



# Striking Oils in The Bronx

From this artist's perspective, the borough is a constant inspiration

**D**aniel Hauben started at the top.

Looking down at the Bronx from the ninth-floor window of the apartment building where he has lived since the age of 9, Hauben fell in love with what he calls "the whole urban sprawl" — and proceeded to paint it on canvas after canvas.

The vast asphalt-and-concrete cityscape of the Bronx — with its highways, tenements and empty lots — is not a traditional subject for art. Yet Hauben has turned it into his main inspiration.

"From the age of 14, I've been fascinated by that landscape," he says. "I've been trying to figure out, how do you encompass the vastness of living in the city?"

In oil paintings that give the Bronx an eerie quality, Hauben frames the urban spaces with street-level and elevated train tracks, with buildings and windows, with shadows and bright bursts of light.

The human figure is often missing, a fact Hauben, now 42, attributes to his lack of formal training.

"I found that dealing with the figure was very challenging, and for a long time did urban landscapes without people in them," he explains. "But I was always looking for different vantage points, and I slowly worked my way down to the street level."

Once there, the challenge became how to show the individual in his environment. So Hauben got in his beat-up car and started driving around the borough, his oils and brushes in the back seat, looking for a place to set up his easel.

"The car is great 'cause it blends into any environment," he says. "If you're going to have people in your work, you have to have a connection with them."

"I try to frame the painting in my head . . . looking for a place where there are people and I can get a sweep of the city in the background."

After setting up, Hauben has no problem establishing a rapport with the locals.

"You'd be surprised how willing people

are to engage in conversation," he says. "I'm from the Bronx, I've lived here all my life, but for them it's a meeting of two worlds."

"They'll say stuff like, 'Nice work, but you know what's missing?' And I'll say, 'Let me guess, you, right?'" Hauben says with a laugh.

So he's slowly added figures to his landscape: domino players in front of a bodega, conga musicians in a park, a lonely figure in front of a red house.

Hauben started drawing and doodling as a kid. His parents, he says, encouraged him "to develop the creative side of my personality." At 19 he decided he wanted "to focus on one thing in my life, and I knew the one thing would be my painting." After briefly attending the School of Visual Arts, he set out on his own, and claims to be mostly self-taught.

