

‘Art Alley’ provides startling, often beautiful works

Anonymous artists have made their mark in downtown Rapid City

by Jerry Rawlings

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There is an unusual art gallery in downtown Rapid City that is unlike any that I’ve ever strolled into. It has an urban feel to it that seems to represent a direction in artworks that you don’t often see in the majority of the galleries in this area. There are no depictions of cowboys, buffalo, or the wide-open expanses of the great American west in this gallery.

This is, without a doubt, a totally post-modern art gallery, wherein one can view artworks that range from the total abstract, to pop art, to photo montage, installation art and skilled works that obviously found their origins in the passions of urban graffiti.



<http://artalley.awardspace.com/>

This work resembles a modern-day “Whistler’s Mother.”

On Sixth Street there is a sign that proudly proclaims the gallery as “Art Alley.” Because, you see, this open-air, outdoor gallery is actually the alley that runs from Sixth to Seventh Streets between Main and St. Joseph.

I’d be willing to wager that many people have no idea this gallery exists, even though they pass by it on a daily basis. To the casual observer, at first glance it appears to be nothing more than another alleyway, full of dumpsters, unkempt backdoors to Main Street businesses, discarded junk and decaying urban architecture. Without a doubt, if you made this observation, you would be absolutely correct, because it is all of these things, but above all, it’s a venue for those wanting and willing to display their art, and have no other locale in which to do so.

Simply put, it is way for them to get their work out there for the public to see.

It is obvious that much of the work has its origins deeply imbedded within the mystic of urban graffiti, but even these works have been taken to a level well above what most of us consider as graffiti.

The use of pigments to create and give the illusion of depth, on the flat alley wall surfaces, is evident in much of the work. Further down the alley you will find actual painted canvases attached to the brick walls, generally high enough that one would need a ladder to hang or remove them.



There's no fee to see this open-air display.

Then there are works that were obviously done on-site, with many paintings simply applied to the walls, pipes, and natural surfaces found there.

I found it to be incredibly interesting to see how these works had coexisted with the elements. There is a natural degradation occurring to them, which simply can never be seen in typical gallery settings.

While I made my way down Art Alley, a car passed by me, full of youngsters that mom had brought down to see the art. Their eager faces smiling and laughing as they pointed out one fun piece of art after another.

One can only hope that perhaps one of them will be inspired to focus on the arts because of an experience such as Art Alley. What other gallery in town has a lifesize 3D image of a bicycle rider, emerging from the back wall of a St. Joe business, or a mosaic merry-go-round horse sculpture, perched high above the street level, as if watching over the occupants of the alley below?

Even the telephone poles have been covered with artworks, which range from representations of Art Alley itself, to those that seem to carry significant religious undertones.

If you are coming down to view Art Alley, I strongly urge you to park the car, and walk through the alley. There are many works that are small, or subtle enough that they will surely be missed from the interior of a moving vehicle.

I walked from one end to the other several times, and on each trip I would discover something new hiding within the different niches that constitute the architecture of an old alleyway.

Much of the art found in Art Alley is obviously being done by young artists who are looking for outlets in which to display their work. This is a natural reaction for the creative mind. Therefore, the work does not have that polished feel to it like you would expect when viewing perfectly framed artworks.

Otherwise, why would they display these works, that they had obviously labored over, in a place where the consequences of the weather would obviously take its toll on the art works themselves.

The other aspect, which I prefer to consider, is that perhaps at least some of them, are using the natural elements to take their art to another level. Consider it as the last brushstroke, only they are allowing Mother Nature to have the last word — and the last stroke of the brush.



Photos by Jerry Rawlings

An art lover examines some of the works in “Art Alley” in the unique outdoor gallery that runs from Sixth and Seventh streets between Main and St. Joseph.

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