



0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9

Joey Behrens . . . from page 1

Scratch any Utahan very deeply and you will find one thing that unites us: a love of the pristine open spaces and scenic grandeur that surround us. Joey Behrens is no exception. While working a day job to pay the bills and keeping a personal commitment to spend part of every day making art, she also finds time to hike or bike the trails that lead in every direction from her downtown subject matter. One way to look at her intensely visualized cityscapes is to think of the canyons and pinnacles of the natural landscape and see them transformed by underlying geometric grids that support but do not contain them. Instead of eroded stone, they are built of glass-and-stone-clad steel. Instead of rivers, they are cut through and revealed by streets. But they are illuminated and brought into rich relief by the same strong, slanting sunlight that can turn mundane materials into dazzling, hallucinatory arabesques.

Translating Behrens' bluffs of glass and banks of signs and streetlights into natural forms may help us enjoy her manmade subject matter a little more, but it should not prevent our appreciating the urban landscape's innate virtues or its importance to her. Ultimately, most of us will spend far more of our time driving the streets than hiking the desert, and Behrens argues that learning to apprehend the urban environment in all its variety and complexity is something we should do. A self-described "city person" her entire life, Behrens discovered both the wild parts of Utah and the unique visual character of its principal city simultaneously, when she saw them both for the first time.

Joey Behrens was born in Cleveland, Ohio, thirty-four years ago and moved here as a teen-ager. Unlike those who are born here and don't really know anything else, or those whose families bring them here, she made her own choice when she was 18. While she admits to having thought no further than Chicago as a place she might choose to live, after high school "a surprising number" of her friends set off to check out the West. A chance to split expenses three ways brought her to Salt Lake City, where she discovered that what looks picturesque in a photo can feel altogether more compelling in person. People who come to Utah for the scenery often find themselves attracted in turn to other qualities, like social cohesion, shared values, and a paradoxical, shared agreement to give each other a fair share of space. Soon most of her fellow travelers had moved on or back, but Behrens stayed. She found a job with TURN, a non-profit provider of social services, and forged a partnership with a man who shared her unconventional sense of possibilities. A few years later, when she made up her mind to study art at the U of U and reduced her hours of regular employment, he promised her, "We won't starve. We may eat ramen noodles sometimes, but we will eat."

Money is a problem for many Americans, but few professions force such difficult compromises on those who choose it as does art. In essence, artists here trade away the financial security of a guild system in exchange for free access for anyone who wants to call herself an artist. But the challenges posed by art-as-business run far deeper than simply earning a living. Behrens acknowledges the importance of the marketplace as a way of connecting with an audience, but distinguishes differing levels of influence she tries to keep apart. "Salt Lake is an interesting art community," she says. "It's often said that there is no support for art, but my perception is it's very supportive. There are all types of grants, galleries, and non-profit spaces that together encourage all types of work. This has always seemed like a good place for me. Still, selling really is a

Behrens admits to, maybe boasts of, being tenacious and even stubborn. Perhaps that is why she has been able to pursue one subject matter so successfully over the last four years. She came to art with the insight that in order to function at all, living things must ignore most of what goes on around them, including many opportunities to see their surroundings in ways that are novel but not immediately helpful. To this she added the observation that most of us move around our familiar environs in ways seemingly calculated to further insulate us: inside vehicles, moving at high speeds. Her first discovery was one of the richest. Glass facades, she noticed, are imperfect mirrors. For an artist of Joey Behrens range and versatility the discovery of these reflective surfaces led in two very different directions. One is pure abstraction, using the repetitive, tessellated and distorted patterns of glass facades, including both transmitted and reflected light layered over and beneath the actual surface, to produce rich painted surfaces wherein geometry interacts with suggested environmental cues. The other invokes the labyrinthine assemblages that comprise our cityscapes.

Focusing on the ephemeral, on reflections and optical illusions, has had the paradoxical effect of making Behrens' architectural fables seem more real, more gritty, more authentic. Sandy Brunvand, an artist and a teacher who has been able to watch Behrens closely over the years, quips that "Joey has been building her own empire." Unlike those landscape artists who endlessly revisit the same overworked themes, Behrens has not been content to just reiterate her portfolio. She constantly stretches her subject matter and expands her tool belt of techniques. Last year at the Women's Art Center, for example, she showed a drawing of buildings viewed at street level that was so large viewers had the kinesthetic feeling of actually standing on the street as she had done. At about the same time, she showed a couple of drawings at the Salt Lake Art Center that fell somewhere between Cubism and Mannerism: fragments of architecture that might have been reflected from one multi-paned glass facade, but which could not be reconciled into a coherent sense of space.

Whether shown as a parable of place, or seen for itself, her empire continues to reveal new dimensions. "This is exactly what I want to be doing, and want to be doing more of," she says. To that end, she recently decided to take the measure of her opportunities. Within three months she was booked for a year. In September alone she'll be following 24 Hours, a group show continuing through the 14th at the Kayo Gallery, with a two-person show in the same space that opens on the 18th, which is the same day the 35 x 35 show opens at Finch Lane. The 25th and 26th will be open events at her studio, Poor Yorick, and the brand new 15th Street Gallery will include her in its inaugural exhibit. Since "nothing that I do is superfast," completing the work to fulfill these obligations is a challenge. But starting them is not. Commenting on her nevertheless prolific output, she says, "While I'm working, something happens that I want to push, so I'm already working on the next piece while I'm finishing this one." She adds, "I have this philosophy on approaching life. You do a piece, then another, until you get a body of work. That's how I live."

