

## Giving *Gossip Girl* Something to Talk About

The production team at *Gossip Girl*, the CW's New York-centric teen "dramedy," has gone to great lengths to

keep the show as rooted in its hometown as possible. The show's characters live in decadent Upper East Side abodes, shop at Henri Bendel, and lunch on the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Another New York tradition *Gossip Girl* has sought to portray is that of the struggling gallerist, in the form of Rufus

Humphrey (**Matthew Settle**), father of the show's brooding male protagonist Dan (**Penn Badgley**).

In the *Gossip Girl* book series, by **Cecily von Ziegesar**, Rufus's bohemian inclinations are denoted by his job as an editor of Beat poetry. But for the show's purposes, executive producer and cocreator **Stephanie Savage** decided it would be better for Rufus to

be a gallerist. "I was in part inspired by the Alleged Gallery that **Aaron Rose** had in the '90s," she says.



**Matthew Settle** lives the loft life as gallerist **Rufus Humphrey** on the CW's *Gossip Girl*.

While scouting locations in downtown Manhattan and Brooklyn, Savage and her crew came across Williamsburg's Front Room gallery, and arranged with owner **Daniel Aycock** to shoot there for the first few episodes of the show. Once it became clear that the gallery would continue to play a large role in the series, the crew erected a gallery set at Silvercup Studios for a bit more flexibility.

Aycock, who is also president of the Williamsburg Gallery Association, says of the Brooklyn-based plotlines,

"It is sort of this parody of what running an art gallery is like. Rufus is almost my age, 37, he has this cute tattooed gallery assistant—my assistant has tattoos—but then he has this ex-girlfriend who dates billionaires."

Paintings by **Judy Glantzman** were seen in Rufus's Bedford

Avenue Gallery in early episodes, but more recently the Queens Council on the Arts—an advocacy group for the borough's artists—has been a source for original works. **Rita Wilmers**'s colorful watercolor abstractions, for example, were featured as the work of Rufus's estranged wife and were described by a snooty Manhattan buyer as reminiscent of "early **Bacon** or **Schnabel**."

The art is not limited to gallery walls in *Gossip Girl*'s rarefied milieu. Set designer **Christina Tonkin** selected several works to display in Rufus's Brooklyn loft, including locally shot photographs by **Harriet Zucker**, small-scale collages by **Lee Malecki**, and glossy color-field paintings by **Linda Bradford**.

And although the artworks hanging in the faux Waldorf-Astoria suite that is the temporary home of Serena and Lily van der Woodsen (played by **Blake Lively** and **Kelly Rutherford**) were produced by the show's scenic department, "When Serena and her mom move into their real apartment, it's going to have real art on the walls," says Savage.

In coming seasons she hopes to expand the show's art coverage with more gallery-based plotlines and Web profiles of the featured artists. "Our show skews pretty young, and young people are pretty savvy about art," says Savage. —*Rachel Wolff*

## THE SOUND OF ONE HAND SLAPPING

"At the end of a day of slapping people hard round the face," says British artist **Phil Collins**, "you long for nothing more than a cup of tea and a large dollop of hand cream."

Collins is no mere sadist. He has slapped dozens of art-world figures, from London gallerist **Pablo León de la Barra** to collector **Vicky Hughes**, for his project *you'll never work in this town again* (2004–). The series consists of more than 100 photographs of his victims, taken seconds after the slap, showing reactions ranging from hysterical laughter to tears. Collins savors the shock. "I always tell the person I'm going to count to three before I slap them," he says. "But I do it on two to catch them out."

Curators **Claire Bishop** and **Mark**



**Mark Sladen** and **Claire Bishop** in postslap shots from **Phil Collins**'s *you'll never work in this town again* (2004–).

**Sladen** selected five such portraits—including their own—for the group show "Double Agent," on view through the 6th of this month at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts. "You're invited to a studio, greeted at the door by Phil, and given a glass of cheap cava," Bishop explains. "Then you're stood up in front of a bright white light and he says, 'This is going to hurt me much more than it hurts you.'" That is debatable—Bishop blacked out. "I said, 'Phil, you bastard!'" she recalls with laugh.

It may be every artist's dream to slap the face of the establishment, but, Collins says, the reality is strangely humbling: "It's about bringing the artist's hand back into the work—and the unholy bond between us all." —*Ann-Marie Michel*