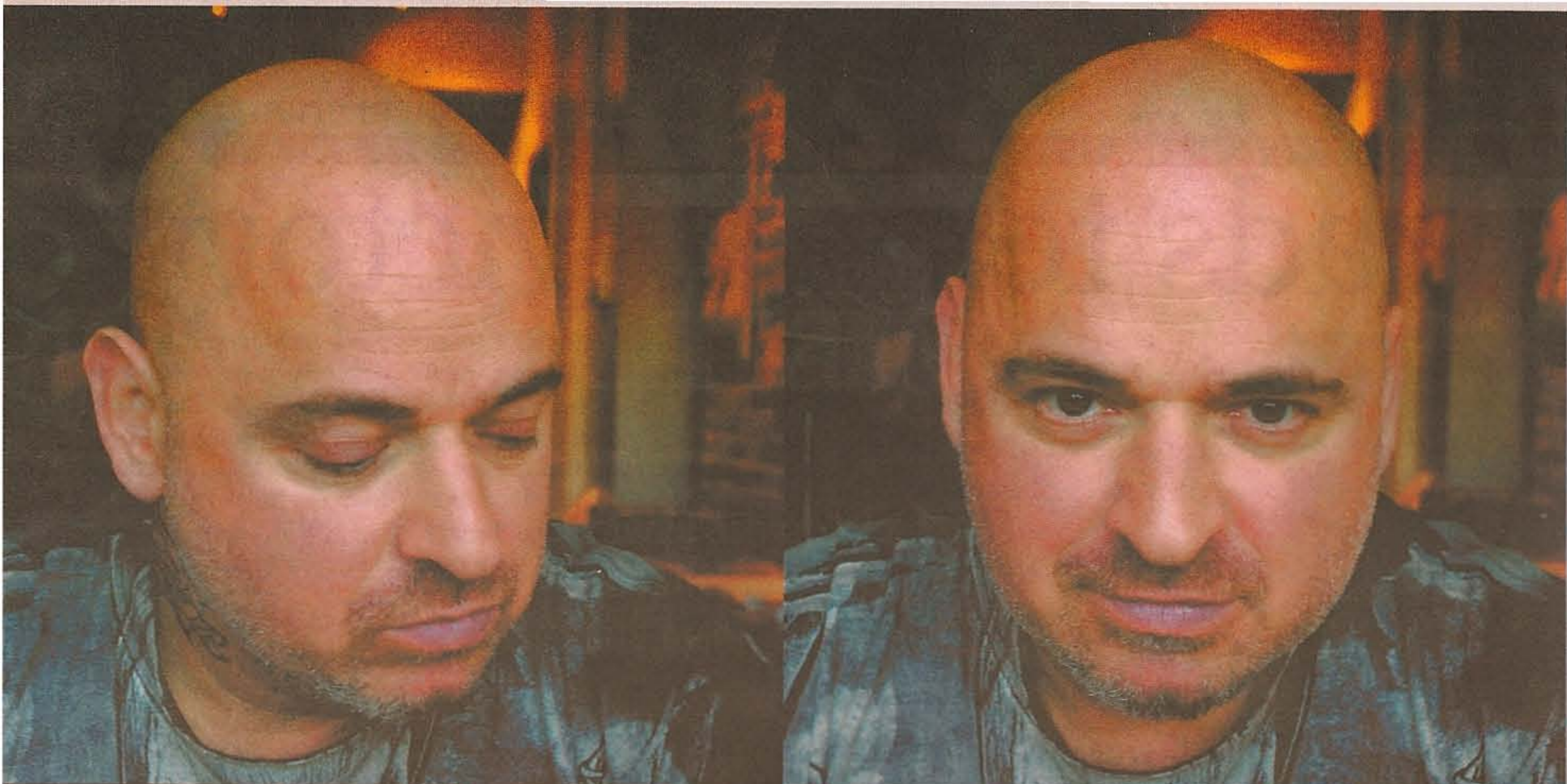


Revolution personified



photos by Ian Platt

Guy Bérubé's La Petite Mort challenges convention

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NEW YORK, SAN Francisco, Paris—these are the cities that come to mind when thinking of thriving artistic communities. Luckily for Ottawa, La Petite Mort Gallery (306 Cumberland St.) owner Guy Bérubé has called each of these cities home and wants to bring his experience in artistic innovation to the nation's capital.

