

Boston

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Our story begins

last fall at a Manhattan art gallery, where sculptor Brian Burkhardt was enjoying the opening of a show featuring his work. A New York artist asked where he was based. "Boston," said Burkhardt. The Gothamite rolled his eyes. "Oh yeah? Where's that?" ¶ It was an attitude Burkhardt had faced before, but this time he'd had enough. At that moment, amiable sculptor gave way to avenging spirit, and a mission to defend the Boston arts scene was born. ¶ "The idea was that superheroes were always from Gotham City," Burkhardt says. "That was the place where people would hear that the action was happening, and it's the case in the art world as well." So he vowed to gather his own kind of crusaders: a team of spandex-clad Picasos, with Boston as the unmistakable backdrop for their exploits. Burkhardt and photographer Tanit Sakakini recruited 16 of their peers to join them in the Superheroes Project, a campaign to boost awareness of and support for the city's arts community. Some members are known locally, others internationally, their work selling anywhere from hundreds to tens of thousands of dollars. What they all have in common is a commitment to making their careers here—and beating back any "second-tier city" sniping.

The Superheroes made their public debut in August with an unabashedly campy photo shoot at a Seaport District warehouse. Dressed as their favorite X-Men, Avengers, or Super Friends, the artists assembled for an iconic group portrait (as well as the photos on these pages); the final image will be unveiled October 23 at the Mills Gallery and sold as posters and limited-edition prints. ¶ Revenue from those sales will help fund further Superheroes efforts, including the expansion of their website (the superheroesproject.com) into a portal for the Boston arts scene, with news and links to shows and artists' sites. But maybe more than anything, the goal is to give local work a higher profile at shows here and abroad. To that end, the Superheroes will strike at the core of the international market by attending Art Basel Miami Beach en masse (and in costume) in December. ¶ Despite its origins, Burkhardt stresses the Superheroes Project is not an anti-New York campaign, nor even just about Boston, but a celebration of artists everywhere. In fact, he dreams of spawning imitators: "We're hoping other cities get on board and start some sort of rivalry. Somebody else could touché us and do the Legion of Doom—that would be beautiful."

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Sheila Gallagher/ Catwoman

Medium: Mixed media, installation, video. Gallagher's media is more mixed than most, with paintings made from smoke, large-scale flower installations, even laser-etched Eucharistic wafers (nonconsecrated, by the way). **Real-life exploits:** She has exhibited at the MFA, the ICA, and several local colleges. **Origin story:** "Besides Catwoman's cunning nature, excellent hand-to-hand combat skills, agility, and flexibility, I like the fact that she drove a Cadillac. And despite her dominatrix exterior, at her core she's motivated by love."