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### A + E FEATURES

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## Resonating subjects

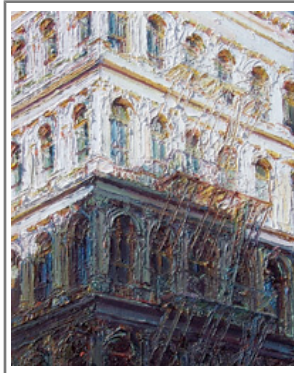
January 10, 2008

by [Susanne Forestieri](#)

### Four up-and-coming artists demonstrate mastery

In today's world, serious artists may have to resolve several dilemmas in order to stay relevant while finding a subject that resonates within them—such as how to take from the past without seeming old-hat and how to get attention in an image-saturated society. Two exhibitions at the Arts Factory demonstrate how four artists are tackling these dilemmas.


Tim Folzenlogen (at the Trifecta Gallery) is at his most passionate when depicting in thick, crusty impastos the intricate facades of cast-iron buildings in New York City's Soho district. (Constructed in the 1800s for manufacturing but rendered obsolete, they were slated for destruction but rescued through the efforts of historic preservationists and architectural critics.) Every great artist has a great subject, and Folzenlogen has found his. These mute testaments to 19th-century decorative abundance speak eloquently to him. The play of light and shadow on the tall windows, columns, ornate pilasters and balustrades is, for him, analogous to the aspirations, yearnings and fears inherent in the human condition. In this exhibition of almost 40 snapshot-size paintings, his virtuoso paint-handling and rich colors would be enough, but the titles—"No Fear," "Growth," "Ascent"—are meant as signposts to a deeper meaning. "French pastry" architecture, as Frank Lloyd Wright disdainfully called it, may be a metaphor for the human soul in all its complexity.



It's not hard to imagine James McNeill Whistler and John Singer Sargent, two of the 19th century's greatest portrait painters and bon vivants, strolling amid Soho's fancy buildings. Barrett Thomson might have been channeling them when he painted the full-length portraits of himself and his fellow artists, part of *extra.ordinary*, a three-artist exhibit at the Contemporary Arts Collective. Although his style recalls those of the aforementioned belle-epoch artists, he and his friends look very contemporary in the uniform of the young—torn jeans, T-shirts and sneakers. Portraits of artists often portray them caught in the act of painting or at least identifiable as artists by the inclusion of an easel, palette and brushes; but these artists, set against a camouflage-patterned background, are portrayed without accoutrements. I think Thomson made this choice to disassociate them from the dandified aesthetes of the past and establish their affinity with the common man.



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contemporary society is not clearly defined or always valued.

Photography has dealt a blow to this kind of realistic portrait painting, but paint's physicality and cachet as a hand-crafted commodity has assured its survival, at least for the moment. Photorealism is one example of how artists have made a rapprochement with photography. Grayson Ronk's strategy is to take the photographic image "another step." His meticulous graphite drawings of people and objects are paradoxically soft and hard, as the precision of hard-edged realism is softened by his exclusive use of hard pencils, which make light silvery marks that he intends as an "echo" or "haunting" of the original photograph. The images are so faint that seeing them requires getting up close and looking hard, a good strategy to get the viewer's attention and keep it. My favorite, titled "Rejected passport Photo (Glenn)," shows a girl of 6 or 7 miming obstinacy for the camera. It works because Ronk's coy technique is a counterpoint to the assertiveness of the little girl and creates an invigorating tension between subject and media.

While Thomson pursues myth-making and Ronk slyly asserts himself, Zak Ostrowski gregariously explores the unconscious—a very hot topic—through myth and metaphor. Working in mixed media on wood, which is very *au courant*, Ostrowski creates compositions jam-packed with imagery. "Experimental Elemental Brain Damage" could be a poster for a hip sci-fi movie. The many elements include a female figure, repeated in a ghostly form, exploding galaxies, a carefully traced French curve and perspectival architectural renderings, which he pulls off with aplomb. I'm not sure what it all means, so I'll let him speak for himself: "The work embraces wood grain and texture to develop new forms ... that combine the transparent boundaries between reality and the stream of consciousness."

Each exhibit is a tour de force of painting and drawing skills. Don't pass up this opportunity to see work by up-and-coming local artists and an exceptional visitor.

#### **Tim Folzenlogen**

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*Through January 26 at Trifecta Gallery, 366-7001*

#### **extra.ordinary**

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*Through January 26 at the Contemporary Arts Collective, 382-3886*

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