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Night Galleries

Collecting fine art is not just for Mellens and Guggenheims. In Portland, you might find something you love—and can afford—at your neighborhood bistro.

BY CLAIRE Z. CRAMER

“**T**his show has been really well received,” says front-of-the-house manager Katharine Hall at Local 188 on Congress Street at Longfellow Square. She waves a hand at the restaurant and lounge’s east wall. “Her name is Anna O’Sullivan, and she’s sold quite a few prints already.”

The framed prints are charming two- or three-color portraits of web-footed shore birds—herons, pelicans, ducks—plus the odd hen and rooster, done in a style that recalls old Chinese block prints but with Maine

birds. They’re stunning and graceful, priced quite accessibly between \$100 and \$300. *French Fry Gulls* is \$250.

CAFE-ART COMMERCE

Local 188 has always hewn to the motto “Eat, Drink, Art,” and its walls have always served as a gallery for local art. Meg Walsh, a potter who’s worked on and off at Local for half a dozen years, curates the shows, hangs them, provides viewers with titles and prices, and manages the sales details.

“I love the opportunity to give local art-

ists a place to sell their work,” she says, speaking for herself as well. When we sit down and order drinks, we find Walsh’s bud vases on the restaurant’s many tables. These are available for sale in the retail shop at Portland Museum of Art down the street.

On a subsequent visit, a new exhibit has just been unveiled, that is, released. Chad Creighton’s startlingly expressive owl paintings preside above diners’ heads. “He paints on salvaged pallet wood,” Walsh says. “He sands it just enough to be able to paint it.”

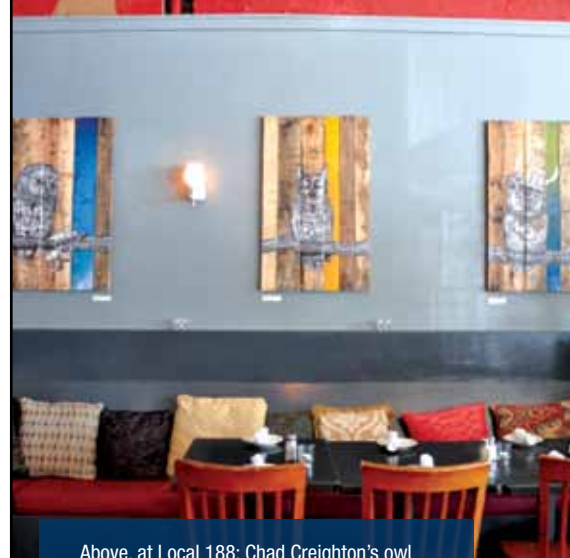
The restaurant’s commitment to art in-



FINE LINES

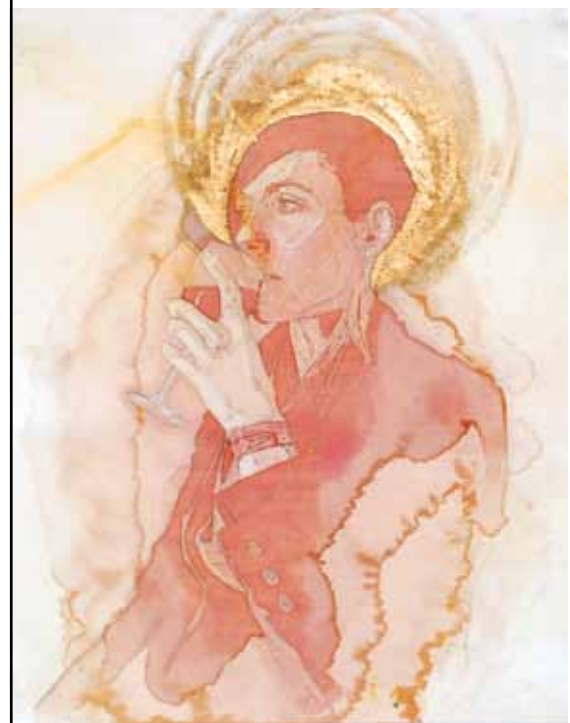
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Above, at Local 188: Chad Creighton's owl portraits are painted on reclaimed wood; below, "Self Portrait in Wine," by Amelia Fais Harnas at the Blue Spoon.

forms its very atmosphere. It's a bohemian place, with ceiling fans spinning lazily way, way up among the antique chandeliers and exposed ductwork, seating that includes couches and church pews scattered with colorful pillows, and a soulful soundtrack in the background. Owner Jay



Villani's welded iron sculptures stand here and there—one serves as a plant stand, and others as stanchions for the rope around the outdoor sidewalk seating. Artist, illus-



trator, and sign painter Patrick Corrigan has painted dreamy murals here and there on walls and bar tops.

Local 188 has you at hello when you first walk in, because it always smells utterly delicious in a lively Spanish or Italian way. And as the song says, the gin is cold and the jazz is hot.

THE SPOON ON THE HILL

At the other end of Congress Street, the Blue Spoon's rich gray walls are hung with a collection of what at first looks like framed sepia pen-and-ink portraits. Closer inspection reveals these are actually dyed cotton and linen napkins.

"I don't have formal training with wax resists; [I'm] just winging it, learning what does and doesn't work," artist Amelia Fais Harnas says. Wax resist is the fabric-dyeing method used in batik. Using wine, Harnas achieves a remarkable level of detail dyeing fabric in stages. "I tend to use old-vine wines," she says, which lend the brownish brick-red color.

We've arrived at the Spoon in time for "Wine Time" happy hour, so we order up \$3 glasses of the house Italian white and take a seat under wine-stain portraits of Ernest Hemingway and Joan of Arc.

The Blue Spoon, though much smaller and more minimalist in decor, has the same sensual, earthy appeal as Local 188. Chef/owner David Iovino is a master of gourmet peasant food. We sip our icy, mineral wine and devour crostinis topped with hot melted blue cheese and allow ourselves to pretend we're on the Left Bank. ■

FROM TOP: COURTESY LOCAL 188; COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

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