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Brooklyn Brothers, by Blood and Paint

By [Jake Mooney](#)

Robert Weiss at his gallery with a self-portrait by his older brother, Kenneth. (Photo: Jacob Silberberg for The New York Times. See related [slide show](#).)



Robert Weiss didn't think, when he used a few thousand dollars from the sale of his late father's trailer in Pennsylvania to open a tiny art gallery in Park Slope, Brooklyn, that he would end up displaying mostly New York scenes. People like to buy them, though, and artists like to paint them, so that is more or less how it has worked out.

Mr. Weiss, the longtime head of the art department at the nearby [Berkeley Carroll School](#) and now a part-time teacher there, has curated shows focusing on the subway system, and on Coney Island, among others. Many of the works in his latest exhibit are from the neighborhoods of Ridgewood and Bushwick, on either side of the Queens/Brooklyn line. That is not a random choice — Mr. Weiss grew up there, on the Brooklyn side, and the two artists on display are himself and his brother, Kenneth, who died in October.

Robert Weiss has been painting scenes around the city for decades, including a snowy version of his family's Bushwick backyard, reproduced from an old photograph, that he gave to his wife as a wedding present in the 1970s.

But his brother Kenneth's pictures were a surprise.

Kenneth Weiss, who was five years older than Robert, struggled with alcoholism for much of his adult life, lived in a van for a while, and stopped painting for decades after a fervent start. Robert assumed, he said in an interview this week, that most of his brother's work had been lost long ago.

A week after Kenneth died, Robert and Kenneth's sons and ex-wife were cleaning out his house upstate when they found something remarkable: a trove of paintings and sketches, most from the 1960s, that Kenneth Weiss had somehow kept safe through all the moves. Those — some of them — are the paintings on display now at Robert Weiss's [Object Image Gallery](#). The story of the paintings, the exhibit, and the brothers' relationship is the subject of [the Dispatches feature in this weekend's City section](#).

Intriguingly, it is at times possible in the show to see each brother's view of the same thing. For example, the backyard: Kenneth Weiss painted it, too, at least twice, during a period in the mid-'60s when he was living upstairs in his parents' house with his wife and young children. There are also views of stoops and awnings in the neighborhood, though Robert Weiss said any

romantic quality they may seem to have is a little ironic, given how eager the brothers were in their youth to move away to bigger and more exciting places.

He was amused recently to talk to a young artist who mentioned having “discovered” Bushwick as a cheap place to live and work, he said. “I was like, ‘Are you kidding me?’ ” he exclaimed. “We spent our lives getting out of there!”

Mr. Weiss, who spent much of an interview on Tuesday darting out of his chair to straighten one painting or another, said the recent financial crisis has been bad for the art business. He opened his gallery in 2000 and has outlasted a lot of others, he said, but lately has been giving some thought to the possibility of closing. If nothing else, he said, he has been planning the gallery’s shows month by month, rather than far in advance.

If the current show, which runs until Jan. 11, could be the beginning of the end, then, it may be appropriate that it is the most personal exhibit Mr. Weiss has ever done. Looking at his work and his late brother’s side by side, he said, reminds him of some advice he always gives his students: “I say, ‘If you walk away from that painting and that painting doesn’t tell you something about who you are, what good is it?’ ”



A felt-tip pen drawing by Kenneth Weiss from the 1960s. (Photo: Jaco