

# INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

## IN NORTHEAST LA, ART COMES IN MANY FORMS

The second Saturday of each month, up to 24 diverse artists unite to host NELA Art Gallery Nights. A person will need a car, or at least a Gold Line ticket and some comfortable shoes, since the showrooms are scattered across Highland Park and Eagle Rock.

Inspired by the neighborhood's "independent spirit," Milwaukee native Brian Mallman organized the event in 2005. "There are no dues," he says. "As long as you're in the neighborhood and involved with art, we can make this happen." Galleries rotate, but here are four regular participants that represent NELA's range.

[www.nelaart.org](http://www.nelaart.org)

### AVENUE 50 STUDIO

Featuring the work of Latino artists, NELA's longest-running gallery opened in 2000. "We believe in using art to cross-pollinate with other cultures," says Kathy Gallegos, who directs the non-profit Highland Park gallery. "So many of our exhibitions are multicultural." The main room is earmarked for monthly exhibits from established artists while an adjacent annex is a training ground for developing artists who respond to an open call on a particular theme. "We like to take chances here," says Gallegos. "We like to explore and experiment and allow people to be free."

Gallegos appreciates how NELA Art Gallery Nights provides "an opportunity to have involvement with our community and to receive feedback and support." She also considers NELA Art "a viable alternative arts district comparable to downtown or Culver City."

131 N. Avenue 50, Highland Park | 323.258.1435  
[www.avenue50studio.com](http://www.avenue50studio.com)

### BUGHOUSE

In nearby Eagle Rock, artists Jeff Klarin and Rebecca Johnson share space with the Double-O Salon. Bughouse, says Klarin,

"is British slang for insane asylum/crazy house which embodies a lot of what we are about." The artists endorse whiteless walls and enjoy discarding gallery conventions by displaying in unusual ways. They produce affordable art, including photos that depict shelves of cassettes and albums, organized by genre. Want a shelf of R&B or jazz? Just ask. They just launched a line of bookshelf photos, including "Radical Chic" (political books). They also riff on retro images like Atari joysticks and record players. Bughouse hosts "the pod," an upraised wood-floored room that currently showcases Rebecca's photography.

5046 Eagle Rock Blvd., Eagle Rock  
323.640.0234 | [www.bughouse.com](http://www.bughouse.com)

### MOR YORK GALLERY

NELA Art Gallery Night is the only opportunity to explore Clare Graham and Bob Breen's "cabinet of curiosities." They've been showcasing artists in their plywood gallery since August 2007. Still, it's Graham's working studio behind the wall that draws the most attention. The massive structure opened in 1933 as a Safeway supermarket and was a roller skating rink in the '50s, but now contains button



chandeliers, Scrabble tile skyscrapers, pop-top furniture and a Craftsman style bench made from rulers, which Graham calls "yard Stickley furniture."

Graham jokes that NELA Art Gallery Night is "an insidious plot sponsored by the Taco Trucks to get people trolling the streets of Highland Park when hunger strikes."

4959 York Blvd., Highland Park  
[www.claregraham.com/MorYork.html](http://www.claregraham.com/MorYork.html)

### TOROS POTTERY

Toros Tngrian specializes in ceramics. Armed with a Master of Fine Arts, he emigrated from Yerevan, Armenia in 1980. In 2001, he decided, "Eagle Rock was perfectly located between downtown, Pasadena and Glendale." Two to three times a year, Toros features pottery from studio members and local potters, but he normally showcases his pottery in the street-side showroom. Functional cups, plates and bowls are the biggest sellers, but when he can find the time, Toros produces more elaborate wall hangings, including a Mediterranean street scene and the fossilized remains of a dinosaur fish.

4962 Eagle Rock Blvd., Eagle Rock  
323.344.8330 | [www.torospottery.com](http://www.torospottery.com)