



HYPERALLERGIC

PHOTO ESSAYS

At Greenpoint Open Studios, Facing Many Closed Doors

Rob Colvin | May 2, 2016

545
Shares



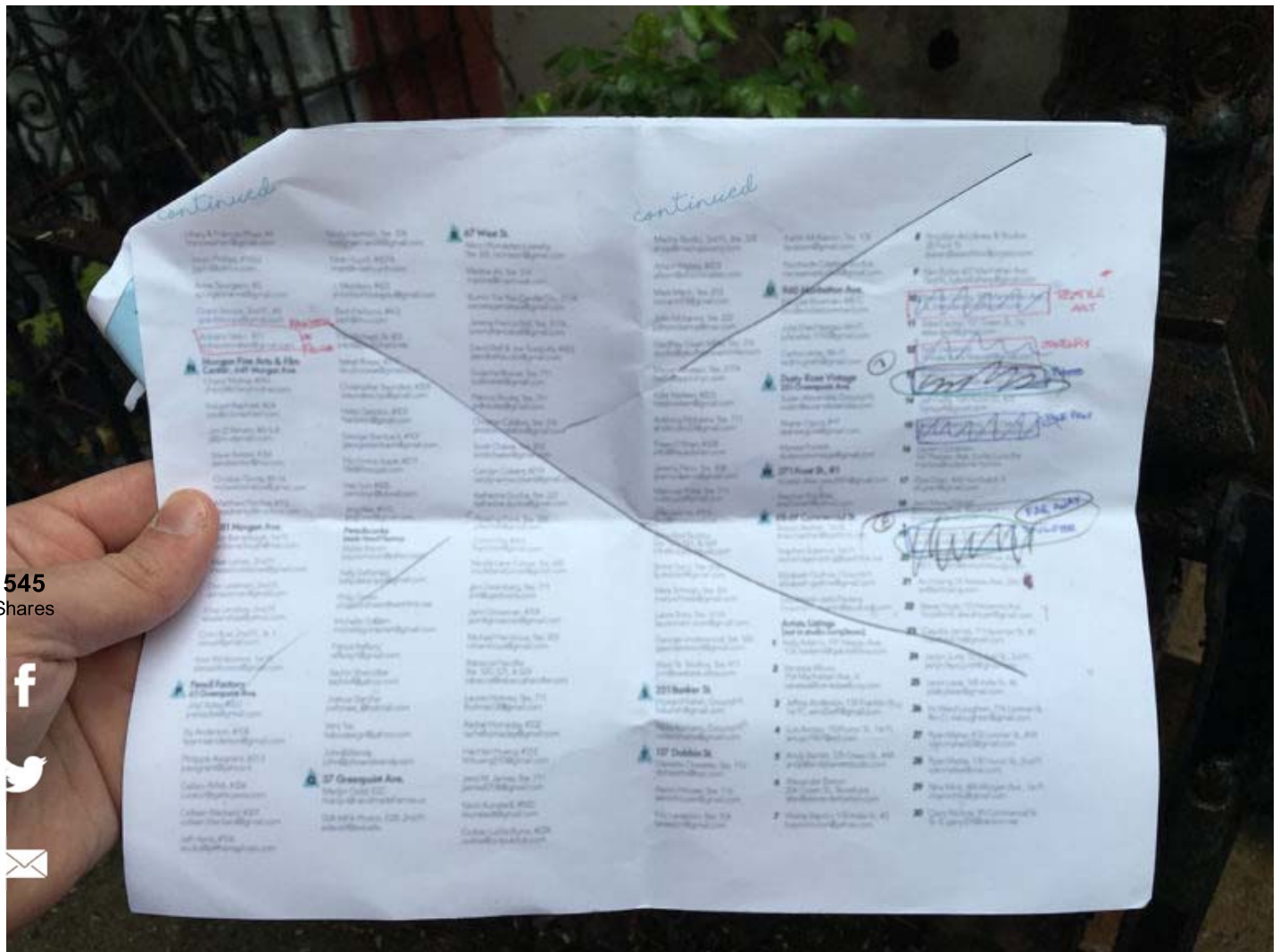
545
Shares



Sculpture by Hein Koh, at 68 West St (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

Bankers talk about art and artists talk about money, according to Oscar Wilde. I don't really know if bankers talk about art. It seems unlikely. Artists do talk about money, though. They have school loans. They have expensive materials. They have studios to pay for on top of apartment rent.

