

## A CRAWL THROUGH THE ARTS

Everyone thinks Downtown shuts down after 5 p.m. Well, everyone is wrong. With seven theaters and a dozen galleries, the Cultural District keeps Downtown alive well into the night.

A Gallery Crawl ushers in each new season, and the event is quickly becoming one of the most popular in Pittsburgh. Begun in 2004 with only four participating galleries, today, the Crawls bring nearly 5,000 people to the area, with 23 spaces to peruse.

Kathryn Heidemann, Senior Manager of Education and Community Engagement, organizes the Crawls and has seen them grow and change with the city. “Every Crawl is different from the one before,” says Heidemann. “Businesses are always coming and going, but we’re always moving forward.”

Recently, several venues, including Arthur Murray Dance Studio and Verve Wellness, opened on Sixth Street, which comprises the newest arm of the Crawls. While a dance studio and a wellness center don’t sound like traditional gallery spaces, this isn’t a traditional gallery visit.

“Defining a gallery space can be hard,” says Heidemann. “Any space can turn itself into a cultural venue. Salon Christine on Penn Avenue, for example, [has] featured local artists, photographers, and craftsman. She transforms her hair salon into a vibrant art space.”

Because events are meant to provide the most diverse artistic program possible, any group can join, as long as they contribute art, which can come in the form of dance lessons, a live band, or jewelry and photographs from a local artist. The Culinary Institute on Liberty Avenue, for example, participates by displaying delicate sculptures made from sugar, as well as providing Crawlers with dollar seasonal snacks.

The unique combination of entertainment featured at the Gallery Crawls is a product of careful consideration by both the Trust and

individual galleries. If a gallery is independent, like ❶ Future Tenant (run by Carnegie Mellon University’s Master of Arts Management program), then the selection of artists and programs is left to their discretion. While Heidemann occasionally puts businesses in touch with artists for the Crawls, her focus is on choosing the venues for raw spaces like Katz Plaza and curating 709 Penn Avenue Gallery. The largest and most popular galleries in the Cultural District—❷ Wood Street Galleries, ❸ SPACE, and 707 Penn Avenue—are curated by Murray Horne, who also selects guest curators to SPACE.

Having worked with the Cultural Trust since 1996, Horne has witnessed the growth of the Cultural District. He feels that the Crawls play a key role in renewing Downtown, attracting crowds that might not have otherwise taken time to visit the galleries. “I think [the Crawls] create an atmosphere that is great for Downtown,” says Horne, “in the sense that the city is being activated by young people.”

Not only do the crawls invigorate Pittsburgh residents, they create a positive image of Pittsburgh for out-of-towners who happen to be in the city during a Crawl.

“If someone is at the Westin Convention Center during the weekend of a Gallery Crawl, they experience the new, creative Pittsburgh that is emerging,” says Heidemann. “I’ve had people call me up and ask if we can put on a Crawl while they’re here.”

Heidemann once read a blog by a Detroit businessman who caught a Gallery Crawl while he was in town and went on to rave about how much Pittsburgh has changed. “He compared the liveliness and culture of Pittsburgh to that of New York City,” Heidemann says, “which is not something you find very often.”

While the crawls bolster the image of Pittsburgh, they also foster economic development within the city. Many galleries sell thousands of dollars’ worth of art as

a result of the Crawls. “Even though the Gallery Crawls are relatively short, they bring a large crowd of consumers downtown,” says Heidemann. “Restaurants, bars, and theaters all benefit.”

While many galleries are new to the area, Wood Street has been a fixture since 1992. Tucked away above the T-station, the space has been home to some of the city’s most original and provocative art. “Our focus is on digitally created artwork,” said Horne. “You won’t find this type of work to the same extent in any other gallery in the city. You won’t even see as much nationally as you see here.”

Wood Street’s sister gallery, SPACE, is the hub of virtually every Gallery Crawl. Easily one of the most popular stops on the Crawl, SPACE was created to exhibit local artists as well as those from outside the region.

Other participants include the Liberty Lofts, 820 Liberty Avenue, and 937 Liberty Avenue. Liberty Lofts recently featured local photographers’ images of Downtown, and ArtUp hosted political cartoonists Gary Huck and Mark Konopacki at 820 Liberty and 937 Liberty, respectively.

