

New gallery, artist collective is one to watch  
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ZaPow! is a knockout.

As a gallery, studio space and all-around creative hub, this new downtown destination is a heavyweight.

ZaPow is the hip, brightly colored vision of husband-and-wife duo Lauren Patton and Matt Johnson, who really want this 2,800-square-foot space to be like a year-round comic convention, Patton said Thursday afternoon.

I was immediately charmed by the sometimes hilarious, always impressive work for 18 artists on display at 21 Battery Park Ave. It's pop culture-inspired art that truly pops. Who doesn't want to sip on chai from a mug with Mr. T's mug -- renamed Mr. Tea, of course -- and his intimidating snarl staring back at you?

And how can a felt mustache, mounted like impressive wild game, not make you smile?

But as Patton, sporting a fabulous glitter-bat bow, gave me a tour of the space, I quickly realized it's what's not displayed on the walls that truly makes ZaPow one to watch.

It's the organization's artist services and support that makes Patton and Johnson true champions. Beyond selling area artists' work, ZaPow offers rentable studio space and portfolio critique opportunities by some of the best authors and illustrators in the biz.

There are two studio spaces available to rent on an hourly, weekly and monthly basis, and I parked my laptop, notebook and cup of joe there Thursday afternoon to write this very column.

Speaking of caffeine, ZaPow offers some great resources for those folks who rent a spot, including fresh coffee and a refrigerator for snacks, as well as equipment such as scanners.

For Patton, who is also a ZaPow artist, providing a working space in a public setting was selfishly motivated, she joked. "Having been an artist in residence, (I) really loved being able to work among creative professionals," she said, "I wanted to be able to surround myself with talented people."

I can relate to her preference: To concentrate for work, I almost need to be enveloped by forces other people deem distracting. What I mean is that silence, white space, nothingness, is actually a lot more intrusive than music blaring, people chatting or dog barking.

In college, I studied with movies on the TV. Memorized maps of China and composed poems while jogging on the treadmill. In the Citizen-Times office, I will put on my headphones and blast music while writing, often just the same song on repeat (this week, that's been Neon Indian's "Polish Girl").

At ZaPow, Patton's got some great music on the stereo; she's created an Internet radio station on Pandora that's Gorillaz-themed, a stereo wink to ZaPow's focus on illustration.

In addition to the energetic music, I find myself refreshed by the natural sunlight washing over the space through a wall of windows. And Patton is right, just being around creative energy is inspiring: My working space, called Zapods, features some intriguing artwork, and when a word or sentence is

playing hard to get, I scope out other people's creative expression.

Patton plans developing her illustrations, which currently stars her fave four-legged character, Kung Fu Weenie, while working the front desk. Kung Fu Weenie's got to wait, however. Since ZaPow's official opening Oct. 15, she's had a hard time keeping up the demand.

"When I was unloading the boxes, I was selling the art before it actually made it on the way," she said. "On Friday alone, we sold 150 pieces of art."

She thinks the artwork has resonated with Asheville audiences because it's "really fun and different," she said, as well as affordable. That mounted mustache will only set you back \$17, for instance.

ZaPow is also putting on a Kids Halloween Art Contest and will be accepting art through Friday. There will be a costume ice cream reception 2-4 p.m. Oct. 30, and trophies and gift certificates to ZaPow and The Hop Ice Cream will be given to the young artist with the Spookiest Art, Most Original Halloween Art and Cutest Halloween Art.

The contest is representative of one of ZaPow's primary functions: To be a community gathering spot. Most illustrators, she said, including herself, are used to working alone in a home studio.

But by organizing in a public way, artists can create more ways of supporting themselves.

One exciting idea on the horizon is to help get more local artists and illustrators in area libraries. Patton, whose sister is a school librarian in Alabama, said that bringing in authors and artists to schools can get so expensive. So she wants to help get artists in schools using Skype, a video phone service online, so that folks can share their stories and skills without schools having to pay travel costs.

I have a feeling that is just the first of many opportunities to ensure artists' financial stability. "There is no reason for artists to be starving," Patton said.

This is the opinion of Carol Motsinger. Contact her at [cmotsinger@citizen-times.com](mailto:cmotsinger@citizen-times.com).

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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

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