

Art Seen: Studio Z – Going, Going, Gone ...



THE BAD NEWS:

Saturday, October 24 from 3 to 9pm is the final bash at Studio Z. Berge Ara Zobian has been making a difference in the Providence art scene for more than 30 years. As a commercial photographer of people, he is on the who's who list among the few best-known mature shooters in the medium. As a gallery owner, operator and curator, there are few people who have earned his credentials as a well-respected and trusted international personage. Mr. Zobian is the real deal. His success is the result of hard work, dedication and trust — trust in the man, in his taste and in his word. There are many who could learn from his ways of doing business and his desire to do things a little better each time. Presently Berge (to most folks) represents 381 artists in the Rhode Island vicinity and has 163 exhibitions to his credit.

His first "Gallery Z" (15 years ago) was located in the Valley Street part of Providence while it was still a gamble to invest there. Then it migrated to the Historic Federal Hill area with GALLERY Z (that most folks know) where he was soon followed by a string of others who rallied forward with their bids on gallery management. His brain-child, the "Moby" whale of a van (a gallery on wheels), was next, bringing art to the community. Then he took yet another risk to invest in and develop a first rate exhibition space, STUDIO Z (3 1/2 years and 22 shows ago) down below Federal Hill in the Butcher Block district of Eagle Street ... where all good things may have come to an end.

In a perfect world, in a world ruled by good ethics, and in the old world(s), a person was only as good as their word, as their reputation or a good handshake were the "contracts" that sealed and bonded a deal. But here in America ... lawyers rule the land so things are illegal until proven otherwise. Ethics and business seldom share the same lunchrooms and profit means winner takes all while you squeeze through some loophole. I always liked that old adage, "In the business world; it's dog eat dog ... but in the academic world, it's the other way around." Well, apparently that also applies to the world of art; little fishes get eaten by them big fishes, burp.

It would appear that the folks who own the Butcher Block Complex (the landlords) had a change of heart(less) and after attracting a number of successful small business into that complex they suddenly evicted them with barely any finesse or prior notice so they can knock down much more than they had originally planned to knock down. Hey, Picasso once said, "Sometimes in order to create you must first destroy." Unsure if he had the Butcher Block people on the old iPhone when he said it.

Berge had a simple plan when he made the move to the Butcher Block space: relocate his own

photographic studio there, park Moby the mobile gallery there, migrate Gallery Z and consolidate all his activities into one location.

Berge had a pretty basic understanding with Butcher Block owner, Rachel Rafaelian, that he was welcome to move there and encouraged to make the needed renovations and applied exceptions that allowed the move and develop the space to his needs. Those renovations reportedly exceeded \$100K. Plans are currently underway to level the entire Studio Z area to “put up a parking lot.”

Berge Ara Zobian said, “I was repeatedly verbally guaranteed ... and in written form ... that we had a secure space here. It’s a sad day in the life of Gallery and Studio Z, but I am sure that we will resurface even stronger.”

Studio Z and the other 10 small-business tenants were informed that they were being “outed” at the start of June and were told to vacate the premises by July 17, 2015. There was no mention of any such plans prior to June. They went public at the start of September, keeping the bad news until the end.

The remainder of the exhibition schedule (3 exhibitions) for 2015 had to be eradicated, rendering void all the preparations, mailing and publications that would have been a part of that effort. The details of how Studio Z has been forced out, along with a host of really cool start-up small businesses, doesn’t speak well for the this particular landlord, nor the economic climate that always leans on and against small business in Providence ... and maybe Rhode Island as well.

THE GOOD NEWS:

Historic Providence and its area art scene has certainly not seen the last of Berge Ara Zobian and the crew over at Gallery Z on Atwells Avenue, where they are busy regrouping and transcending into the next stage of existence as one of the important art galleries and cultural entities locally, regionally and publicly. Berge is a true survivor and an optimist, and to help ease the pain with all this costly relocation he has sounded the alarm for support, financial and otherwise, from those folks who have a true vested interest in the quality of life in Little Rhody. More importantly, his friendly smile remains and gentlemanly demeanor is still in tact.

Here are two contacts that can be useful in assisting Studio Z:

Help Studio Z: [gofundme.com/helpstudioz](https://www.gofundme.com/helpstudioz)

Armenian Art Gallery Z: armenianartgalleryz.com