Artists "talk money" when strategizing their careers, hoping to break into the ins and outs of "the art world." Talk of career often devolves into grumbling about unfairness, pointing out biases in this or that corner, and is often founded on the tacit belief that the art world should be a meritocracy when it isn't.



List of artists, page two (click to enlarge)

Historically, the way forward for many artists has been to organize themselves and independently mount shows — go DIY without any power broker's approval or jury. This is the approach of [Greenpoint Open Studios](http://hyperallergic.com/295379/at-greenpoint-open-studios-facing-many-closed-doors/), which lists over 300

participating artists in many locations around the neighborhood. I was asked if I'd like to cover the event, which seemed like fun given that I don't get into studios as much as I used to, writing more these days about what I see in galleries and museums.

My plan was to look at every single listed artist's work online and pick 15 or so who seemed most promising and visit them first. Then I would see as many artists around them as I could, while staying on schedule.



Studio complex community area on Greenpoint Ave

Greenpoint was a ghost town when I arrived on Sunday. Rain was partly to blame. Seeing the generally empty streets, I felt empathy for the artists who must've been sitting in their studios, waiting for just one person to come in and say "nice art" before wandering out. My empathy declined, however, when finding hardly any artists in

these buildings. Instead of suspiciously tidy studios, light music, some crackers on a table, and art, I was faced with many closed doors. Of the 17 artists on my list, four had their doors open. They were [Hein Koh](#), [Heather Morgan](#), [Roxa Smith](#), and [Tyler Weeks](#).

All of the present artists were very welcoming, one or two letting me know Saturday was much busier. During my five hours in Greenpoint, I looked thoroughly at a couple dozen artists' work. On the whole, it tended toward tasteful and hesitant, careful to be in-the-know about what art in galleries looks like. A cutesy aesthetic of blobby paint and pleasing colors prevailed, whether in down-tempo abstraction or goofball figuration. There were artists who confused artistic risk with being in-your-face political, holding you hostage to a message you've never likely disagreed with. Most artists were painters; minorities were few. The two artists' work that stood out most, Heather Morgan's and Hein Koh's, paralleled in that it was indifferent to good taste. Morgan has an intentionally deskilled approach to painting that manages to feel authentic, favoring tacky subject matter and making it work. Koh's stuffed, vinyl monster sculptures have a Pop art immediacy while being creepy enough to unnerve. So packed were their studios with work, the artists would likely feel present even if away from the room.

