

'Get to the point'

Gallery owner **Guy Bérubé**, on first tattoos, spit on gallery windows, and butter ... lots and lots of butter

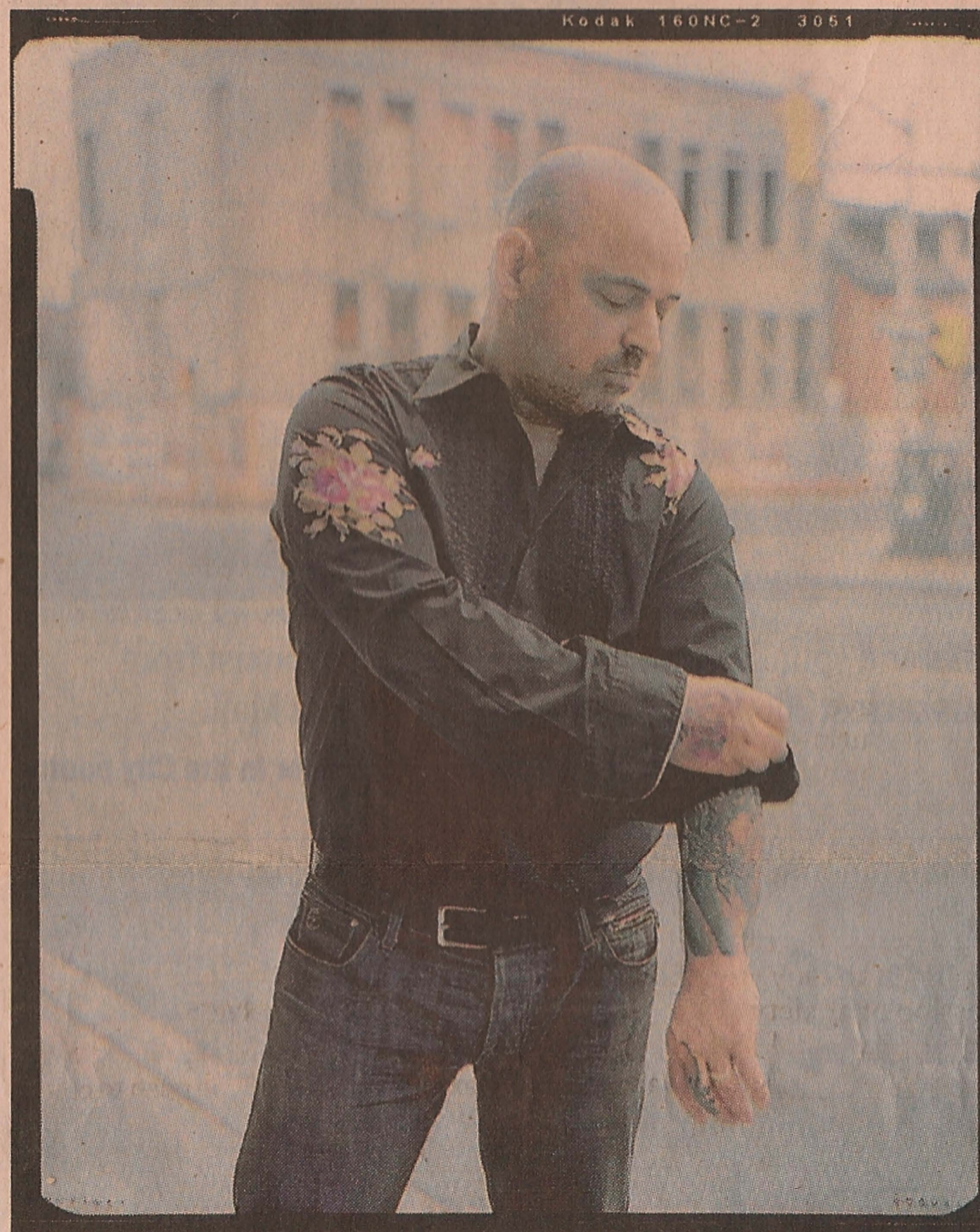


PHOTO OF GUY BÉRUBÉ ON FRONT PAGE BY RÉMI THÉRIAULT; PHOTO ABOVE BY TONY FOUHSE

Guy Bérubé owns La Petite Mort Gallery on Cumberland Street in the ByWard Market. Visit lapetitemortgallery.com for more information.

