



Artist Brian O'Rourke (left) and Joshua Atkinson stand in their Atkinson-O'Rourke Gallery, which opened on Oct. 24 this year. Atkinson owns the gallery while O'Rourke serves as resident artist. Photos by Rebecca Susmarski



By Rebecca Susmarski, Assistant Editor, *The Frankfort Station*
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After getting by with a little help from his friends, Brian O'Rourke has officially achieved every artist's dream.

The former Frankfort resident transitioned from the world of sales and advertising to become resident artist at his own gallery on Oct. 24 in Elmhurst. Joshua Atkinson, O'Rourke's friend of about three years, owns the Atkinson-O'Rourke Gallery and helped O'Rourke settle into his new independent lifestyle.

"We've been mutually impressed by the level of synergies we've had in opening the gallery," O'Rourke said. "There's a lot of people who could've killed each other going into business [together] ... but we have a very unified vision, from the way we wanted things to look to what we've wanted to sell, and it's been a great process."

O'Rourke specializes in abstract acrylic paintings (using mostly earth tones), digital photography and women's handbags depicting his paintings. His painting style includes layering acrylic paint and adding a sheen, though he never plans what the painting will eventually look like before he begins.



Pictured is the interior of the Atkinson-O'Rourke Gallery containing paintings, photographs and more by Brian O'Rourke. O'Rourke began creating art professionally 10 years ago, and Atkinson-O'Rourke marks his first independent art gallery.

"When I walk into different art galleries throughout the country, I want something to catch my eye," Atkinson said. "I want to see something I haven't seen before ... and his stuff just really drew me to it. If you look at [his paintings] in different lights, you notice something different every single time."

O'Rourke originally began making paintings in his Elgin apartment 10 years ago to de-stress after work. After friends and family members began asking him to make paintings and take photos for them, O'Rourke got his "big break" by donating pieces to charity events and leaving his cards for customers.

Soon afterward, O'Rourke had his paintings on the walls of furniture displays at Macy's department stores and the Acquisitions of Fine Art gallery in Hinsdale. After the artist had his work in the Hinsdale gallery for about a year and a half, Atkinson — who had been looking for a change himself — saw an opportunity.

"I've been in the restaurant business for 10 [or] 15 years, and I loved it, but I wanted something of my own," Atkinson said. "I was a big fan of his work and wanted it all over my place, so why not ... create a space to get people in, [and] more people to see it?"

The duo created a website for the gallery together before opening day, and they often worked until midnight on the days leading up to the opening to clean up the gallery's space. The pair will also host an official grand opening event on Nov. 7 at the gallery.

To celebrate the gallery's kickoff, O'Rourke created new lines of women's accessories, including bracelets, scarves and necklaces. He plans to soon make another line based on nature he saw on his trip to Colorado this past summer.

"It's great because it gives new life to some of the [old] paintings ... and then every time we come out with a new painting, we'll come out with lines of accessories for those too," O'Rourke said. "If you come in here one week, a couple weeks later there's going to be entirely new things."



Pictured are acrylic, layered paintings by Brian O'Rourke. O'Rourke typically uses earth tones in his works, but experimented with the teal and yellow painting (upper right).

Both men agreed that the business has worked so far because they trust each other to administer two separate aspects of the gallery.

"I don't want my passion to be tainted by the need for income," O'Rourke said. "... That's what's great about Josh being the business side is he runs it, and I don't have to worry about that stuff. It leaves me free to focus on the artwork."

O'Rourke added that he's excited to have transformed his "right brain release" into a full-time career.

"That's the best part about it — I'm putting something out into the world that's a piece of me," O'Rourke added. "It's like leaving your mark. Someday when I'm gone, my art will still be here."

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