Bérubé was raised in Ottawa and obtained a photography diploma from Algonquin College. He moved to the United States and worked in several galleries, including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. In 1989 he settled in New York and spent a decade working and selling art out of his apartment. In 2000 Bérubé crossed the ocean to deal art at Au P'tit Bouchon, an arts venue in Paris, before returning to Ottawa in 2001. His extensive experience in other cities convinced him

that Ottawa needed a dose of the avant-garde, and in October 2005 he opened his own gallery, La Petite Mort.

Bérubé utilized the skills he honed during his years as an art dealer to create a gallery that seeks to impress and disturb viewers in the same moment. The gallery's name itself—French for “the little death”, and another term for an orgasm—embodies this strange union. La Petite Mort is described on its website as “that gorgeous moment that juxtaposes suspense, tension, and relief just after the release of a really good orgasm”.

Bérubé brings 25 years of experience in the art world to La Petite Mort, including his time as both a recognized art curator and accomplished interior designer in several of the world's most culturally vibrant cities. Bérubé uses his unconventional approach to art—honed through his experiences in the world's most cosmopolitan cities—to challenge patrons and shift the paradigms of the Ottawa art world.

“Ottawa would probably be the last place I would have wanted to open a gallery because it's a difficult market and a tough sell here,” Bérubé explains. “The reality is sometimes I have to borrow money to pay the rent.

Sometimes I can't pay my artists because I have to pay my bills first.”

Despite the challenge of succeeding in Ottawa's arts scene, Bérubé has persevered. He's made a name for himself with his inventive gallery and the strange collection of art housed within. La Petite Mort has played host to hundreds of artists in its short lifetime and has garnered recognition from both the local and national media.

Bérubé holds to the philosophy that change is necessary in all aspects of life. This ideal is evident in the diverse and unconventional work in his gallery.

“You have to move into the 21st century and realize that some things, even though they've been the same forever, have to change. Change is healthy,” he says. “There's a lot of rules I choose not to follow.”

Bérubé has come to realize over the years that while the concept of exclusivity may work for the gallery, artists usually hate it. If they depend entirely on one gallery for all of their sales, they will miss many opportunities to showcase their creativity.

“Normally a gallery has exclusivity [with artists], but I don't believe in that,” he explains. “My artists are encouraged to show elsewhere. Galler-

ies are meant to work by themselves, grab as many artists as they can, hold onto them, [not] share them. That's bullshit. It's not fair to hold on.”

This laid-back approach to the standard practices of the art world reaches beyond his artists' freedom to the selection of artists themselves and the way he works on a daily basis. He explained his concept with a comparison to some of the galleries he found when living in Paris.

“You walk into these galleries and [it's] a little tiny bachelor apartment and the guy is cooking his soup on his desk and it's very personable. That's what I wanted ... I didn't want it to be pretentious.”

One thing Bérubé never shies away from is controversy, but controversy for its own sake is not his goal. He tries to show art that is worthwhile and intelligent, regardless of how accepting people are of its content. His shows frequently deal with erotica as a central theme—part of the reason his collections often have a strong reaction from the art world.

“There's a little bit of controversy because people think [I] just show anything and everything,” he says. “But the stuff I show here, it works. It's affordable, it's unique, and the artists have something to say.”

Bérubé sees art everywhere, and doesn't hold to the traditional idea of what should and shouldn't be shown in a gallery setting.

“Somebody wanted to rent the gallery for their four-year-old's drawings,” he recalls. “I thought that was so cute. I thought, why not? I don't want my gallery to be exclusive just to artists that are established.”

Currently, Bérubé's gallery has over 100 member artists, and each one is guaranteed at least one individual show. He calls these shows “one-night stands”, and hosts one every Friday night, from 7 to 10 p.m.

“I discovered a long time ago that it's all about the opening night ... because if people came once, they won't come back, they've seen it.”

As much as Bérubé hates to admit he plans on leaving Ottawa again, he has always felt that it's healthy for him to keep moving.

“What I would like to do [next] is take the business and expand it,” he says hopefully. “I would imagine the possibility of keeping this one here and ... I would open one in Toronto or Montreal with the same name and branch it out.”

*For more information visit
lapetitemortgallery.com.*