1. When you were a kid, what did you most want to be when you grew up?

I definitely wanted to be an adult. I felt that being a child was a waste of time. It was my dream to turn 30 and as soon as I did, it was the most exciting thing — it happened in New York. I loved it. And has it all been downhill since then?

Totally.

2. If you had to start a different career now, what would you like to try?

Every time I've been in some crisis, whether it's a friend having a heart attack or a car accident, I always seem to remain very calm, so I figure a paramedic would be a great job. Plus the uniforms are very hot.

3. What was your first tattoo? What was the story surrounding getting it?

It was on my arm and it was a sacred heart, which is a bleeding heart with a crown of thorns and flames, and had to do with being a Catholic boy, which was my upbringing. Eventually, I got over it and just had it covered. It's the only tattoo that I ... not regretted, but had covered, because I kind of moved on.

4. What was on your bedroom walls when you were a kid?

The classic Farrah Fawcett, with the red bathing suit, slightly showing boobies and great hair. What else could you ask for?

Did you mourn her passing?

I totally did.

5. What would be your ideal exhibition?

does a type of work that is called mistakeism, which is when you create art by pure fluke. He's a painter and went to Thailand with his girlfriend and was kind of obsessed with the Thai ladyboys who wear heavy makeup and either hustle or just walk around as women. And so he decided to take their faces, literally — he put masking tape on their faces, removed their makeup and mounted it on black board. So they're like a contemporary, 21st-century version of the Shroud of Turin.

I love the idea of mistakeism. It justifies a lot of what I do.

Me, too, but that's not art; it's just mistakes.

And the third?

Tony Fohse, because we've been working together for a long time, and he's working on this series for the last two years — and he's got another year to go — photographing people who deal with addiction, here just outside the gallery. The portraits are important to me because they give a sense of pride to the subjects themselves.

11. Name three musicians or groups everyone should have on their iPod.

I'm old-school. I just went through my CDs and I found the first one I ever bought, which was Grace Jones's *Nightclubbing*. It's a classic — I still play it. And Pink Floyd — I'm sorry, but I figured you guys would go for it. And Justin Timberlake. I love the bling.

12. In 50 or fewer words, describe what makes La Petite Mort Gallery unique in Ottawa.

I kind of put together this formula from all the galleries I worked for over 25 years. I eliminated things like exclusivity and showing the same artists every year — the moneymakers. So I created a formula where the artists pay a yearly fee to join the gallery, but everybody had a show, but for 24 hours. We call them One-Night Stands. That's created a gallery that does mass production and has shows once a week, or even twice a week.

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20 QUESTIONS

her some good therapy and have her not kill herself, would be a great thing for us.

16. If your friends could change one thing about you, what do you think it would be?

My friends say this to me already. They say, "You can't rescue everybody. You can't rescue anyone, actually."

You should have become a paramedic.

17. What three emotions would you generally like the work you display to elicit from viewers?

Humour; getting turned on; and compassion.

18. What do you miss the most?

My mom has Alzheimer's, so I miss a lot of things with my mom, a lot of things. I always looked for things we could do together until she could no longer talk or function. I created these colouring books with an artist, Juan Carlos Noria — a great graffiti artist. We did about three of them and they each had about 50 drawings in them, and my mother and I would colour them together. Initially she would do them by herself, and then I would help her, and then it got to the point where I held her hand, and then I would draw and she would point to the colours.

