

An Eye for Talent

YOU DON'T JUST HAPPEN upon LaMontagne Gallery. It's in a cement building on East 2nd Street, in an industrial section of South Boston. Outside, the only sign of the gallery's presence is the stenciled lettering on its gray metal door. But as evidenced by some recently purchased items sitting tantalizingly in the back office one day in August—a pair of \$9,000 Gil Blank Cold War-themed photographs and an exquisite Daniel Heidkamp portrait titled *Bowl*—LaMontagne



As owner and curator of his unique gallery, Russell LaMontagne is shaking up the Boston art scene.

BY KATHERINE BOWERS

doesn't need foot traffic to succeed.

The gallery has built its clientele through word of mouth among the city's art cognoscenti and art consultants in New York, and that kind of promotion suits gallery owner Russell LaMontagne. "I'm looking for collectors, not shoppers," says LaMontagne, 39. "If I have three people in a month—and they're good people, who are really interested in what we're doing—that's what I'm aiming for."

Beth Marcus, a collector and customer who lives in Wellesley, says that visitors to the gallery will find its owner engaging and quick to offer his insights. "Russell is very generous with his time," says Marcus. "He will walk you through the gallery, speaking about an artist's work and thought process."

An Andover native, LaMontagne returned to Boston in 2006 after selling his interest in LFL (now the Zach Feuer Gallery), an influential Manhattan gallery that he cofounded in 2000. "One of the reasons I came back to Boston is that I love it and I wanted to bring the same sort of energy here that I'd experienced in New York," LaMontagne says. "I've created a program that represents Boston but is also bringing new things to the city."

LaMontagne's program has included a photography show titled "People Take Pictures of Each Other" in September 2007. Interior designer Manuel de Santaren purchased a Ryan McGinley photograph at the show. "Because of his years in New York and being part of that art scene, he brings a fresh eye to town," says de Santaren. "What he brings in is not so safe, it's refreshing. He searches out interesting, truly emerging young talent."

Among that talent is Yale art student Jacques Louis Vidal, whose work LaMontagne showcased in September in a solo show. Vidal downloads images from the Internet and then takes an X-Acto knife to them, layering the slices into a textured, distorted final image. His pieces include a portrait of Dolly Parton that he fashioned from snapshots of fireworks.

In the study of LaMontagne's Winchester home hangs *The Field*, a painting by School of the Museum of Fine Arts alumna Holly Coulis. She's one of several artists whose work LaMontagne promoted in New York and continues to show at his Boston gallery. He reserves a third of the gallery's programming slots for local artists, including sculptor Tory Fair, a Harvard graduate who works with rubber. In January LaMontagne Gallery will feature the work of Bostonian Andrew Witken, who arranges writings, photographs, and other objects in ways that present the personal histories of his subjects.

"Russell really grapples with the concept of how to foster a commitment to new art in Boston," says Institute of Contemporary Art curator Jen Mergel. LaMontagne's return to his hometown, she says, has "added a new dimension—critical, geographic and social—to the Boston art scene." *LaMontagne Gallery, 555 East 2nd Street, 617-464-4640; lamontagnegallery.com.*

photograph by Tracy Powell