

The young and the restless

Dust tries to bring cutting-edge art to the under-30 crowd

By T.R. Witcher

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Dust Gallery, on the ground floor of Downtown's Soho Lofts, is used to being on the edge of the next big thing. Next week, the gallery is trying something new, launching a series of exhibitions called Downtown Dust. The series is designed to create a dialogue between the youth culture in Las Vegas and the up-and-coming young artists on the international contemporary-art scene.

The goal of the program, curated by James Reeves, is to tap into an audience—or create an audience—of young people interested in contemporary art. “I think that there actually is that audience,” says Reeves, “but I think you can’t just expect them to flock to what you do right off the bat.”

The Dust series debuts with an exhibit featuring Brooklyn-based photographer Ryan Foerster. Following in the intensely documentarian style of photographers like Nan Goldin or Philip-Lorca diCorcia, the 24-year-old takes intimate, unvarnished portraits of friends as they sleep, do drugs, climb trees, hang out. Many shots feature ethereal, hazy, barely seen bodies floating toward the surface of the image.

Reeves describes them as exhibitionist and a little autobiographical. “There’s an underlying happiness about them,” he says. “It’s like no matter what they’re doing, they’re having fun—it’s like the party you want to be invited to.”

Foerster has just shown at New York’s prestigious Bortolami Gallery, and, says Dust owner Naomi Arin, he may be exhibiting as many as 90 of his photographs in Las Vegas.

At art-gallery openings in bigger cities, it’s common to see a demographic at both ends of the spectrum—20-something visitors and 60- and 70-something art buyers. “Young people give it legitimacy,” says Reeves. “That’s what makes the buyers want to get in.”



“Allison Water” by Ryan Foerster

MARTOS GALLERY

And hiping the next generation to art is essential if they are to become buyers of tomorrow's art. "You need to look before you buy," Arin adds. "If you don't get in the habit, you'll never buy."

That may be harder than it sounds. Unlike music, television and films, art, outside of a handful of places, is not part of the fabric of everyday cultural life. Would-be art-goers aren't given as much of a chance to develop their eye, hone their aesthetics, even find the language to describe what they see and what they want. And the presumed stuffy profundity of art galleries turns away many potential gallery-hoppers.

Nevertheless, in other cities art openings can be more like parties, and fortunately, parties are something that Vegas does well. Aided by some booze and DJ John Doe, the exhibit's opening-night reception for Foerster is shooting to create a vibe different from your normal art-gallery opening. It's not "going to be the wine and the quiet affair," Reeves promises. A word-of-mouth campaign centered around hipster havens such as Beauty Bar, local clothing stores aimed at youth, even UNLV, is meant to create a sort of organic scene, according to Reeves.

Reeves hopes that the kick-off exhibit creates "enough of a spectacle that the idea remains in people's minds beyond the two-week period we're holding it for."

The next exhibit in the series, in November, will feature San Francisco artist Alexis Amann. Future exhibits may pair artists coming from out of town with talented young locals.

The Details

Golden Slumbers: Photographs by
Ryan Foerster
August 27–September 6
Dust Gallery, 900 Las Vegas Blvd.
S. Suite 120B. 880–3878,
dustgallery.com.
Opening-night reception, August
27, 7–10 p.m.
Beyond the *Weekly*
Ryan Foerster