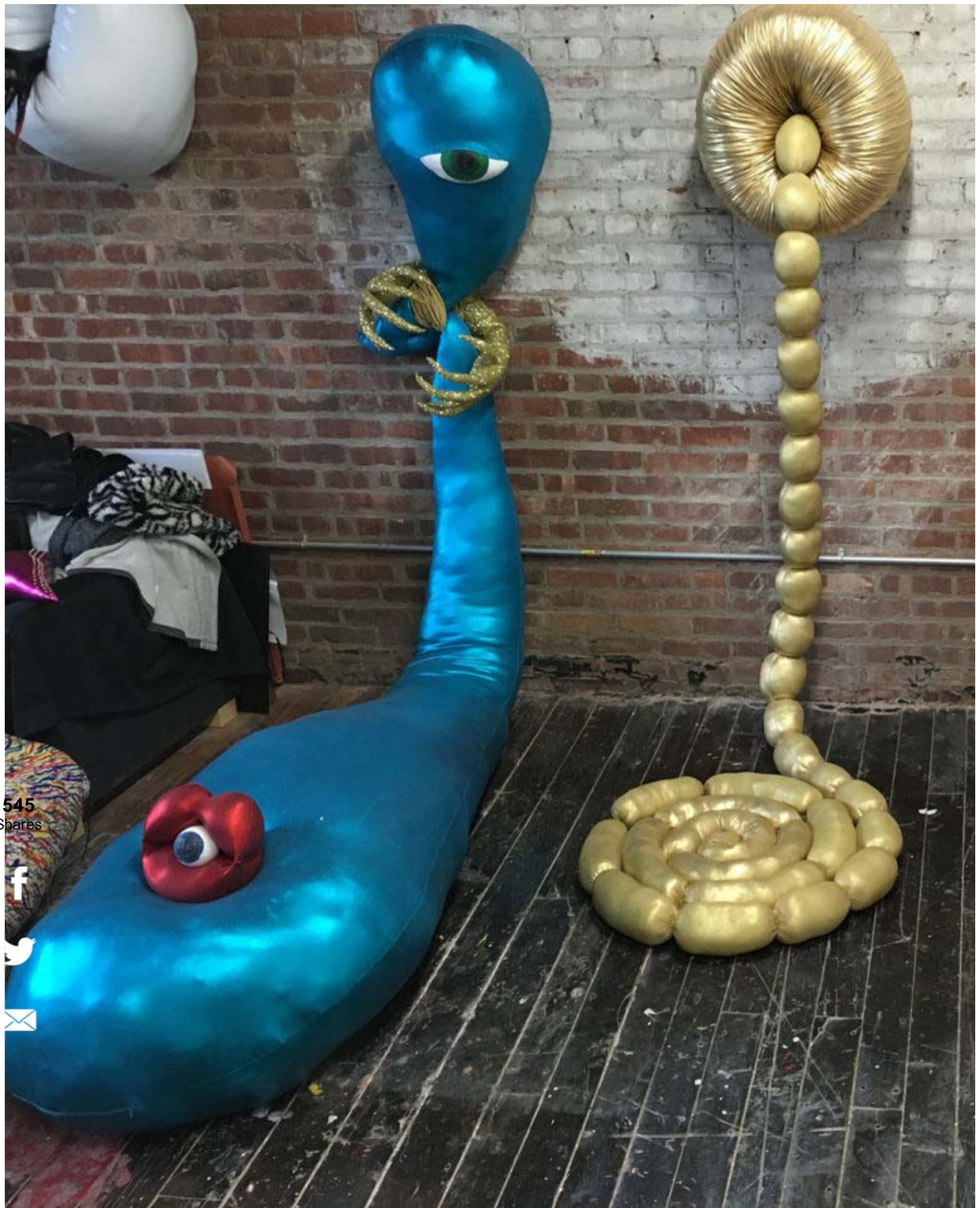


Artist left note, "Not Open Today," on apartment buzzer on Noble St

Certainly not all artists could be in their studios; things come up, scheduling is hard, etc. Yet in the open studios I have visited before, such as [the EFA's](#) (Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts), when the artist isn't there, a friend usually holds fort in their stead. Were I to scale up from my experience in Greenpoint in four buildings and some outside studios, the absence rate would be about 90%. What, then, accounted for such a remarkably high no-show rate in an event artists had planned for themselves? If it were me — and years ago, in another time and place, it was me — I would've been there, even as a matter of courtesy. Any exhibiting artist I know, if they made a commitment like this, would have been there.

Making it in New York is hard. But for all the difficulty it takes artists to get into a good gallery, I wondered Sunday what it would take for a good gallery to break into a good studio. Maybe it's true — showing up *is* half the battle. Here is the work of some artists in Greenpoint, those ready for a fight.

