists involved work full-time in the area west of Eighth Avenue. For example, photographer Maria Moreno works in Long Island City, but her vivid portraits and outdoor scenes will mingle with local artists' work. "I'm hoping to get exposure for my work and work for an event I believe in," explains Moreno. "It's great to bring together not only the artists, but also the public. I hope that tourists come in, exchange ideas and keep creativity alive."

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May 21-23, Sat.-Sun., noon-6 p.m. Full details at www.artistsinthekitchen.org.



Work by Giorgio Jorghe Casu (pictured) will be part of the Hell's Kitchen Artists in Studio Tour.

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