



# Great Expectations

*Brits add flair to local contemporary arts culture*

By Laurel Ornish

There's New York. There's London. There's Paris. There's Basel. Will "Dallas" ever be added to that exclusive list? It could happen.

If Dallas ever becomes a world-class art scene—not only for collectors, but for artists—it will be thanks in part to the pushing-the-envelope attitude of a major Dallas collector, who lives in Britain most of the time, and a captivating British expatriate artist living in Dallas.

Dallasite Kenny Goss had the vision in 2007 to establish Goss Gallery, which morphed into the Goss-Michael Foundation to house and display the more than five hundred pieces of contemporary British art he and his partner, British pop superstar George Michael, have collected over the past decade. Mr. Goss, who grew up in Euless and whose family “didn’t have pictures on the wall, much less art,” as he recalls, began collecting during his travels. He went to museums and became fascinated, and the bug grew from there to become a passion.

He originally selected the art himself and now works with an advisor who “helps me define the mission a little bit” and “does a bit of the education, so you don’t waste a lot of time.” Today the collection is valued at hundreds of millions of dollars and was built on the foundation laid by other notable Dallas art collectors, with the idea of further solidifying Dallas’s prominence in the world of modern art, as well as inspiring and promoting young artists.

“I lived all over the world,” Mr. Goss explains of his desire to house the collection in Dallas, “but I wanted to come home again. I have a house here. My family’s here. I have loads of friends here. A lot of Texans come back home to live. We have the friendliest people in the whole world. My friends from London come here and say, ‘These people can’t be that nice! And they are!’”

The GMF, as it’s known, is not a selling space but rather one to show the collection and pieces that were loaned to museums. It’s also a nonprofit that distributes \$5,000 scholarships to students going to college to study art, including two graduating from Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas.

“Our vision for the future,” Mr. Goss says, “is to actually build a space, hopefully in the area.” That will likely happen within the next five years and would’ve occurred already had the economy not taken a nosedive. In fact, Mr. Goss had picked out property but decided to wait.

In the meantime, you can catch a solo exhibition there by artist Richard Patterson, one of the original “Young British Artists” (YBAs), who met his future wife, Road Agent gallery owner Christina Rees, in 2000 while in town for a Dallas Museum of Art showing of his works. Mr. Patterson is now based here and has a studio in the Fair Park area of Dallas.



Amy Phelan, Richard Patterson and Kenny Goss at the Goss-Michael Foundation. Ms. Phelan was the model for Mr. Patterson’s *Exile on Jackson Street*, 2003, featured on page 15.

## British Style

The YBAs dominated British art in the 1990s and attracted enormous media attention for their shock tactics in subject matter and lifestyle. Most prominent are Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin, both of whose works are heavily represented in the Goss-Michael Collection, including Mr. Hirst’s *Saint Sebastian*, *Exquisite Pain*, a black calf preserved in formaldehyde struck by arrows, and Ms. Emin’s *Drunk to the Bottom of My Soul* and *When I Think About Sex*. Mr. Patterson’s larger-than-life sculptures, paintings, and montages mix reality and illusion to staggering effect. Using the commonplace artistic fodder of celebrity and the media as a starting point, he throws ideas of beauty, space, and time into abstraction.

But while Mr. Patterson’s Pop Art is more PG- than X-rated, both Mr. Goss and Mr. Patterson believe that if Dallas is to become a world-class art scene exhibiting and fostering cutting-edge art, it must loosen up. “One thing you have to do, in Texas especially, is you have to get people in the door, so you can’t offend them,” says Mr. Goss. “But I have a philosophy that if you’re offended by what you see when you come in, then don’t come in! Maybe it’s because I don’t live here all the time. I have no problem having nudity, for example, or having something that goes against someone’s religious belief in art.

“A lot of people told me, ‘Oh, you can’t do that.’ But we haven’t had any complaints. We’ve had a lot of penises and

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Richard Patterson,  
*Posh, Thomson  
and Scary, 1997*

breasts in my art here. There's been no issue whatsoever. People go to New York and London and see it, but we necessarily don't want to see it in our own community. I think [the solution is] you just put up a notice: 'If you don't want to see this, if you're offended by sex or language, don't go in.'"

Mr. Patterson notes that Dallas has, paradoxically, both the highest-per-capita strip clubs and museums that have protests lodged against them by public-school teachers for exposing students to nudity. But in order for art to be "good" or "cutting-edge," must it offend?

"It's not that the artist is trying to be offensive," the artist asserts, "but you're trying to bust through, to shake people out of feeling that viewing art is a passive activity. People come into galleries and they look at it like it's entertainment. And it's *not* entertainment. They're meant to think about it and they're meant to be engaged. So if they're a bit offended by it, then maybe something is going on already. They're already wanting to say, 'That's not art.' And then you say, 'Well, why isn't it art?' And they say, 'Because you can't put that in an art gallery.' Then you want to ask them, 'Well, what is an art gallery's function then?'"

Another key ingredient Mr. Patterson believes that is needed to explode the local art scene to international success is an intoxicating artistic community—one that lives by its own rules. While being in Dallas affords him "sunshine, a big studio, and a cool house," he misses the camaraderie of a lively art scene.

"The thing about being in London in the '90s is there was this incredible energy. One of the misunderstandings about art and genius and celebrity and all these things is that an individual can create something on their own, uniquely in a vacuum. It never happens like that. It's to do with groups of people coming together and being influenced by each other and having a dialogue with each other and banging up against each other and competing with each other, hating each other, loving each other, having sex with each other. The London scene was very incestuous, in every respect of the word. And that's why there was a scene. It wasn't just because so-and-so was good with a paintbrush, or so-and-so could take good photographs, or whatever."

### Economics Play A Role

That's not to say a vibrant arts community could have staved off the effects of the economic bust being felt worldwide, especially in the arts.

"A lot of my friends," laments Mr. Goss, "are artists, and no one really wants to have a show right now. Artists at Richard's level and major galleries, they're not the ones who will disappear. It's up-and-coming or people at the beginning. It's going to be really tough. I go to art events in London, and people with a hell of a lot of money are scared to death right now."

Mr. Patterson agrees there's a big readjustment going on because of the perceived bubble in the art world. "It's just like the real estate bubble, the toxic assets thing, people are wondering whether stuff has gotten overpriced or not. Galleries are suffering. Output will contract a lot, and a lot of people will disappear for good."

But both curator and artist are optimistic about Dallas's future. "Look at the art scene in Dallas compared to what it was twenty years ago," Mr. Goss points out. "I do everything fast, but I think tiny steps is the way that it happens here. Small steps. And that's what they're trying to do. It's easy for me to say, 'I want a Jeff Koons retrospective,' but that would be very difficult. That's probably too big a step."

"I think it's a question of connecting the dots now. I think a lot of stuff is already in play," says Mr. Patterson. "I do think we need a better university-level art school, more daring and focused. . . . There's got to be a real urban, actual energy—not theme-park energy—where people are actually making stuff."

But North Texans are pushing for progress, affirms Mr. Goss. "The exciting thing about people who live here and support the community is they want the world to see Dallas as being world-class. That's the great thing. They're philanthropic, generous, they do everything to make Dallas a world-class place." ■