

GREENPOINTERS

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EAT & DRINK

MIDRIFF HOLE SERVES SOCIALLY DISTANCED GELATO IN WILLIAMSBURG

by **Melissa Kravitz Hoeffner**
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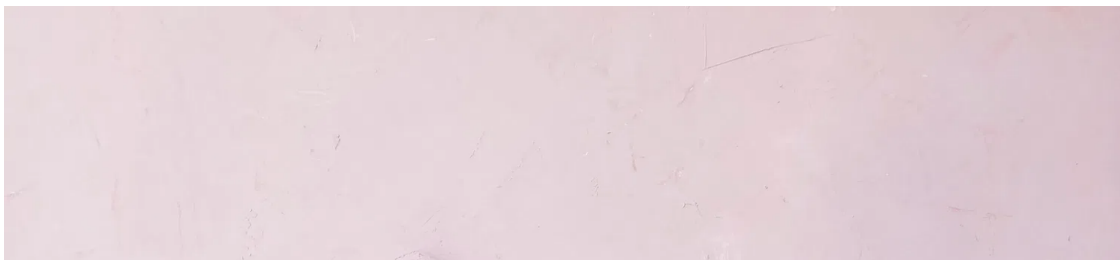


Joshua Schwartz missed the old Williamsburg. That is, the neighborhood he remembers from living in North Brooklyn for the past 15 years, where experiences were more crucial to the area's identity than commerce. That's the ethos behind **Midriff Hole**, the new pop-up gelato shop Schwartz and his creative partner, Janet Braunstein, launched in August.

Schwartz, a co-founder of **Lanning Smith**, and Braunstein, who runs clothing brand **Jamal**, have maintained a studio at 166 North 12th St. for many years, hosting "different experiments and projects" in the space, Schwartz says. A secret bar, an art gallery, and more hospitality-inspired projects popped up over the years, but never under the restrictions we face in a pandemic. Braunstein had been making her own gelato for a while, and the idea to sell it had been discussed, but it wasn't until late this summer that the pair began officially vending it.

But Midriff Hole isn't like any sweet shop in the neighborhood: All gelato is ordered and delivered through a small, cone-sized hole. The concept was a riff on the **buchette de vino**, or little wine holes, that re-emerged in Florence this summer, after a nearly 500-year-break when Italians preferred bars over anonymous service.

Midriff Hole is more family friendly, with flavors including pistachio, espresso chocolate chunk, vanilla rice, strawberry, and Thai chai. All scoops go for \$3 and sell out every weekend. The spontaneous schedule Midriff Hole has is all part of the fun — will passersby be lucky enough to walk by while treats are being vended?





Midriff Hole sells homemade gelato out of a hole, inspired by the Italian Renaissance

“Everything we do has a twist to it, it’s not just a gelato shop, or a bar, or a gallery,” Schwartz says. “I think the experience of coming to Midriff is pretty nice.” He and Braunstein built the pink wall, with its Renaissance-esque triangular hole and attention-grabbing bell, themselves. He’s noticed several people walking by and taking a photo of the installation, and only later returning to find out the artwork is also functional, and sweet.

Because this is Williamsburg circa 2020, not 2005, Midriff Hole is looking to partner with a restaurant, hotel, or investor in order to create a sustainable business model. For now, Midriff Hole’s fall hours will be irregular, until a next step to solidify the business is confirmed.

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