

Tyler Emerson-Dorsch and Brook Dorsch in front of Brookhart Jonquil's *In a Perfect World*, on display in their gallery.



artistic coming of age

THE DORSCH GALLERY HAS BEEN RENOVATED—AND RECHRISTENED—INTO EMERSON DORSCH, MARKING NOT ONLY THE GROWTH OF A GALLERIST BUT THAT OF MIAMI'S ART SCENE AT LARGE. BY BRETT SOKOL

Looking for an easy way to gauge the gentrification of Wynwood? Just use your nose. “When I used to go out jogging in the morning, the smells would be of the body shops painting a car or a fiberglass factory,” recalls art dealer Brook Dorsch, sitting inside his Wynwood gallery. “Now you walk out at 7 in the morning and you smell fresh-roasted coffee. There’s already a line at Panther [Coffee], and there’s people on laptops sitting there.”

Previously a warehouse-filled neighborhood known chiefly for its blight, Wynwood is now internationally synonymous with Miami’s thriving art scene, as well as an ever-growing array of chic restaurants, bars, and boutiques. “The last year and a half has been very surreal. Before it’d be nothing but homeless people pushing shopping carts,”

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RIGHT: A sound sculpture from Rene Barge's 2013 *Re/lay* series; BELOW: The entrance to the gallery in Wynwood.

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Dorsch says of his break-of-day runs in the area. “Now it’s people pushing baby carriages. And not just any baby carriages—high-end Bugaboo baby carriages.”

Consider the appearance of strollers with four-figure price tags a generational harbinger—for Dorsch as much as for his neighbors. When he first hung out his shingle as one of the nabe’s pioneering galleries in 2000, transforming a onetime lamp factory and an abandoned home into ground zero for Miami’s homegrown avant-garde, his gallery served as a late-night clubhouse for boundary-pushing artists, caterwauling jazz musicians, and feedback-sculpting punk rockers alike. Thirteen years in, the gallery is still home to some of this city’s most exciting talent. But Dorsch himself is now married with two small children—“Punks do grow up,” he chuckles—and running the gallery alongside his wife, Tyler Emerson-Dorsch. Reflecting that partnership, the gallery has been rechristened Emerson Dorsch and remodeled to a buffed degree that had Miami’s celebrated street artist Michael “Typeo” Gran dubbing it “Chelsea as f-k” during its packed April re-opening, a wry nod to Manhattan’s luxe art district.

Still, don’t look for any hand-wringing over bohemians turning bourgeois on Emerson-Dorsch’s part. Joining her husband inside their gallery’s office, she stresses the “importance of treating the art the way it should be valued. And part of that is giving it the right setting.... I want this art to get out into the world, to play in a larger arena.” That means embracing Wynwood’s new upscale identity, sanded edges and all. “High-end retail has been following this model for a long time. It applies to a breadth of activity beyond the art world,” she adds. A crass formulation? Not to the Miami artists hoping to quit their day jobs and focus solely on art.

Emerson-Dorsch herself is a fairly recent convert to this contemporary milieu. Following her 2002 graduation from college in North Carolina, she arrived in South Florida just in time for the debut of Art Basel Miami Beach, eventually moving from a position at the Miami Art Museum to becoming the director of the Fredric Snitzer Gallery. Having previously focused on Renaissance-era art history, the post-Basel whirl came as a shock: “Wow! Artists are still alive?” Emerson-Dorsch quips. “Contemporary art can be brash and in-your-face, sometimes even tacky. But then you start to meet artists, to talk with them, to hear their ideas and references behind what they’re doing, and how revolutionary postmodernism is. The fact that everything is up in the air right now is exciting!”

Indeed, Emerson-Dorsch seems to have embraced that new spirit with a vengeance. “I accept that he loves painting,” she draws with a playful roll of her eyes in her husband’s direction. “He *loves* painting!” And her own aesthetic passion? “I tend to love ideas,” she says.

These two schools of thought meet in the gallery’s current stable of represented Miami artists: The classically trained painter John Sanchez, whose urban landscapes viscerally capture South Florida’s concrete vistas beneath moist skies, shares space with the filmmaker Clifton Childree, whose darkly comic visions transport John Waters to the age of



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vintage vaudeville. The sculptor Robert Thiele’s starkly beautiful monoliths are set against Magnus Sigurdarson’s conceptually tongue-in-cheek videos; Elisabeth Condon’s canvases of color-drenched abstraction contrast with Cheryl Pope’s

sprawling installations full of smashed crockery.

If there’s a common thread here, it’s that these are all artists Emerson-Dorsch and Dorsch believe are worth fighting over—and for. “I want to make sure we keep it as pure as possible, that it’s all about the art and not just about the selling of the art,” explains Dorsch. Which raises the question: How exactly do you strike that balance? A decade ago, Dorsch’s own career as an engineer for a maritime satellite communications company often had him sprinting from a stranded ocean liner to an exhibition hanging. There wasn’t much time for sleep, though he was able to subsidize any shows which produced lackluster sales. Now, with a family to support and an ambitious program to promote, can the gallery still afford to stage shows with little commercial potential?

“We can,” Dorsch insists even as his wife simultaneously blurts out, “We can’t.” The couple fix each other with knowing smiles and begin laughing.

“We can’t *as much*,” Emerson-Dorsch offers. “We want longevity.”

Dorsch nods in agreement, warmly rolling the phrase around his tongue: “We want longevity.” *Artwork by Alan Gutierrez is currently on exhibit at Emerson Dorsch, 151 NW 24th St., Miami, 305-576-1278; emersondorsch.com; e-mail: brett@oceandrive.com. OD*

