



### Can Black and White Gallery Save Williamsburg from Fashion?

story by *David Pierce*

One of the landmarks of the Brooklyn gallery scene is Black and White Gallery. Like many galleries in the Williamsburg area of Brooklyn it moved to Manhattan to attract collectors who wouldn't cross the bridge and to stay vital in more established centers of the New York art world. Challenged by a limited collector base and real estate prices that now rival Manhattan, galleries and artists' studios are disappearing from the once Bohemian and vibrant Williamsburg landscape. Tatyana



141

diggs

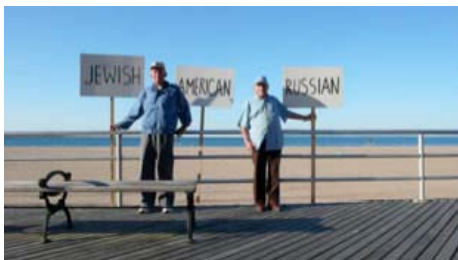
[digg it](#)

Okshteyn the Director of Black and White Gallery though, kept her space in Brooklyn along with her Manhattan presence. This kept the connection to the neighborhood and the artists and patrons of the scene. But the neighborhood that artists and galleries love has become increasingly unrecognizable and appropriated by the world of fashion and commerce. Okshteyn is fighting that trend by establishing Black and White Brooklyn as a not-for-profit space dedicated to long-term, less marketable projects and site-specific work.

The age-old problem with art is that artists must always defer to the tastes of the markets in order to survive. Centuries ago the markets were kings and churches. Today the patrons of galleries and donors to museums fuel the art world. Inevitably the markets influence the work. While financial support for the arts is vital for survival, commercial galleries can't take many chances with work dependant on a delicate support line. Combine that with a real estate push in bohemian neighborhoods and it's easy to see why art scenes all over the world are disappearing or being consumed by fashion. No other area best illustrates this than Williamsburg. Okshteyn's move in the neighborhood is a welcome one by many.

Non-profit spaces have their own challenges and pitfalls but they can play with ideas and take chances that commercial galleries simply cannot. Non-profit's can support unknown artists and show less marketable work. Okshteyn thought this was an important thing to reestablish in a neighborhood once aloof to the market and focused on unique DIY approaches to art. Rather than lament on the past or give up the fight she took the initiative to establish not-for-profit status. Anyone familiar with the process knows that this is no easy task. It requires an analytical process, talent, and a clear plan. Combine that with the financial paper work and running a commercial space across the river it is easy to see why many artists and patrons view Okshteyn as a good friend of the independent art world.

The gallery's inaugural show as a not-for-profit space features a project by Alina and Jeff Bliumis. The show "Casual Conversations in Brooklyn" is an exploration of the immigration and assimilation process in America. The project examines the dynamic of retaining roots while adopting a new identity of American. The work compares the opinions, hopes, and dreams of American immigrants with their role in the fabric of the country. The artists create what they call "social portraits" documenting the voices of the public and integrating it with site-specific installations.



It will be interesting to see if Williamsburg's identity as an independent forum will re-emerge and if any other galleries follow a similar model.

[Login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

[home](#)   [news and reviews](#)   [listings](#)   [video](#)   [submit a review](#)   [contact](#)