545
Shares



545
Shares



Sculpture by Hein Koh



545
Shares

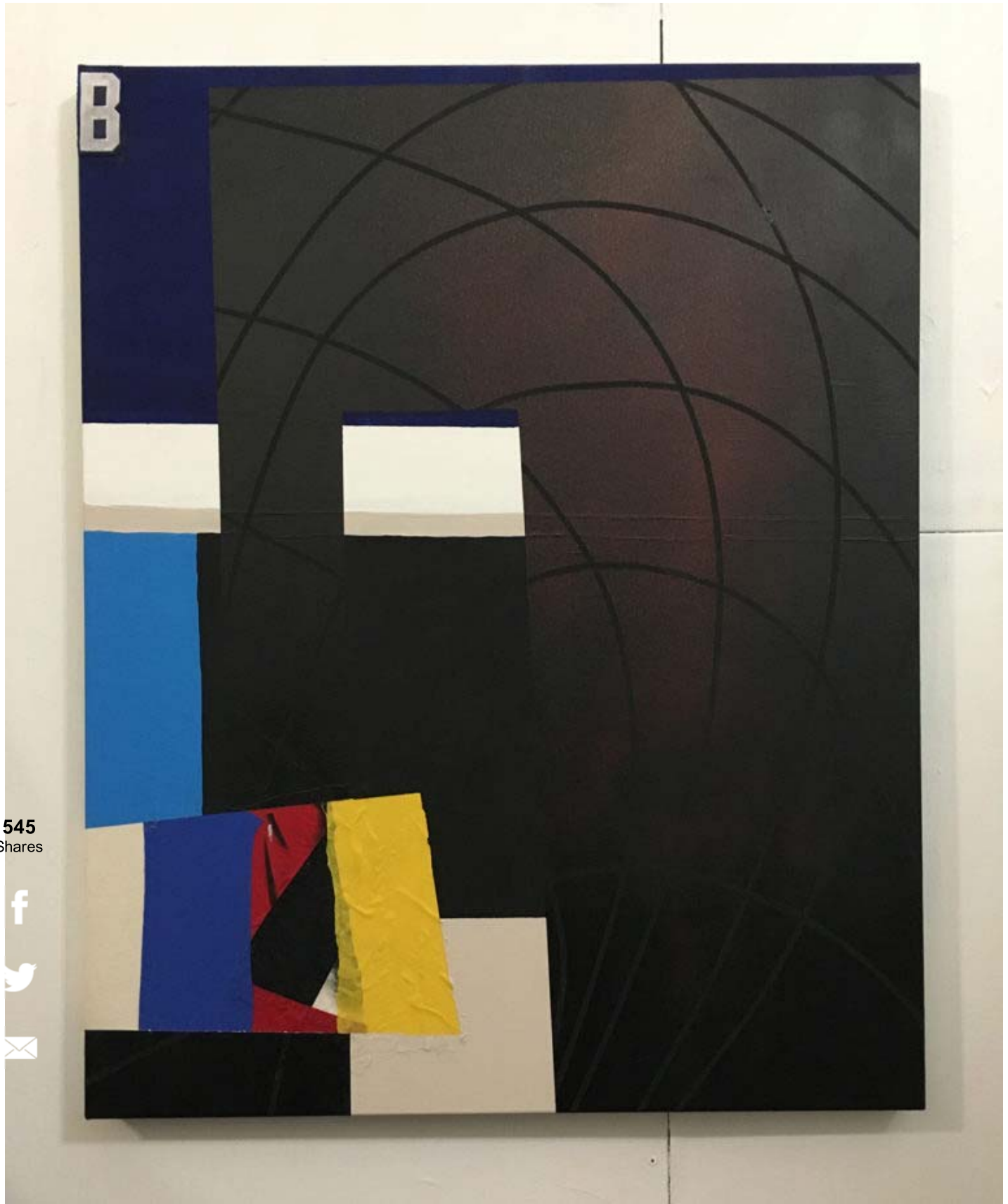


Painting by [Michael Royce](#) at 276 Greenpoint Ave



Collage by [Roxa Smith](#) at 790 Manhattan Ave

545
Shares



545
Shares



Mixed media by [Samuel Branden](#) at 307 Eckart St



545
Shares



Sewn sports jerseys by Sam Brendan



545
