

13FOREST Gallery closes up shop in Medford, moves to Arlington

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Medford - After nearly two years, the city's only private art gallery is shutting its doors and crossing the river to Arlington. 13FOREST, which represents more than 100 local artists, recently lost its lease and will officially close on Jan. 6.

Owner Marc Gurton took a one-year lease at to test the waters of operating an art gallery in downtown Medford and by the time the lease was up this past fall, the landlord had made other arrangements with a Thai restaurant next door that wishes to expand.

What some may see as a loss for Medford Square, which has been trying for decades to bring culturally relevant business to its storefronts, Gurton sees as a new beginning with new possibilities. With a larger space at his disposal, he is excited to seek out fresh talent in Arlington.

"If I can connect artists to other artists and artists to the public, then it's wonderful," said Gurton, of the change.

The gallery will retain the name 13FOREST at its new Massachusetts Avenue location, he said, and all of the Medford artists will remain represented.

Gurton originally bought the gallery from the previous owner, Lisa Tang Liu who has gone on to pursue photography. Once a mid-level corporate accountant, Gurton quit his career after 20 years to travel through England, Italy and Tunisia. Upon his return, he took a temporary job with Liu.

"I came to do the books and started saying, 'Why don't we get some more inventory,'" Gurton said. Before long he was hooked on 13FOREST.

"I've always been interested in art," Gurton said, adding that at Brandeis University he had studied art history for a year and has enjoyed photography for many years.

He said he enjoys working for himself, even if it is a bit scary at times.

A background in accounting has proven to be a useful tool for a gallery owner, Gurton said, and not just to satisfy his artist clients.

"Accounting is about balance," he said. "When an accountant reviews a financial statement, it's got to look right. When things are off, you notice right away."

To commemorate the gallery's move, a final exhibit called "Crossing the River" is on display at 13FOREST and many items are on sale. The exhibit displays a theme of nostalgia, motion and uncertainty.

Among works from eight contributing artists, Gurton included a series of photographs he took of a shipwreck off the coast of Maine and a series of Liu's photos of Medford.

"It's about peril and fear and 'Oh, my God, I'm moving,'" said Gurton of his series.

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He said he had originally balked at one photograph Liu included of the Citizens Bank in Medford Square, but after analyzing it, he realized its importance.

"I think what she was trying to say here is that here is a lot of potential in the Square," said Gurton.

In the black and white photo, a spacious street is laid out before an architecturally pleasant building, containing a bank. On the sidewalks, there is no foot traffic.

"Nothing's really happening," said Gurton, of the photo.

The paintings, pottery, oddly shaped facial sculptures, glassware and jewelry and other artistic trinkets will leave Medford on Jan. 6. Gurton is pleased that 13FOREST will be near other art galleries in and crafts shops in Arlington, though, he confessed, he might have liked to see it work out in Medford.

"There's a lot here," he said. "There's all this amazing stuff and Medford is one of the oldest cities in the country."

He said he would be interested in opening a second shop in the Square one day.

"I'm going to miss the book store and I'm going to miss this gallery," said Adele Travisano, one of the gallery's contributing artists. "Now I have no reason to come to the Square. I come to the bank, but I can do that in West Medford."