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An over-the-shoulder gallery space

Toronto has its fair share of galleries that are so small lots of people walk right by without even noticing them. There's Barr Gilmore's consistently excellent Solo Exhibition space, a window eight inches wide and 96 inches high, tucked discreetly beside Dufflet Pastries at 787 Queen St. W. Currently on view is one of Paul P's paintings of a young man in pink. Titled *Pink Gothic*, the painting is similar to the exquisite light-touch works included in the Power Plant's *Republic of Love* exhibition, which is running now.

And there's the Look Up Gallery, located between two second-floor windows near Beaconsfield and Queen West. Weather-tough art is suspended over the sidewalk and, of course, you have to look up to see it.

But Anitra Hamilton's newly launched art space, called Satchel Gallery, which is located inside her sturdy yellow carryall bag, is definitely the smallest gallery in town at the moment. Hamilton tells me she's heard of even smaller galleries than hers. In the U.K., someone has been curating exhibitions in a breast pocket. There is also a gallerist wandering around Halifax who has set up exhibition space on a bald spot of his otherwise bearded cheek. The patch of skin is programmed for site-specific works, and *objets* such as Plasticine sculptures have been built and attached to his face for extended periods.

Hamilton, who is also an artist, is more practical about comfort and portability. She carries Satchel Gallery over her shoulder whenever she goes out. "I'm at gallery openings all the time anyway," she says, "so I thought, 'Why not carry someone's art with me?'"

So far, art in a bag has been a huge micro-hit among opening-night partiers. The most common question Hamilton is asked is, "How can I get a show?" Right now, Hamilton

is sticking to a schedule of one artist, one work, for one month. This month, Germaine Koh's *Placebo* is in the bag. The work is a small medicine bottle filled with 25 pill-sized stones. By swallowing these, Koh claims, you help root yourself by switching your focus and meditating on the wee stone as it passes through your body. "It's ecstasy for awareness," she says.

Apparently so: People were happily popping stones at the recent Rodney Graham exhibition gala and at Ydessa Hendeles's opening last Saturday. A full bottle sells for \$75, which is not a bad deal for a work of art made by one of Canada's leading conceptualists; Koh has just been short-listed for this

year's Sobey Art Award, a \$50,000 prize given out every other year to artists under the age of 40.

Satchel Gallery has attracted other high-ranking artists since it opened in March with a small booklet made by Calgary artist Jade Rude. The booklet, titled *My Name Is*, documents Rude's vinyl lettering graffiti, which uses the name-tag phrase as a street tag. For the month of May, Hamilton has commissioned Alex Snukal to make a new work, and she has plans to exhibit Daniel Olson, Alexander Irving and Marla Hlady, all of whom have substantial art careers. Even AGO staffer Janna Graham wants to take the gallery on tour

and act as the *animateur*, giving a little spiel on each artist's background and concepts.

"I don't want to get too serious about this," Hamilton says. "I'm not documenting the shows or building a Web site or anything. It's pretty casual." In fact, to see the show, you have to run into Hamilton at a gallery opening and request a viewing. The effect of Satchel Gallery is all in the social transactions it sparks.

■ For more information, e-mail anitra.hamilton@sympatico.ca. Germaine Koh's *Placebo* can be purchased at artmetropole.com and weework.com.

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