

# Chasing Landscapes



## A Practical Study in the Removal of Arte Agora from the Public Way

By Daniel X. O'Neil

Chasing Waterfalls:  
A Practical Study in the Removal of  
Arte Agora from the Public Way.

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On the cover:

Pizza In The Rain "Landscapes 9 | Podhalanka",  
obscured by posters advertising the opening of "Eats On  
Sedgwick", a food hall in River North.

## Introduction

This month, [Vertical Gallery](#), an art gallery in Chicago focused on urban, contemporary & street art, is presenting an exhibition called *Pizza In The Rain 'Landscapes'*, commemorating “the conclusion of a 13-month-long collaborative public art project celebrating the architecture of the Windy City.”

I documented the first Pizza In The Rain piece I obtained when it slid off the wall— [Paris](#)— in my recent book, [Arte Agora: Art made, sold, or placed in the public way](#). [Buy!](#)

I consider [Pizza In The Rain \(PITR\)](#) to be one of the best purveyors of [Arte Agora](#). That’s in part because he’s accomplished as an artist— a precise, expert renderer of street, architecture, and emotion— but also because he is consciously devoted to the placement of his work in the public way.

As Vertical Gallery puts it, Pizza In The Rain “has long drawn inspiration from creating and displaying work in non-traditional environments... PITR continues to work almost exclusively in public spaces, with an emphasis on creating art that harmoniously interacts with its surrounding environs.”

Vertical Gallery founder and owner Patrick Hull said: “Because they’re wheat-paste, these pieces can last as little as a day. Others have lasted two years. You just don’t know. It’s a true street art experience.” The installation of pieces in the series was masterfully documented by [photographer Jeremy Mercado](#).

This is my kinetic contemporary art criticism. For each item I’ve removed, I note location, method of removal, and other notes that indicate the joy of documenting, collecting, indexing, and archiving some of the finest art being published today. I show the piece in situ, and in conservation.



Where the Landscapes project has discipline and rigor, my own criticism is based on idiosyncrasy and chance. Where they place for consumption, I seek to remove and conserve. They plan their spots, and mine are chosen for me as I walk.

With provenance comes accountability. See below three pieces I’ve removed from the public way. I wear no neon, I have no CDOT bib, I’ve got my hat, my feet, and my fingers, and this is my record.

## Joseph Renda Jr. "Landscapes 2 | Engine 30"



*Joseph Renda Jr. "Landscapes 2 | Engine 30" and Pizza In The Rain "Landscapes 2 | Engine 30" at the old Personal Privilege spot on Milwaukee Avenue north of Wolcott, December 2018. Note the uneven build-up of posters beneath the installation*

When I first saw these pieces, I didn't know they were part of an ongoing project, and I didn't even know that they were two pieces by different artists. All I saw was the fateful PITR and knew that I wanted to have it, if it was possible to be removed intact.

The spot is a large, double-pane glass storefront, has been empty since [Personal Privilege](#) moved a few doors north. Smooth glass is a very difficult surface from which to pull wheat-pasted items.

A good example of a pane glass installation to which the wheatpaste tightly adheres is the one at an empty storefront that turned into [Pilot Project Brewing](#) on Milwaukee Avenue across from [Congress Theater](#). The same [Renda](#) piece was affixed there.



*Joseph Renda Jr. "Landscapes 2 | Engine 30" at the storefront turned into Pilot Project Brewing on Milwaukee Avenue across from Congress Theater. That paste is tight.*

The Personal Privilege spot is highly sought-after, with high visibility on Milwaukee Avenue, especially for the national marketers who post multiple copies of large-format posters. Add regular layers of the dreaded [brown-paint buff of the City of Chicago](#), and you've got what amounts to a "base" from which to pull the underlayment upon which the piece is pasted.

So that's what I did. It didn't work out perfectly, and I learned a pretty good lesson. The top is sheared off where the main underlayment ended, and a differentiation in surfaces precluded me from getting both pieces.

Basically, when there is a crease in the underlayment, it's likely that the piece will tear along that crease when trying to extract it from the surface. Live and learn.

I walked the piece home, which is always an adventure in navigation, and here it remains.



*Remnant of Joseph Renda Jr. "Landscapes 2 | Engine 30" in a hallway.*

## Danny Sobor "Landscapes 6 | Michigan Summers"



*Pizza In The Rain "Landscapes 6 | Michigan Summers" remains in the spot where both it and Danny Sobor "Landscapes 6 | Michigan Summers" were installed, at the "The Chicago Gallery 1973" spot on Hubbard at Milwaukee.*

I was able to get this next piece based on the meteorological golden conditions for the removal of Arte Agora: recent drenching rain and high humidity.