19. If a movie is made of your career and life, who should play you, and why?

It's so obvious. Bruce Willis. I think we were separated at birth.

5. What would be your ideal exhibition?

Initially I wanted to say one that sold out, but I don't run my gallery like that, in terms of making sales. Sales are like a bonus, a special treat.

Instead, I'll say I have this thing for incidental art, which is art you make without the purpose of showing it, other than for a specific need.

The perfect example are these posters I collect of missing pets, and they're hand-drawn because the person didn't think of using a photograph or didn't have one or just got the pet and didn't photograph it yet. One of my favourites is of a bird — she's lost her bird and drew it, with a little map and signs everywhere. I find that so endearing.

Do you actually collect those?

I do, and it gets me in trouble all the time because I remove the posters. But I do call and say, "Did you find your pet yet?" which creates false hope.

6. What three activities or rituals can you not get through your week without?

Changing the cat litter, going to

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the bathroom and removing spit from the gallery windows, which is almost a ritual. I have shows that people seem to react to, and when I come to work in the morning, I almost always have spit on my windows. It could be another gallery owner, it could be an ex-lover, but I have a feeling it's the art, because there's more spit for things that are clearly upsetting for some.

7. What three things could you easily do without?

Changing the cat litter, going to the bathroom and removing spit from the gallery windows.

8. What was the first piece of art you bought for yourself?

I was 15 or 16 and I bought a painting here in Ottawa by Valerie Pocock. It's called *Death Meets Life* and it's on a plank of wood that's long and narrow and it's reversible. On one side you have this Botticelli-esque nude of a woman, and then on

the other side a darker skeleton-like figure. I love art that you can flip around and switch and do stuff with.

9. If you could have 100 pounds of anything, what would you choose?

The PC answer is some vintage art books. I love vintage art books and I had a ton of them in New York and when I moved I sold them all.

And the PI answer?

Butter. I love butter. One hundred pounds of butter, man, that's the hottest thing in the world.

10. Name the three area visual artists whose work most excites you these days?

Just recently I went to Canteen Gallery on Dalhousie Street and found the work of this very young artist — Sergei Haletski. He does these fine-line drawings that are phenomenal.

Then I would go for my current exhibition by Patrick Thompson, who goes under the name Evoke. He

them One-Night stands. That's created a gallery that does mass production and has shows once a week, or even twice a week.

13. What makes you squirm?

Bulls--t and games. Life is short — we should just get to the point.

14. What have you most recently discovered?

As I'm approaching 50, I'm realizing that things are OK just the way they can be. Lay low, chill out and relax, and skip the drama.

15. If you were to live inside one novel for a year, which would you choose and why?

The biography of Diane Arbus by Patricia Bosworth. She's not someone that's written about much, she doesn't have that many books out, and she's one of the most amazing photographers of all time. Actually, I owned a photograph by Diane Arbus, but had to sell it to finance this gallery.

But to spend a year in the life of Diane Arbus — toward the last year — to follow her as she photographed circus freaks and people in nudist colonies, and hopefully get

career and life, who should play you, and why?

It's so obvious. Bruce Willis. I think we were separated at birth.

20. When and how do you expect to die, and what would you like your headstone to read?

I think I'll be shot by a disgruntled lover. I'll be like 98 and that person will be half my age. And my tombstone, which I don't want, will say "He loved butter."

LOTTERIES

Lotto 6/49: 13, 14, 24, 31, 40 & 48. Bonus 44.

Ontario 49: 18, 22, 30, 32, 36 & 45. Bonus 31.

Lottario: 2, 8, 10, 24, 26 & 27. Bonus 33.

Early Bird: 16, 18, 24 & 45.

Pick 3: 8 0 8.

Pick 4: 3 9 5 9.

Daily Keno: 1, 4, 9, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 30, 33, 36, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 68, 70.

Encore: 5446989.

In the event of any discrepancy between these numbers and the official winning numbers, the latter shall prevail.