

Movements Taps into Neglected Art Community



by Lucy Shaw

To nurture an artistic "movement," there has to be a place that is inspiring and free of restraints, in which artists of all kinds can come together and collaborate. This kind of environment has seemed to be lacking in Austin; however, in an easily overlooked spot on Sixth Street, there is just this sort of space, aptly named Movements.

The gallery has been a continually evolving project for the two owners, Kimberly Zawislak and Andrew Barren. It has gone from a practice space to an art gallery to what it is now -- a space that intertwines different media of art. There is an area in the back for performances (poetry readings, plays, musical performances et cetera), and in the front is space for artwork to be displayed. There is also a small bar for coffee and tea (it's b.y.o.b for now because they don't have a liquor license); however, the owners want to maintain a gallery/theater feel for the artists, instead of falling into the coffeeshop/bar atmosphere they are trying to escape.

"We have a different sort of vibe here," Kimberly explains, "the people who come want to be here because they want to witness art...there is a level of respect that goes on [in the performance area] and it is inspiring for artists to have an attentive audience."

Being musicians themselves, the owners of Movements maintain a high level of respect for the featured artist. They take only ten percent commission for the pieces they sell, so that the artist keeps most of the profits. He or she also gets almost total creative freedom. "Our goal is not to limit. As long as we can house it here, we really try to," says Kimberly.

One reason that Movements can allow such freedom is that the owners aren't relying on making a profit. What really motivates them is to be able to provide a space where artists can feel more comfortable and free. "Because selling here is not an issue, it becomes a much more free space to display work that can be more radical or more avante-garde...and all the artists that have shown here have been really into this space for those reasons," says Andrew.

As for the musicians that play at Movements, Andrew says, "We have typically tried to stray away from having groups that are folk, or blues, or rock oriented [because] they could play at so many other places on this street. And that, again, is the original reason why we created this place -- as a venue for art that was very uncomfortable in the rest of the places around Austin."

So far, Andrew and Kimberly have been really impressed with the artwork they have been presenting. "We haven't had to deny a single person," said Andrew. "We've come up with an application process which weeds out most of the people that aren't serious, and the ones that are serious have so far been really incredible artists."

A concept that emerged after Movements opened and started attracting different artists was a desire for the space to be a meeting ground for different artists to communicate, grow, and learn from each other. Andrew recalls meeting other musicians through Movements and thinking, "For the first time in our lives since we've been here we finally saw a different side of Austin that you don't usually see because there is no other place for these groups to play." Kimberly relates similar experiences when people would come up to the gallery and afterwards be inspired to create after not doing anything artistic since college and feeling stuck in a nine-to-five job. She says, "That's just the biggest high...when you've got the artist and the community coming together saying you can do this and there is a place where it can be shown."

So, if you've been avoiding Sixth Street lately, the same reason you've stayed away may be a reason to come back. Because tucked in between Marisco's and Shop 24 is a place that has somehow kept a low profile yet is attracting people from out of the woodwork. "What we're giving the community, since it is supporting itself so well, is so worthwhile," says Andrew, "and it kind of helps bring some integrity back to Sixth Street."

The hours you can catch Movements open to the public revolve around the events going on. So here are some of them:

- Every other Tuesday the Austin International Poetry Festival schedules poetry readings at Movements. (These aren't open mic, so you can count on a serious show.)
- Also, Matthew Feiner and a group of artists that he has brought forth will be opening their show at Movements on Tuesday, Sept. 16 at 8:00 p.m.; and it will run for about three weeks. These art openings have been the most packed events at Movements. "It's really an incredible energy every single time," says Andrew.
- Then, during October, KOOP radio station is having an art auction of Halloween masks. The masks are being made by 200-300 artists around Austin, some of them regionally famous. This event is scheduled close to Halloween (Oct. 12-17) and people can come through and bid on or buy a mask for a costume. The proceeds will go to charity and to help the radio station.

Other than that, Movements is working on upcoming festivals in which you can pay one ticket price to come and see a bunch of different shows (music, a play, poetry, etc...) all in one huge weekend. To get more on these events, call the gallery at (512) 469-1745.