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Why Lansdowne is on the up and up

Presented by



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Is Bloor and Lansdowne the new Queen West? Much as this question oversimplifies neighbourhood change, it's useful enough to have popped up in recent urban forums both online and off. After all, with little wiggle room left on Queen and rents there on a relative rise, galleries and vintage shops are migrating north. Though most of these, such as iconic artist-run centre Mercer Union, won't open till the fall, the art's still worth scouting now. Grab a coffee at local fave Yasi's Place and come along.

1. GEORGIA SCHERMAN PROJECTS

300 Campbell Ave., Suite 307

Officially opened in March, 2007, Georgia Scherman Projects occupies a massive warehouse space on the northern fringes of Bloor-Lansdowne. And it was space Scherman came for: With 16-foot ceilings and massive windows, the gallery's a rarity in tiny-storefront TO. (And though it's out of the way, she's hardly lonely; the studios of her parents, artists Tony Scherman and Margaret Priest, are just down the hall.) Currently, Scherman's gallery showcases digital prints from local stalwart John Massey. Though this exhibit's not quite as exciting as her recent international group-show collaboration on theft in art, it still provides ample food for thought: Massey juxtaposes luxury-car interiors with commercial-romantic sunsets in a way that suggests privilege can actually be both protection and prison.

2. PUBLIC ART

Lansdowne and Symington

Many of Bloor-Lansdowne's recent changes originate with local artist Dyan Marie. She's initiated a number of public art projects, effectively turning the nabe itself into a gallery. Recently honoured by the Canadian Urban Institute (and coincidentally an innovative figure on Queen West in the '80s) Marie's projects include etched walkways at area parks, stenciled sidewalk refuse and, most recently, an elegant new mural, created by Richard Mongiat, that graces a local underpass. The mural takes a refined, minimalist style, with black, white and grey outlines of tree trunks, damask and leaves addressing (rather than smothering) the backing concrete. Another new public art flourish is a series of Marie's own banners lining Bloor. In them, she presents street life in the area as something bright and sun-filled, familiar and abstract.

3. TORONTO FREE GALLERY

1277 Bloor St. W.

Toronto Free Gallery director Heather Haynes was part of the recent Queen East resurgence. Now, her nonprofit, activist-oriented gallery has relocated to Bloor West, taking over an old hardware store (whose sign still hangs above the entrance) to create another community-friendly walk-in space. Haynes' first exhibition here in March energetically addressed the creative activism so dear to her heart. Now a new show, Toronto Free Library, offers a different take on the theme. Curated by two young, emerging creatives, Maiko Tanaka and Sarah Todd, the show's a freewheeling three-part exhibition that encourages artists to riff on ideas of reading, knowledge and communal resources. In Part One, closing today, Swintak makes library users play ping-pong to earn a book In Part Two (opening Wednesday), slapstick-art duo Amy Lam and Jon McCurley take the helm, while Part Three showcases Darren O'Donnell It's always worth keeping an eye on what Toronto Free does next.

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