I was cycling to an appointment at [Philip Di Ciminna Barber Shop](#) on Lake Street south of Randolph. I've been



going to Phil since 1991. I have had a longer relationship with this person than 5/6 of the people I know. I love Philip Di Ciminna. He keeps a razor with my name on it for me in a cabinet and has done so for the last 28 years. Time passes.

So I was biking along and I looked at the wall of the train and noticed that a piece had completely slid off the wall.

I have seen this phenomenon before, and [documented it in my book, \*Arte Agora\*](#). It's a gift for art to become detritus, intact.



I was in a hurry to get to my appointment so I didn't take a picture of it laying on the ground. I was somewhat concerned about the disposition of the piece because when it is so wet the biggest danger is folding on top of itself and it never coming off. So, counter intuitively, it's a good idea to roughly crumple it into a ball, because that reduces the amount of surface area directly on top of each other, and increases the chance that you will be able

to smooth it out later. I stuffed the item into my bike pannier and went to my haircut.

Back on the parking slab behind my house I did my usual, smoothing it out, and letting it dry. There was a minimum of tearing. I have learned to optimize smoothing and not worry too much about tearing, because tape cures a multitude of ills. It's important to remember that this is a thing that used to be outside, in Chicago.



*Danny Sobor "Landscapes 6 | Michigan Summers", drying out like a sweater on concrete.*

The piece was remarkably intact. In fact, this is the most complete piece I have of the series. It is wrinkled from the crumpling, and stippled from the wall, which may explain the sliding off— the more surface bumps, the more chance there is for rain to get underneath and disrupt the adhesive.



*Above: a better look at Danny Sobor "Landscapes 6 | Michigan Summers" as installed, at the Gemini Building spot on Milwaukee at Moffat. It's unoccupied, has smooth brick walls, and great sightlines on two sides from Milwaukee Avenue. Below: the piece from Hubbard and Milwaukee, after drying.*

## [Pizza In The Rain "Landscapes 9 | Podhalanka"](#)



*Pizza In The Rain "Landscapes 9 | Podhalanka" installed at the old Personal Privilege spot on Milwaukee north of Wolcott, October 2019. This was a Monday morning and the piece looked very new—was not obscured or disturbed in any way.*

The next piece is a good example of the tension between removing art from the public way, and preserving it for the future, and leaving it to be enjoyed in the public way, only to have it permanently obscured.

I was cycling down Milwaukee toward [Matthew Rachman Gallery](#), because I was [conducting an Arte](#)

[Agora session](#) there for [Morgan Sayers](#)' class from [SAE Institute](#) in the gallery during their [Wesley Willis: City of Many Dreams](#) show.

I stopped to snap the shot above, and returned to the spot a couple more times that day. I saw that the piece was almost wholly placed on top of many layers of paper underneath, and I really thought I might be able to get the entire thing peeled off, with customary layers of buffer, intact.

I also saw that many people were admiring the work. You assume, of course, that this happens—it is striking in scale and in obvious skill. There's an obvious difference between this piece and items that are more promotional and less hand-wrought.

But when you see it personally, and you see people walking by and taking pictures of it and enjoying it, that certainly dampens the appetite to remove the item from the public way.

Moreover, I was mindful of the last time I pulled an item from this spot and I was less than successful. So I decided to chill a minute and let the game come to me.

It came to me, and to the rest of us who went outside, in the form of a series of gauche and pedestrian posters advertising a new food hall in the River North section of Chicago.

There's no way that I will criticize the decision of the people who pasted on top of what I consider to be a superior and exemplary work of Arte Agora.

That would be hypocritical. As actors in the public way, they place their posters wherever they see fit. I think it would have been better if they had not, but waddiknow?

Given this new reality, I saw that there was a coherent  $\frac{1}{6}$  of the piece left unobscured, so I roughly removed the remnant and walked home with the entire construct balanced on my head.



*A portion of Pizza In The Rain "Landscapes 9 | Podhalanka", before cleanup.*

Once I got about cleaning up the piece, removing extraneous buffer layers, I uncovered a bonus piece—a [Gloop Gurlz](#) ad that had been pasted over. Time passes. The archeology is there, if you want it. I am an actor. I'm in the public way. Glory to God in the highest.



*Remnant of Pizza In The Rain  
"Landscapes 9 | Podhalanka". Safe  
storage of large-format Arte Agora  
can be a challenge.*



*Remember that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return.*

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