Konopacki’s exhibition featured work from his graphic novel *A People’s History of American Empire*, a book-length adaptation of Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*. Konopacki answered questions about the novel and signed copies for fans. “I’m not from Pittsburgh and I’m really impressed with this turnout,” says Konopacki. “There are a lot of people here.”

While the Gallery Crawl remains a quarterly event, it has been vital to the growth of Pittsburgh’s art scene and the revitalization of Downtown, and Heidemann and her co-workers are excited for its future. “We’re really happy with how the Crawls have grown,” she says. “We have gained an audience that keeps coming back, and we know that the crowd is going to keep growing.” — JD

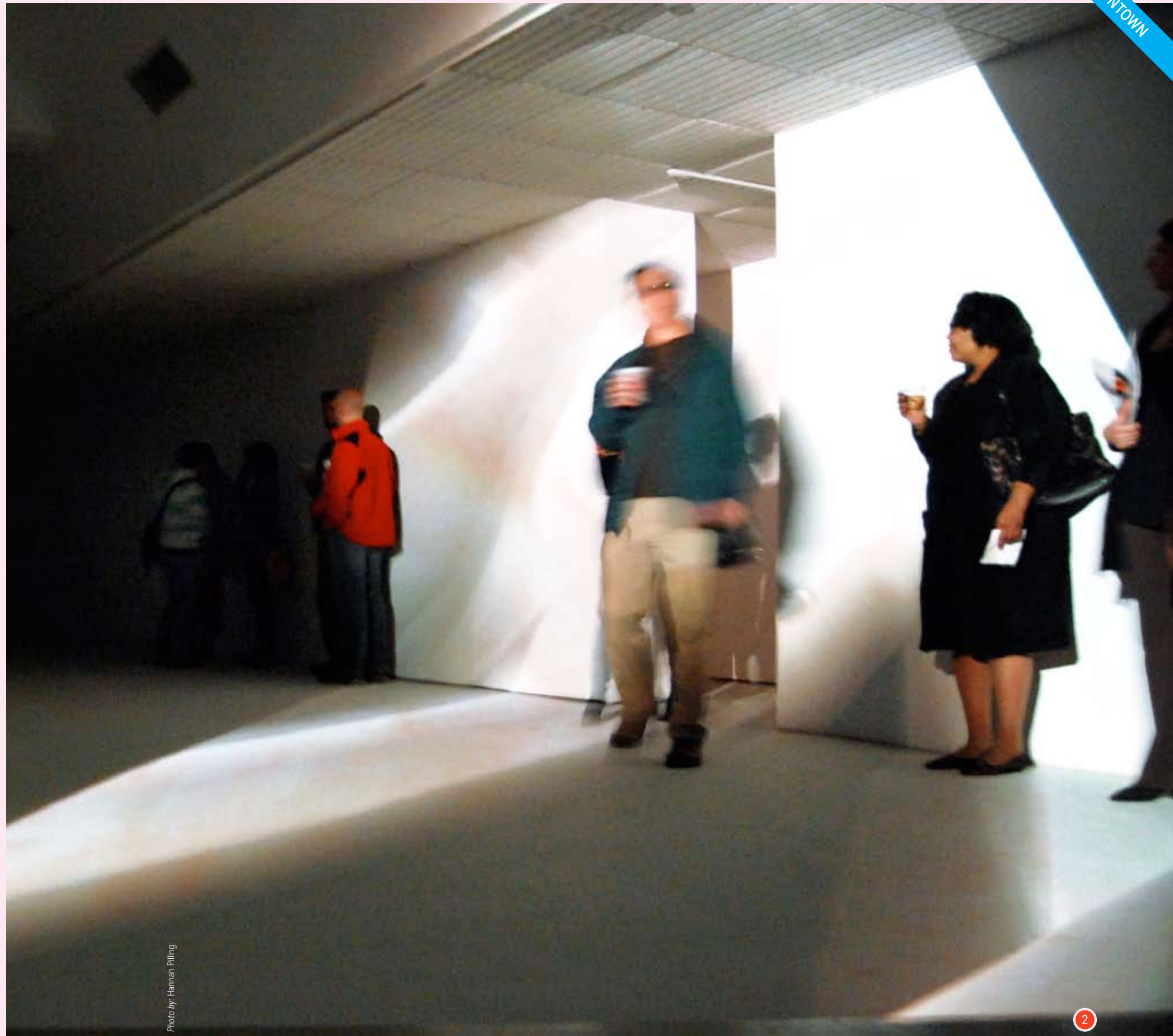


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