

TO SEE, TO DO, TO EXPLORE ... *Weekend* Urge

The JERSEY JOURNAL
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art payless

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also this week: meet bartender **jessica lesko**
see **tap olé** in concert
and check out your **weekend entertainment calendar!**



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the word

"the way things are set up now is nuts"

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"this will get the tap olé name out there"

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"we consider ourselves pop or pop rock. definitely not metal"

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Visionary makes art accessible to the masses

JEFF THEODORE
JOURNAL ARTS EDITOR

Inside Union City's Yardley Building, a rusty former soap producing facility primed to be converted into condos, Weehawken artist Ben Goldman has been lathering over an idea for three years — seeking to turn the art world on its ear.

In a nutshell, Goldman's gimmick is to sell museum quality art prints that working or middle class folks can afford, which would thereby generate profits for long suffering "starving" artists.

"The way things are set up now is nuts," Goldman says. "Out of the visual artists out there, about six-tenths of one percent can make a living. You have to be both pretty lucky and talented. If an artist today doesn't have a strategy for reproducing his or her work, they are losing out on two-thirds of the market out there."

Enter Goldman and his fledgling venture, United Visual Arts, which aims to fill the vacuum for both artists and consumers.

"There are more visual artists in the world than actors, writers or musicians," says Goldman, who also works as director of City Without Walls, a Newark-based gallery for emerging artists. "We need a bigger market for our work. Through the years, visual artists have been afraid of reproductions because they put a lot of intellectual value on originality. It's far more extreme

than in other disciplines."

However, if Goldman has his way, UVA's artwork — most of which will sell for about \$300 a print — will be available for purchase at furniture stores and retail giants like Target and Home Depot. Each print will include the artists' signatures. On the flip side of the prints are personal details about the artists, what inspired them to create the print, and a certificate that guarantees the print's authenticity.

"The ultimate goal is to sneak great art into people's homes," he says.

Brian Battaglia, owner of Battaglia's Home, says he enthusiastically supports Goldman's concept. When his new 14,000-square-foot furniture store opens in January in Hoboken, art pieces from UVA will be front and center.

"I think customers will react to this because it's unique," Battaglia says. "And it's a nice price point at \$300. You're getting a limited edition print, a frame that's unusual and contemporary, and also supporting these local artists from down the block."

Battaglia, acknowledging that he isn't much an art connoisseur, says he believes Goldman's idea can help close the chasm that exists between art that hangs in museums and botched-up reproductions.

"Generally, these large companies go to art shows and buy art from whomever has the license," Battaglia says. "After a while it's the same kind of merchandise out there that really isn't that special. Then, on the other hand, you have the art that's sold in the galleries for the ultra rich. There isn't that much in between."

Jersey City artist Hiroshi Kumagai says he's banking on his status as a UVA artist to elevate his profile and body of work.

"People are saying it's a great idea and I feel optimistic about it," Kumagai says.



ARTISTS SIGN their names on limited edition prints.

Kumagai, a Tokyo native who moved to Jersey City eight years ago, says he was the quintessential "starving" artist a few years back.

"There was a time I had nothing happening for me," he says. "I mean, for like six years. I don't know how I mentally lasted that long. But I guess, mentally you have to have this hunger inside you to create something... that's where the drive comes from."

Kumagai, 34, calls his style of art a by-product of Japanese pop culture.

"I paint flat and vibrant colors, vivid images," he says. "I don't do abstract expressionism. I'm more into illustrations. It took a while to get accepted and have people take me seriously because my work looks like cartoons. Since the 1990s, people have more of an appreciation for it, and a lot of artists are doing it now."

Like other artists, Kumagai says he's always looking for an edge to promote his work and "make ends meet. I think this (UVA) could be appealing to a mass audience. And I like that it's still fine art."

Goldman, who holds a doctorate in public policy and quit a high level government job to pursue art, says he's relatively certain that the UVA move will resonate with the public.

"My goal is to continue to test market this at holiday parties, put it in furniture stores in six months and within a year in chain stores," Goldman says. "As the years go by, we want tens of thousands of them in stores."

What's his backup plan if this doesn't catch on?

"Well," he says, as a grin spreads across his face. "You have to ask my wife about that."

f.y.i.

WHAT: United Visual Arts prints holiday tour

WHEN: 6 to 9 p.m., Dec. 4 in New York City; 6 to 9 p.m., Dec. 11 in West New York and 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., Dec. 13 in Newark

WHERE: The New York show will be at the Rental Gallery, 120 East Broadway, Floor 6; the West New York show will be at Suite 7J, 6515 Kennedy Boulevard East, Suite 7J; the Newark show will be at ELEVEN80, 1180 Raymond Boulevard, private lounge

INFO: Call 973-622-1188 for more details about the show or to buy prints over the phone. You can also go to cwow.org or unitedvisualarts.com

GOLDMAN WORKS on a print while UVA artist Manuela Paz observes.