

Monthly art (and shop) crawl kicks off

Naomi Carniol SPECIAL TO THE STAR
Published On Thu Jan 07 2010

After the madness of the holidays, early January tends to be a quiet month on both the gallery and shopping scenes. This week's launch of First Thursdays on West Queen West aims to change that. About 35 of the district's art galleries, shops and restaurants will stay open until 10 p.m. for the new monthly event.

As part of Thursday's festivities, the recently opened Toronto Institute for the Enjoyment of Music (821 Queen St. W.) will present two free musical performances. Over at Camera (1026 Queen), the Stephen Bulger Gallery is hosting a free film screening of *The Queen*. And women's wear boutique Magpie Designs (884 Queen) will present live music. "In the dreary months of winter, it's nice to have something fun going on," says Magpie co-owner and co-designer Cathy McDayter.

By staying open later, boutique and gallery owners hope to attract not only the after-dinner crowd, but new customers whose schedules prevent them from visiting during regular business hours. Participating stores are offering First Thursdays sales, which shoppers can access by downloading a savings "passport."

While First Thursdays are organized by the local Business Improvement Area, tonight's event isn't just about boosting business.

"It's an invitation to come see our area," says Tao Drayton, owner of vintage clothing shop Cabaret. "It's about a neighbourhood, not just the businesses, but the people, the artists and the community that lives and works down here."

At least two art galleries will host openings Thursday from 6 to 9. Angell Gallery (890 Queen) will unveil work by Calgary-based artist Bradley Harms. Scheduling the opening for First Thursdays lets the gallery "broaden our audience," says owner Jamie Angell.

At Lausberg Contemporary (880 Queen), visitors can meet German artist Jürgen Paas at the opening of his show, "In the Presence of an Original."

For art lovers – and those slightly intimidated by art galleries – arts journalist Betty Ann Jordan will lead an art walk. Kicking off at 6:30 p.m. at the Edward Day Gallery (952 Queen), where artist Doug Guildford will be present, Jordan's tour will visit five galleries and a restaurant (Oddfellows), introduce participants to artists and end with hot chocolate at the Drake Hotel. Complimentary "wine and nibbles" are promised.

The art and design walk is just the beginning, Jordan says. "Our hope is in upcoming months that we will expand the walks to three theme tours. One will be art and design. Another will be music and spoken word and the third will be food and drink."

As for First Thursdays, "it's a work in progress," Jordan says. "It's just going to get better and better."

More info at www.westqueenwest.ca