

The New Gallery at home in Eau Claire

Shifting identities, collaborations and locations an integral part of artist-run centre's history

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After a period of shuffling locations and staff, The New Gallery, Calgary's oldest artist-run centre, has found itself on solid ground — at least until Eau Claire Market is demolished. "(The gallery) is more stable now," says programming director Tim Westbury. "We're in a new location, have firmed up the staff and bolstered the board, which had slipped the

the only place for now." The location in the mall accounts for a lot of foot traffic, most notably from those unfamiliar with artist-run culture. "A surprising number of people stop by and read about the gallery's history," says Westbury. "Those not courageous enough to come in will look from outside." However, some exhibitions have raised the ire of the mall's administra-

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past few years."

The New Gallery (TNG), now in its 34th year, began as the Clouds and Water Gallery, which lasted from 1975 to 1979. In 1980, it was known as the Off Centre Centre, before changing its name to The New Gallery in 1987. Shifting identities, collaborations and locations are an integral part of the gallery's history.

The gallery's move to Eau Claire Market in March 2007 has presented some challenges, the most pragmatic of which regards the (eventual) demolition of the mall, supposedly sometime in 2010. "We'll stay until they knock it down," says Westbury. "Unless something appears, this is

tion, particularly Kristin Ivey's The Phallus Series (April-May 2009). Ivey's plush creations (like if Fraggie Rock was populated by penises) were kept hidden from public view during the duration of the exhibit. "A curtain (was placed) to stop people from seeing the works, as it's a 'family' place," says Westbury. "Something like that goes against our mandate."

Administrative director Jessica McCarrel is particularly excited about the gallery's recently launched online archives, with info and images on past TNG shows and activities. The hope is that it will not only feature the history of the gallery, but artist-run culture in Calgary. Currently,



Susy Oliveira's photo sculpture "Nocturnal Garden" from her January 2010 show



Ted Hiebert's exhibit explores questions of photography, September 2009

the archive features more than 100 comprehensive entries on past shows, with that figure to double in the fall. The site is open source and available to the public. "The move to a smaller space (Eau Claire) made us recognize the value of our archives," says McCarrel.

Currently, most of the gallery's permanent archives are being held at the Glenbow Museum, but it is set to open a resource centre in early 2010 that will make the materials open to the public. The gallery has a semi-permanent space that will house the resource centre, which Westbury says has been in the works for the last 10 years. As well, the gallery plans to kick-start its press, publishing more essays and commentary on the exhibits. "We have more going on in programming than public outreach, although the gallery is historically acknowledged as the longest standing in the city, with connections to the development of other centres in Calgary," says Westbury. Indeed, organizations such as Emmedia and the Mountain: Standard Time (M:ST) performative arts festival have spun out of TNG activities. "It gets to the point with, say, so many people doing

video art, that there's a need for something else, like Emmedia. With sufficient energy in the community, these things take on their own life."

This year's upcoming shows are heavy on the audio-visual, says Westbury, and include: Ted Hiebert's *Unbecoming* (August 28-September 26, 2009), touching on "the notion of vampirism, of photography stealing the soul"; and Christophe Jivraj's *The Swimmers* (October 2-November 7, 2009), featuring videos of his work as a caregiver for disabled adults.

Remaining committed to its community-oriented approach, the gallery actively encourages public involvement and support. "Membership is a key part," says McCarrel. "That community and democratic approach is what keeps it going. Volunteers contribute in a very hands-on way — the people have a say in what they want to see, to approach us and discuss where they'd like to see the gallery go." For Westbury, the gallery is constantly evolving: "With the artist-run idea, situated in this hippy '70s thing... it's always the question of, 'Can you find value in that still?'"

thenewgallery.org/