

## ART FOR THE CASH POOR: ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

By Joan K. Smith

Philadelphia artist [Nick Cassway](#) is known for portrait installations that approach social issues with an earnest wit. In Cassway's work, the media is an essential part of the message, as surface materials interplay symbolically with subject matter. The unusual media he's adapted to imprinted images range from the concrete (literally, impressions in concrete) to the ephemeral (plastic bags strewn as litter) and ultra-ephemeral (retinal afterimages).



Outside of his own art activities, he's been executive director of Nexus Foundation for Today's Art since 2003, and is co-curator of Dissentia Curatorial Services, founded with artist Chris Macan-Wilson in 1998 to shake up traditional notions of presentation, audience interaction, and commodification of art.

Cassway will be one of the artists participating in InLiquid's "Art for the Cash Poor" event June 9-10 at the Crane Arts Building, 1400 N. American Street. He will be showing and selling prints, t-shirts, and a new series of vinyl pieces. For more information on "Art for the Cash Poor," visit [www.Inliquid.com](http://www.Inliquid.com).

We had the opportunity to ask Cassway a few questions about art and Philadelphia:

*What brought you to Philly?*

I was born here. I haven't left except for a year and a half (when I went to Vermont). I came back because I like my Philly roots – I didn't feel like establishing myself someplace where I didn't have roots.

*Is there a place in Philly that inspires you?*

The lower Northeast, specifically Castor Avenue. If you drive all the way up Castor Avenue beginning in Port Richmond you'll come across practically every ethnicity: Korean, Russian, Palestinian, Indian, Brazilian, Philippine, Columbian...

*Why do you think Philly attracts artists?*

You can be a medium-size fish in a medium-size pond. And Philadelphia is like a tube of toothpaste — you can always squeeze a little more out of it.

*Tell us about your art.*

I make drawings — I have a background as a painter and printmaker but my main work is drawing. I make traditional portraits of people using nontraditional materials, like computer-cut vinyl. The people I was drawing up until recently were public figures related to social issues, but now I use candid photos of my friends as subject matter, to illuminate something about human nature and human behavior — such as portraits of people giving me the finger!