#### Show and sell

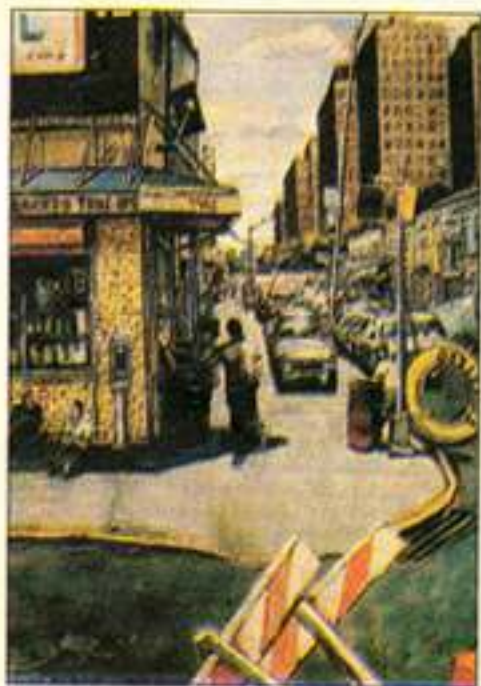
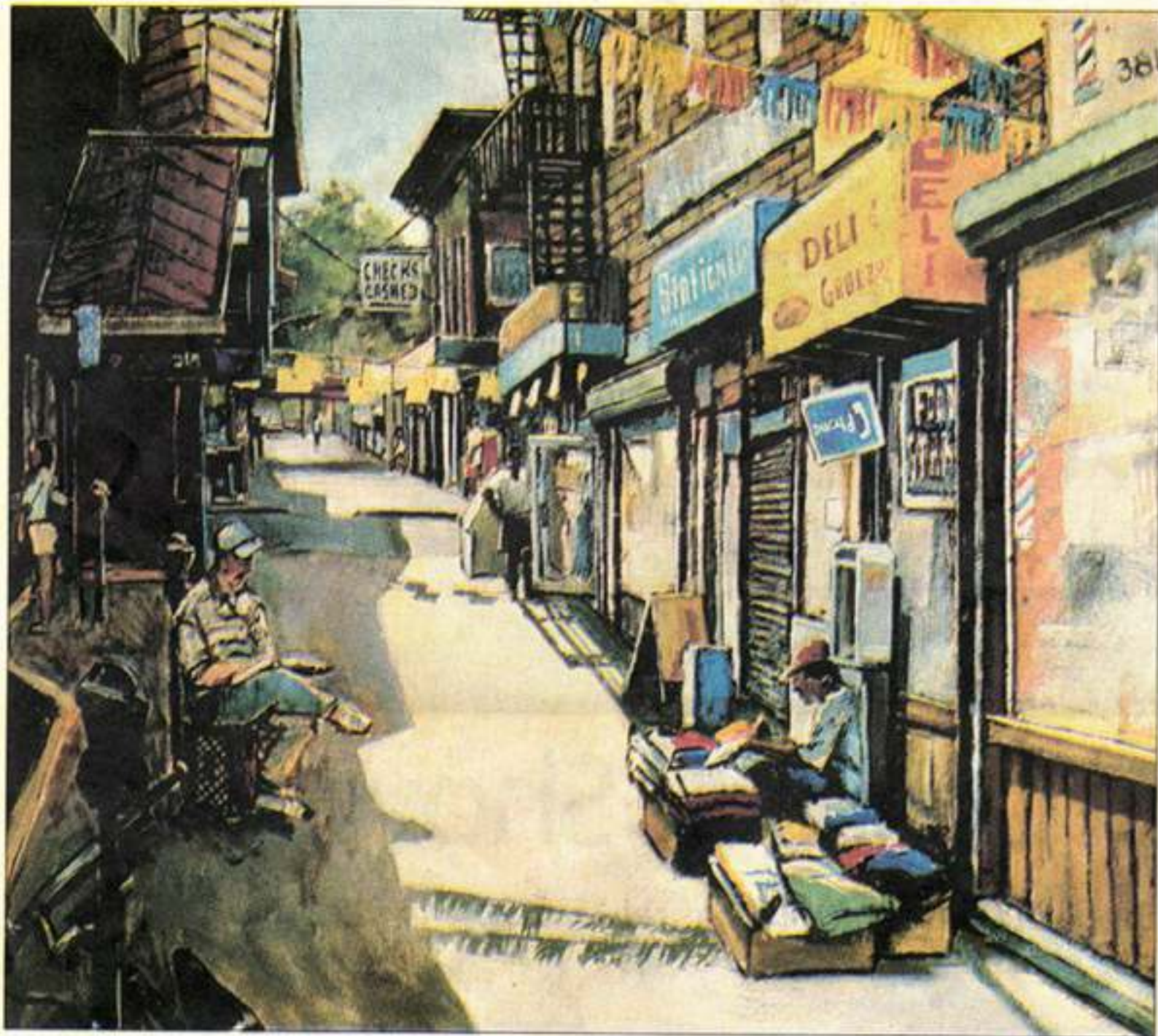
Like many artists, Hauben needs to supplement his income, and teaching — everyone from high school students to senior citizens — is how he does it. Some of his paintings, which range in price from \$200 for small prints to \$4,000 and up for large oils, were shown earlier this year at the Michael Inghar Gallery in SoHo. (His work can also be seen online at [www.artwing.com](http://www.artwing.com).) Still, Hauben's in an "endless quest to connect with the right gallery that will take away some of the burden of promoting the work."

Of course, his uptown location has not helped: "I might as well be living in Wisconsin," he says.

But the Bronx remains his main muse. These days, Hauben is setting up his easel on 182d St. near the Bronx Zoo, where he takes advantage of the neighborhood's wide-open spaces.

"I like working on location like that, because somehow it all comes back into the work — the smell, the sounds, it all shows up," says Hauben. "It's very different from taking a photograph or going into the studio."





## PAINTING THE TOWN

Among Daniel Hauben's uptown cityscapes are (previous page, from top) "Mosholu Park," "View From the Bronx River Parkway," "No Place Like Home," and (this page, clockwise from above) "Barber Shop," "Red House" and "Tire Shop - Webster Avenue."