To view more of her work and a list of her upcoming exhibitions visit www.joeybehrens.com

Alternative Venue: Salt Lake City Beans & Brews Downtown

by Laura Durham | photos by Fabiola Labra

David Letterman once said if it weren't for all the coffee he drank, he'd have no identifiable personality whatsoever. When your identity depends on the coffee you drink, coffee suddenly means more than a simple jump start to your system and where you get your coffee becomes just as personal as how you take it.

Coffee shops depend on atmosphere and personality to set them apart from each other. Beans and Brews, with 18 locations from American Fork to Salt Lake City, wants to create a warm, relaxing setting that invites the community it serves to spend time over a cup of coffee, whether it's for a business meeting or a casual gathering.

The company takes great pride in being part of the neighborhoods they feel privileged to serve, so when

problem. I need my work to sell so I can make the next piece, but I can't value the work by whether or not it sells. The value for me is in making it."

As she talks it becomes apparent that she's put a lot of thought into this, as befits an artist who shows constantly and sells well to a discerning public. "The value of public acceptance is in feeling supported, in knowing that what I do is not meaningless. But people buy art for so many different reasons. You don't know why someone is buying it. The person who buys the work may not recognize where I'm coming from, which for me is a personal exercise in discovery, or finding a visual metaphor for something I've discovered. Beyond that, I ask myself, How am I reading it? How do I react? I want to explore those personal reactions, and make and explore connections."

Nearly four years ago, Behrens decided to curtail her day job and try to make it as an artist. She came by her subject matter almost as soon as she started looking for it, something she credited even then to the mobility of her preferred method of getting around the city: her bicycle. While learning to see like a painter, recognizing two-dimensional clues that reveal the truth of three-dimensional space, she discovered what she calls "the paradox of information" that the things we see routinely present to our brains. The contrast between how we perceive and what we know about the things we perceive is the great drama of art today. Some artists deliberately draw as clumsily as they can, but Behrens is after something far more sophisticated. Walking, driving, and riding the same street, Behrens realized that the sensory impression and its intelligent revision are both simplifications both illusions and further that the demands of crossing back and forth between them only add to the necessity of ignoring most of what we perceive in order to make sense of what we choose to pay attention to. Like a painter who continues to watch the gathering dark after the sunset is over and everyone else has gone back inside, artists are privileged to stand apart and observe things we might otherwise never notice. For Joey Behrens, such phenomena as reflections in windows and the interplay of natural and artificial light through veils of glass are such events worth seeing for themselves and also capable of unlocking the secrets of how we exist and maneuver in three-dimensional space which she chooses to capture and represent on the two-dimensional surface of a canvas or a sheet of paper.

Moving to the U of U and into the local art scene led to her encounter with others who share her motives, if not her specific interests. Eric and [Sandy Brunvand](#) and [Stefanie Dykes](#), the founders of [Saltgrass Printmakers](#), were all connected with the U and all shared her impulse to question received opinion. One assumption they were eager to dispel insisted that printmaking was just a way to make multiple copies of artworks originally conceived in other mediums. They allowed Behrens to perceive printmaking as just another way of making marks, regardless of their final purpose. "I'm interested in printmaking for the kind of marks that can only be made that way. I'll gladly go through the entire process to make one image, if it's the one I want."

Her discovery of printmaking came as the local printmakers were exploring a nineteenth-century technique that turned out to resonate particularly well with her painter's sensibility. The Chine-collé technique permits printing on unusual papers too delicate to survive as finished works of art. During a later stage of printing, these printed elements, characterized by finer detail or a different character, are attached to a more permanent support. For Behrens, what appealed most about Chine-collé was the opportunity to construct images in layers. Artists have visualized landscapes in layers at least since Claude Lorrain: "I've always been interested in doing a really complex image and then putting a cover over it. I like the transparency that allows me to make another image and position it on top so you can't see either one completely," Behrens explains. And the urban subjects that interest her come true in diaphanous layers. Looking at the city, where motion brings distant objects into view and then snatches them away again, buildings organize themselves in receding ranks, the sky is a negative space that has a presence of its own, and atmosphere creates depth out of abstract geometric silhouettes.

[continued next column](#) ↗

the Salt Lake City downtown Beans and Brews (268 S. State) opened in February 2008, they wanted to fit into that unique community. "The attraction to the downtown area included the art district," says Natalie Kaddas, owner of Beans and Brews. "I feel it is fitting to have a locally owned coffee shop, displaying local art." The location has been hanging local artwork as part of the Gallery Stroll for a year now. It's a perfect place to end your stroll (coffee shops tend to stay open later than galleries) and discuss the artwork you saw that night.

Displaying art adds a new dimension to how the coffee shop relates to its customers. "Our regular customers are very excited each month to see the change of the artwork; they have also purchased many different pieces," says Kaddas, "It is fun to learn about our customers' different perspectives and critiques of the work. It gives our coffee shop an opportunity to build stronger relationships with our customers."

Beans and Brews has a professional installation system throughout the store, where they can hang as many as 30 pieces of art. They've shown abstract photographers, watercolors, acrylics and more. One of the unique and exciting things about viewing artwork in alternative venues like coffee shops is you often get to see some young, up-and-coming artists with a fresh perspective. Kaddas explains, "Several of the artists we have displayed in the past, [this has been] their first exclusive engagements. It is very rewarding to be able to provide a positive atmosphere to show their artwork."

The art is a perfect complement to the quality service and coffee served at Beans and Brews. They roast their coffee locally at 4,000 feet above sea level, which results in a fresh, smooth intensity unmatched from coffees roasted at lower altitudes.

For the September Gallery Stroll Beans and Brews is proud to feature local artist Rosanne Blue, whose unique style includes a range from farm fields to fantasy paintings. If you're interested in showing your work at the downtown Beans and Brews, [email Natalie](#) and be prepared to come into the shop and submit some samples of your work.



[0](#) | [1](#) | [2](#) | [3](#) | [4](#)