

Alley art kicks off new artist's exhibit

By Meredith Healey

A young local artist has turned a Bank Street restaurant into a litter box – and customers are raving.

In a five-week art exhibit at the Atomic Rooster Bar and Bistro, 24-year-old Xan Woods uncovers the social energy found in dark and dingy restaurant alleyways.

“[The alley] is really a place people take a breath and have a personal moment for themselves,” says Woods, a Carleton University student. “It’s where people from all different walks of life come together to meet, from clients, to homeless people looking for cigarettes, to chefs, bartenders, and servers.”

In her first formal exhibition, Woods uses various mediums to illustrate the restaurant industry behind the scenes. Paintings, sculptures, collages, and photography have all situated the restaurant’s customers in an unfamiliar but “sacred” alleyway.

Atomic Rooster has been featuring local work since it opened a year ago. The restaurant runs on a five-week artist rotation and general manager Kim Ramji says Woods’ exhibition is one of the best they’ve had.



Tricia Van der Grient, Centretown News

Artist Xan Woods with one of her paintings at the Atomic Rooster restaurant on Bank Street.

“[The customers] love it. This is so interesting to them. It’s gotten really good reviews,” says Ramji. “I’ve been in this industry for a long time and I see the alley in a different light now.”

Portraits of chefs with bodies made of chicken wire, plaster models of chicken wings, crushed cans and paper maché garbage

bags were all used by Woods to challenge the norm that paintings have to be serious.

“For me it was just such a fun experiment,” says Woods, who has never studied or been formally taught fine art.

One of Woods’ favourite alley-inspired pieces is her collage of cigarette packages glazed with stain-glass colours. Although Woods is against smoking, she says the Smoke-Free Ontario Act forced greater interaction in back alleys.

Before the Oct. 21 opening night, Woods advertised the exhibition completely on her own through hand-outs, her personal website, and mass Facebook messages. After selling three-quarters of her exhibit on the first night, she knew the initiative had paid off.

“I realized how hard it was to get together an art show on your own,” says Woods.

Aside from creating a multi-faceted exhibit, Woods cur-

Aside from creating a multi-faceted exhibit, Woods currently interns at La Petite Mort, an art gallery in Ottawa that she describes as “provocative and controversial.” Guy Bérubé, the gallery’s director, says the young artist has a talented future ahead of her.

“It’s not just about her work. It’s about her energy and drive,” said Bérubé. “It almost seems schizophrenic because there are so many different mediums. It’s fascinating when an artist can do all those things.”

When the restaurant exhibition ends on Nov. 12, Woods has several ideas in mind, including a political piece on the federal election called “What’s the Point?”

Positive feedback has also inspired her to explore other social spaces, including a future exhibit on OC Transpo wheels.