

five questions

with Tony Fohse

Who's the user?

USER Men, on display at La Petite Mort Gallery until Sept. 26, is part of the ongoing series *USER, Portraits of Crack Addicts* by local photographer Tony Fohse, who discusses his work in this edited interview.

— ADRIENNE ASCAH, 24 HOURS

1 Your work has won awards and received critical acclaim. How important is critical recognition to you?

When I get a pat on the back I giggle but then I just get on with my life because I believe if you believe them when they like you, you have to believe them when they don't. I choose to believe nothing.

2 Why was consent and respectful co-operation such an important aspect of the *USER* series?

I kind of consider these collaborations. When I called the series *USER*, I always had in mind who's using who. I'm using them, they're using me and probably everyone who looks at the work is using us both.

3 What did you learn from them?

I've learned a lot about community and people helping each other. I've learned a lot about classical anarchy because (of) the way they run the corner (at Cumberland and Murray streets). In one sense it's lawless but they also adhere to their own rules and regulations.

4 Did any of the *USER* photos show people injecting or smoking drugs?

No. They would often come up to me and say "Take a picture of me smoking some crack" and I would always say "No, I'm



Tony Fohse's latest exhibit, *USER: Portraits of Crack Addicts*, is at Le Petite Mort gallery until Sept. 26. SUBMITTED PHOTO

interested in taking pictures of the people and not the drugs."

5 Why do you stay in Ottawa?

I would say probably 80% of my clients are outside of Ottawa. About 10 or 15 years ago I (considered moving) to New

York City (or) London, England. It's essentially a battle between ambition and comfort and comfort won, which is one of the reasons why I go and do the personal work I do in places that are not very comfortable, like (photographing) drug addicts or spending Christmas in Arkansas.