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4 'hidden galleries' of Providence

Bill Van Sieten
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Cade Tompkins of Cade Tompkins Projects featuring work by Nick Hollibaugh in his current exhibition entitled *Witness: New Sculpture* through November 14th.

First-time visitors to Providence are sometimes puzzled by the city's lack of a Soho-style gallery district. After all, Rhode Island's capital is home to one of the world's top art schools, the Rhode Island School of Design, and an art community that ranks among the largest and most distinguished in the country. So where are the galleries?

As it turns out, there are quite a few art galleries operating in and around Providence. The trick is finding them.

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If art galleries employed stealth technology, they might look a lot like this sleek new gallery space on Providence's East Side. Hidden behind an imposing 19th-century mansion, the gallery is virtually invisible from the street. Yet that doesn't seem to bother owner Cade Tompkins, a former New York art dealer who opened the gallery last fall.

"It had everything I was looking for," says Tompkins, whose specialty is contemporary art. "It's right at ground level, which is important when you're loading and unloading artworks. There are not a lot of windows, which means that there's more open wall space."

As for the gallery's lack of visibility, Tompkins says it wasn't a concern. "Like many art galleries nowadays, we're not really dependent on walk-in traffic for sales," she explains. "We participate in nationally recognized Contemporary Art Fairs in New York City, Chicago and other locations."

At the same time, Tompkins is determined to make the gallery an active part of the local art scene. For example, while she still represents a number of high-profile New York artists, she also exhibits works by local artists such as painters Ruth Dealy and Nancy Friese and sculptors Cristin Searles and Dean Snyder.

Tompkins' current show (through Nov. 14) features the work of Nick Hollibaugh, a RISD-trained artist whose crisply Minimalist sculptures are inspired by his Midwestern upbringing. Upcoming shows will focus on Providence painter Tom Sgorous and International artist Tayo Heuser.

Cade Tompkins Projects is at 198 Hope St. (at Fones Alley) in Providence. For information, call (401) 751-4888 or visit www.cadetompkins.com.