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CONTEMPORARY ARTS COLLECTIVE: Making a fresh start



jacob kepler/VIEWBeate Kirmse, new director of the Contemporary Arts Collective, stands inside the group's new quarters at The Arts Factory, 107 E. Charleston Blvd.

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By BEVERLY BRYAN

VIEW STAFF WRITER

The new year finds the nonprofit Contemporary Arts Collective back at multi-tenant gallery space The Arts Factory, 107 E. Charleston Blvd., with a new director at the helm.

The organization, with a purpose to promote contemporary art in Las Vegas through exhibitions and educational programs, moved from The Arts Factory into Holsum Lofts, 231 W. Charleston Blvd., in 2006 and had only interim directors.

Now back at The Arts Factory, new director Beate Kirmse is looking at a new phase in the artist-run organization's 18-year history in Las Vegas.

Kirmse, who signed on in September 2007, said she plans to enter this phase concentrating more on contemporary art and emerging artists. She hopes to bring the exhibitions at the CAC's main gallery to a certain level and keep them there.

She sees contemporary art as not just art made by living artists, but work that "contemplates our culture" and challenges the viewer by commenting on politics or exploring new mediums.

She said she would like to introduce shows featuring national and international artists alongside member shows to provide residents with work they might not otherwise see in Las Vegas.

"I also think that it's important for the community to see what's going on in other places," she said.

But, she said, local artist shows would remain a staple.

"We have to have venues for our members," she said.

She added that she would like to start up more educational events, such as artist talks, as a kind of community outreach to engage different age groups.

In the future, she plans to keep members well informed and build strong connections with other arts groups -- to make the CAC "a switchboard for artists and others in the art world."

To that end, the CAC Web site is being revamped, with plans for an archive of past shows and a virtual member show, where members can post their work.

Kirmse recently moved to Las Vegas from New York, where she was becoming burnt out as a consultant for financial companies, she said. She characterized her new full-time role with the CAC as turning her hobby into her job. The new atmosphere is one she enjoys.

"It's very emerging here. There is a drive to create something here," she said.

Starting educational programs and showing international artists is costly, she said. To accomplish all of these goals, the organization is going to need some money. Kirmse said she is working on a strategic business plan to raise the necessary funds.

The higher, 30 percent commission artists now pay to sell their work with the CAC may help.

Also, apart from funds, the CAC seeks board members. The current leadership is an interim board and the organization is seeking candidates for an eventual election. Arts Factory owner Wes Myles is president only until a replacement can be elected.

The CAC was troubled toward the end of its time at Holsum Lofts. Current vice president and former president Jacie Maynard explained that part of the reason the board originally voted to move to Holsum was because it was a larger space and it looked like a good opportunity. When the arrangement did not work out, there was talk among CAC membership of letting the organization die.

"There was a time when everyone was like 'let it go.' You can't let it go," Maynard said.

When Myles heard that the CAC's future was in question, he made the group an offer -- it would move back to the Arts Factory, he would become the interim president and he would hire a director. The board accepted.

Maynard said Myles made an attractive offer and explained the lease at Holsum Lofts was coming up and it was time to look at other options.

Myles said practically anyone in the community willing to put in the time could have a chance to help guide the organization.

"That's how a collective works," the veteran member said.

Kirmse said, right now, she's just trying to get things going, but she expresses strong faith in the organization she is leading.

"It's phenomenal that it's survived for so long in Las Vegas as a nonprofit," she said.

Maynard seemed even more enthusiastic.

"We have an incredible exhibit committee. What we are going to be able to offer the community is just phenomenal," she said.

For more information on the CAC, those who are interested can call 382-3886 or go to www.lasvegascac.org.

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