Shares

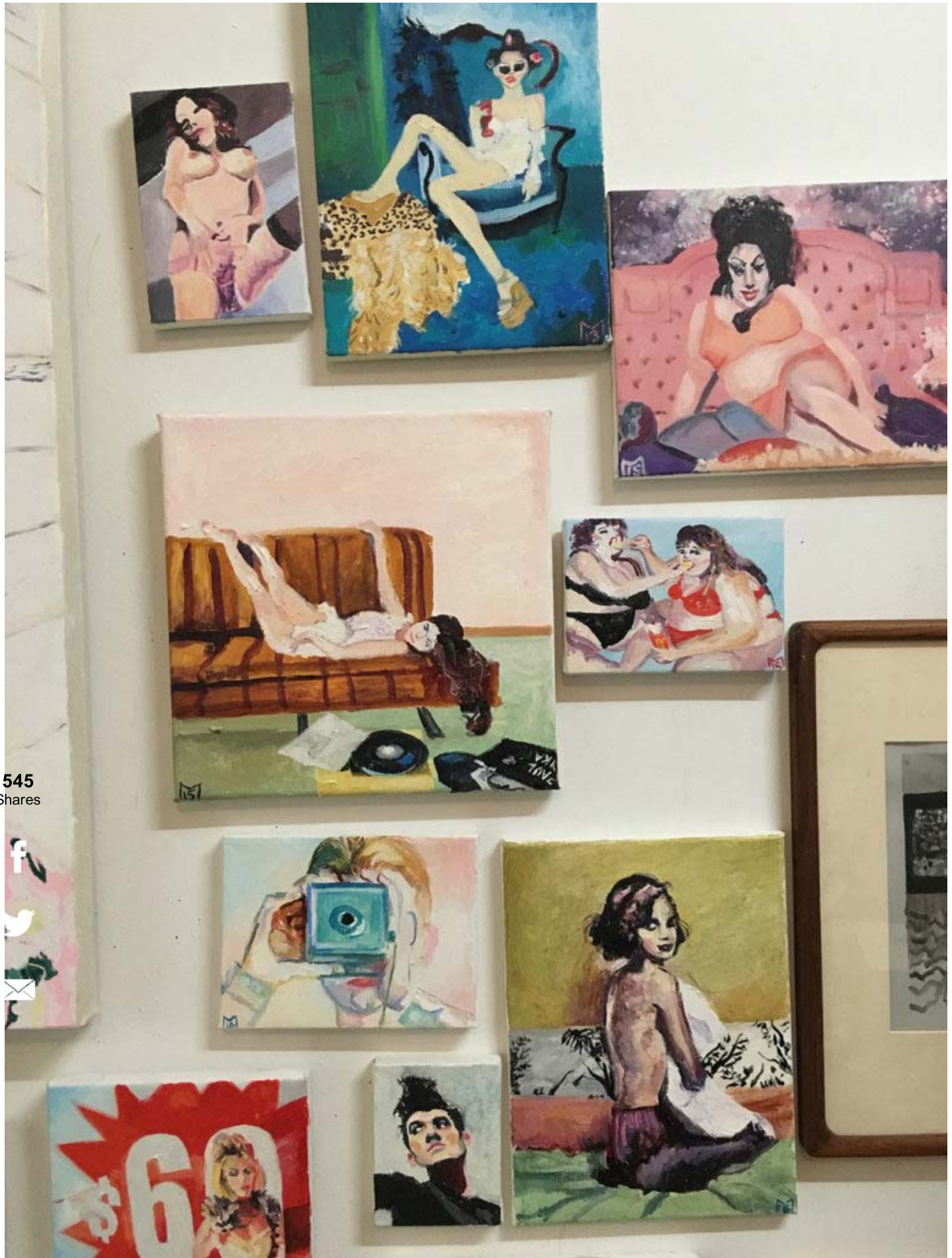


Painting by [Tyler Weeks](#) at 276 Greenpoint Ave



Painting by Heather Morgan at 253 Greenpoint Ave

545
Shares



545 Shares



One of Heather Morgan's walls of her paintings

Greenpoint Open Studios 2016 *took place throughout Greenpoint, Brooklyn, on April 30 and May 1.*

 **comments (15)**

545
Shares