

Provoked: A peek inside the Gallery Provocateur

By Kristen Frith

The Provocateur has been catering to the fans of the flesh and fantasy since March 1st, 2008. It is a beautiful treasure tucked inside the historic Congress theatre building. Inside, one can gaze at giant canvases depicting scenes of the beautiful female form in many different representations. Art works range from the dark and eerie to the playful and sweet, but most are centered around feminine sexual energy. If you find the nude photograph or depictions of the female figure provocative, Gallery Provocateur is for you.

The Gallery Provocateur promises to illicit an emotional response. You can immediately sense a different kind of vibration when you walk through the doors. The place itself seems to have a sensual energy. The open space, with multiple rooms, is rich with fabric and faux-finished walls giving the impression of a high end boutique rather than your traditional art gallery. It becomes the kind of environment that makes you want to arrive looking dangerously alluring. Your most extravagant outfit will look perfect here. The founder, Veronika Kotlajic, states, "The avant-garde gallery was designed to stimulate all the senses. Contrary to the white walls and stark atmosphere in most gallery settings, the Gothic/Romanesque décor provides an intimate setting and innovative ambience."



The gallery was created by Veronika and is run by herself and a Board of Trustees which includes assisting curator Michael Lee Vaillancourt. The two of them are not your average gallery curators. In addition to having been involved with the Echo gallery for a number of years Veronika has also been a model, artist, couture-clothing designer, and web designer. Michael is currently a member of the band Edith Blade, and produces music under the moniker of Sound Stylist. They feel that their involvement with the creative process has given them a better understanding of how to serve the artists they exhibit. When I inquired about how she got into running galleries, and her previous experiences, she said, "At the time, I was modeling for many artists, and as an artist myself, I know how hard it is to make a living in the arts. After learning that most galleries charge a 40-60% commission and some with high hanging fees, the goal was to give back to the art community by structuring the

gallery as a not for profit with a very low commission." The gallery charges no entrance fees. Instead, they ask for donations that go to support various charities from helping animals to feeding the homeless.

Centered around community, they have created a haven for art that shines a light on the erotic. The art world has often struggled with idea of art versus pornography. The body is a touchy subject for many people. So much so, that the words "touchy" and "body", in this sentence together, made some of you uncomfortable. Then again, most of us love sexual images and that feeling of somehow misbehaving. Veronika's reason for focusing on this theme was simple. "I think the human body is a work of art in itself and I have done a lot of fine art nude modeling. I was discouraged prior to opening Echo, that some amazing artists specializing in the fine art nude or erotic art genre were being turned away from most galleries in

the States because landscape work was "safer" and more "marketable". I knew first hand there was a market it just had to be tapped into." And does she feel like her passions have become part of a movement? "Absolutely. In the last eight years, I have noticed a tremendous surge in the appreciation for the erotic, comic, fantasy and low brow arts. There are new magazines today specifically dedicated to these genres and there is a recent gallery movement on both coasts for the low brow genre especially."

This fall, the gallery shows its more macabre side with its annual Halloween exhibit "Hellraiser". Running from October 31st to January 31st, featuring the works of artists such as Chad Savage, Gigi Gross, Clive Barker, with a book signing by Rich Cronborg. Artist cocktail receptions will be held on Oct. 31st and Nov. 7th from 8-12pm. While this exhibit features the dark arts, it is still representative of this venue's taste. If you enjoy disturbing and beautiful works of art, this is the show to see...and the gallery to see it in.

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