

# The Impact of Gallery 1313 on the Parkdale Neighbourhood

Parkdale has changed a great deal since the opening of Gallery 1313 over three years ago. Artscape conducted a virtual interview with gallery director, Phil Anderson, to learn about the changes in Parkdale and the impact Gallery 1313 has had on the neighbourhood.

## **Artscape: What changes have you seen in the Parkdale neighbourhood since the opening of Gallery 1313?**

**PA:** There have been many noticeable changes in Parkdale since Gallery 1313 opened in January 1998. I believe Parkdale's image has also changed from the seedy down and out neighbourhood to an almost hip area. Pedestrians are feeling safer, new businesses are more confident and there is more pride in the neighbourhood. All the problems have not gone away but they are not dominating the landscape and the local news. These changes have come about through the partnering of organizations and the efforts of individuals. The art community is much more visible in Parkdale now. Where once Parkdale was just an area for artists to find cheap studio space, now the artists are shopping in the area, showing their work in local galleries and participating in community life.

## **Artscape: In what ways do think Gallery 1313 has made an impact on these changes, and on the area in general?**

**PA:** Gallery 1313 has certainly played a part in helping positive change grow in Parkdale. We receive over 5,000 visitors a year with over 24 exhibits and perhaps as many as 150 artists exhibiting yearly. These visitors and artists come from all over Toronto and Ontario as well as from all around the world. The Gallery has proved to be a wonderful resource for the area as local school children and community residents have the opportunity to view art from local, national, and international artists. The notes left by local residents in the sign-in book indicate that the Gallery has become a source of local pride. The media coverage of art exhibits has also given the area a very positive image and has encouraged other galleries and businesses to move into the area.

## **Artscape: When you were in the original planning and development stages of the Parkdale Village Arts Collective and Gallery 1313 what was it about Parkdale that made you choose the area?**

**PA:** The Parkdale Village Arts Collective started in 1994 before the proliferation of storefront art galleries. It started as an initiative of the Parkdale Village Business Improvement Association to try and create positive changes in the area. The artists involved thought it

would be an opportunity to market their artwork and be part of the community as well. The collaboration resulted in the beginning of an art street festival, ARTBEAT, which started in 1994 and continues today in its 8th year. Parkdale has a strong sense of community that is somewhat unique because of its diversity and history. These factors and the economics of the times have both drawn and pushed artists to the area.

## **Artscape: What arts-friendly businesses or organizations have opened since the beginning of Gallery 1313? Has there been a growth in the number of cafes, bars and restaurants in the area?**

**PA:** Businesses such as Woolfitts Art Supply have been drawn to the area because of the artist population (over 600 artists in Parkdale/Liberty) and pioneering Galleries such as Gallery 1313. Although Gallery 1313 didn't open until January 1998 it was in the early stages of planning in the spring of 1995. Again media coverage such as the City TV and CBC profile of the November 1996 fundraiser for Gallery 1313 held at the Rhino, and the Toronto Star article on the new Queen West of Jan.1997 by Christopher Hume helped boost confidence in the area and promote both arts and business activity. The move to Parkdale of organizations such as Visual Arts Ontario (4,000 members) and Mercer Union, A Centre for Contemporary Art (over 20 years old) have also played a major role in changing the area as an arts community. Of course Artscape has been here involved in paving the way for change in its development of 900 Queen St. West and then 1313 Queen Street West. Artscape has proven to be a lifesaver for the arts community and continues to help and nurture it. Many restaurants and cafes have opened as well due to the many changes in the area. The establishment of an arts association, The

Queen West Gallery District (Bathurst & Queen to Roncesvalles & Queen), has helped breed a supportive energy to nurturing new businesses along Queen St. West.

## **Artscape: What improvements has the City made to improve the "look" of the street over the past 3-4 years?**

**PA:** The City through its support of the Parkdale BIA has helped improve the streetscape through such initiatives as the Facade Program and the Mural Program. The BIA has also done a wonderful job installing flower baskets and lights along Queen Street. The Parkdale Liberty Economic Development Corporation has lent financial support to some of these programs.

## **Artscape: Have you noticed more foot traffic in the area?**

**PA:** There has been a definite increase in pedestrian traffic in the area as residents and visitors feel safer and more comfortable shopping and exploring the neighbourhood.

## **Artscape: Property values in the area are rising. What do you feel are the positive and negative effects of this?**

**PA:** There is a real danger that gentrification could turn a hip neighbourhood into a tragically hip neighbourhood. Artists are all too familiar with the effects of positive change on their communities. Change that they have helped bring about. What safe guards can be put in place to protect neighbourhoods from such gentrification? This is a question without an answer currently. More funding to organizations such as Artscape and development of more artist co-ops would help address this problem. The positive effects of this kind of change mean people with more money coming to the neighbourhood can buy art and support artists in this way.



**Parkdale at Queen and Brock with a view of Gallery 1313 (at left)**