

All Aboard

A first-person account of a popular third-Thursday art tour by trolley

Whether you're an art enthusiast looking for a fun introduction to the Providence creative scene or just a fan of meeting new people while sipping free wine, Gallery Night Providence is a lovely way to spend a Thursday night. For the past 25 years, the tour has been introducing individuals to the works of local artists by ushering them between city galleries via trolley.

At the series inception in 1996, Providence looked very different. As Gallery Night co-founder Paula Martiesian recalls, "It was a city down on its luck - a dirty post-Industrial town whose heyday had come and gone." She continues, "There was no WaterFire... restaurant culture was still in its infancy. So what happened? People stepped up."

Martiesian and co-founders Teresa Level and Catherine Little Bert started Gallery Night Providence with the goal of reshaping the city around the arts. They set out to bring attention and financial support to local artists by introducing visitors to their work in a unique way. They also sought to make art accessible to all, no matter financial status or educational background.

On a warm July evening, myself and a group of friends attended our first-ever Gallery Night. While most tours leave from the Graduate Hotel, ours departed from the WaterFire Arts Center. Upon arrival, we were introduced to our tour guide, Shannon Hadfield, a local art historian and educator. Hadfield asked the group where they were from and if they'd attended Gallery Night before. Some people had been going for years while others were first-timers like myself. Although experience levels varied, excitement did not. We kept asking one another, how is an experience like this free?

Michelle Maynard, executive director of Gallery Night Providence, says the majority of their support comes from grants from the Providence Tourism Council, RISCA, and Providence's Department of Art, Culture + Tourism, along with funding from individuals, businesses, and galleries and art spaces who pay to be a part of their network.



Shannon Hadfield, tour guide for Gallery Night Providence, addresses a trolley full of guests

Inside the studio of artist Anahid Ypres

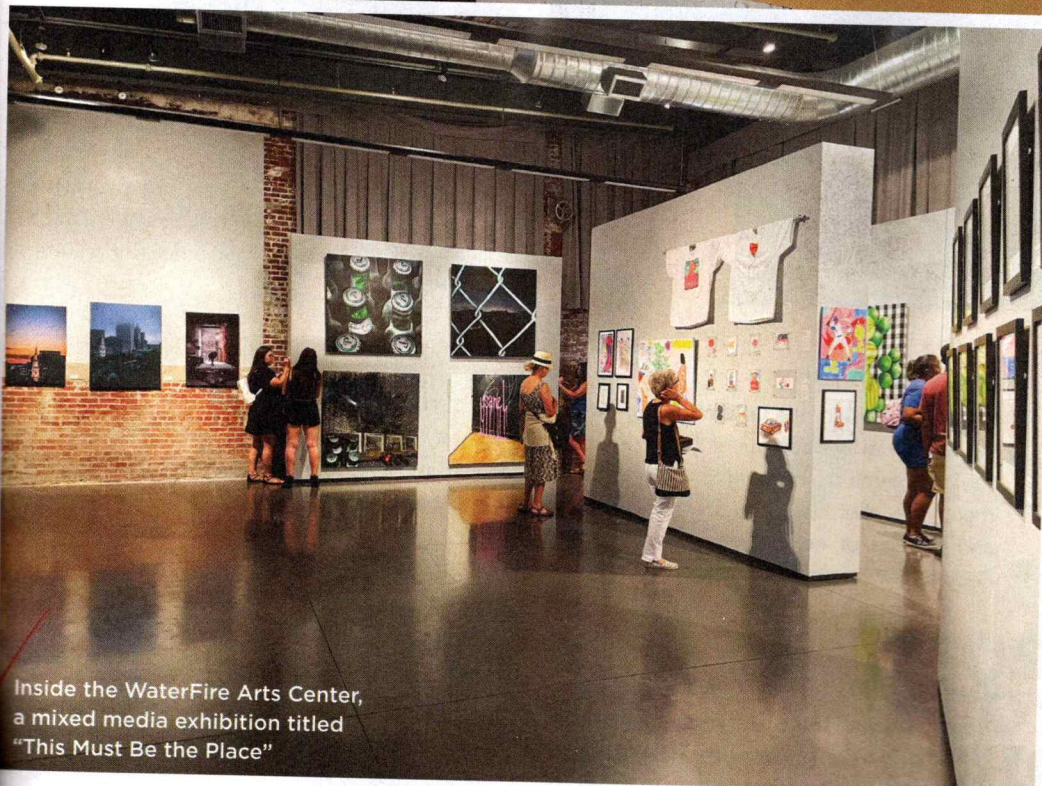


The first stop on the tour was to the Rhode Island Center for Photographic Arts on North Main Street, where we were invited to wander between rooms viewing various collections. One artist, Terry Frishman, used her stop to showcase found profiles and false images in often overlooked and gritty street subjects such as tire marks, oil spills, and melting ice. In attendance, Frishman was delighted to explain the concept to us, asking, "Have you ever seen a face in the moon?"

Our next destination was the colorful studio of Anahid Ypres, just a few floors up. Ypres had glasses of red wine and snacks prepared, and on display was a sculpture of a treehouse resting upon a cloud; a painted bust of a jester; and an avant-garde map of Matunuck where an enlarged seagull flies over colorful sailboats, giant fish, and white fences in the sand. I was surprised by the affordability of some of her prints, and happy that I could support her with a purchase.

We then moved to Sprout CoWorking in the Valley neighborhood, where a fiber arts collection from Rhode Island Threads was on view. This was an exhibit I would have never attended on my own, but was blown away by the intricacies managed in these woven pieces, particularly in the portraits where facial shading was accomplished with thread and fabric dye. Before we left, one of the artists handed out bookmarks made from fabric scraps. I received one with strawberries on it.

Our last stop took us back to the beginning at WaterFire Arts Center, where we viewed a mixed media exhibition titled "This Must Be The Place." Walking out, everyone was saying the same things, that the tour had forced us to navigate our city in a way unfamiliar to us, that it had made us feel comfortable in new-to-us settings, and that we would definitely be back. *The final 2022 tours take place October 20 and November 17. Learn more at GalleryNight.org*



Inside the WaterFire Arts Center, a mixed media exhibition titled "This Must Be the Place"