

LOWELL RYAN PROJECTS



After running Mike Weiss Gallery in Chelsea for 13 years, Virginia Martinsen and Mike Weiss feel as if they've been "born again" at their new space on the West Coast.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL KETTINGALL

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OUT ON WEST ADAMS, NEXT DOOR TO THE legendary Collins Fish Market and down the way from Charles Bukowski's childhood home, Mike Weiss and Virginia Martinsen have turned a former *carniceria* into a pristine gallery. "Some of the neighbors come by and ask us if we have meat," Weiss says with a laugh.

Adding to the confusion, the name of the gallery and the name of the people behind it don't match up, and that's by design. Lowell is Weiss's middle name, and Ryan is Martinsen's. The levels of obfuscation hold a purpose: "If you're able to separate yourself a little bit from your history, you take certain kinds of risks and challenge yourself. People come in and go, 'Where's Lowell?'" Weiss says, still laughing.

Weiss and Martinsen's history consists of running established Chelsea space Mike Weiss Gallery for 13 years, showing works by the likes of Deborah Brown and Marc Séguin, as well as Martinsen's own large-scale oil paintings. But after two hurricanes flooded the gallery and extended construction in the neighborhood created further difficulties, Weiss and Martinsen, who are married and have been together for 15 years, decided enough was enough.

In 2016, they packed up and moved to a large home in the

Catskills to start Gates of the West, an online art platform. But soon the itch to open a space crept back in. "We want to be where the art is," says Weiss of their cross-country relocation to LA. "When we left Upstate New York, we started traveling the country and seeing a lot of great artists in a lot of different places, but what excited us was out here."

They set up shop in a nearby West Adams hotel and found the space. They opened in January with a string of group shows before exhibiting "Born to Love," a solo show by longtime LA artist Alexandra Grant. Grant's dramatic *Antigone*-inspired text abstraction paintings drew scores to the gallery, including actor Keanu Reeves, with whom the artist had worked previously. The new start, the new name and a string of successful shows has the duo—and their dog Felix, who chills with them in the office—pretty excited.

"There's a lot of energy here, even with writers and magazines," says Weiss, who notes the next show will be Brooklyn-based artist Kumasi J. Barnett. "In New York, *The New York Times*' energy has gone down, and magazines are going out of business. The day-to-day movement was tiresome. We've been born again here. We feel so energetic."