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Columbia's Sager Reeves Gallery adopts new name, furthers creative direction

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The names we use matter.

Bestowing a new identity often represents an about-face, a turn in direction and value for a person or institution. On other occasions, a new name allows us to call something what it's already been, lending language sufficient to describe reality.

This type of shift feels most accurate in the case of Sager Reeves Gallery. Last month, the Walnut Street venue, formerly known as Sager Braudis Gallery, announced a new name and chapter. Longtime gallery director Hannah Reeves assumed co-ownership, taking her place as an equal partner alongside founding owner Joel Sager.

The announcement also gave voice and definition to a strong existing partnership between Sager and Reeves. Their working dynamic and complementary vision has sustained the gallery as a unique landmark on the Columbia arts landscape.

"We have ... a very left-hand, right-hand thing going on — we're very intuitive with one another," Sager said, describing his relationship with Reeves.

The gallery thrives on creating unity between artists and time periods. Monthly exhibits feature work from local, regional and national creators while rotating displays underline the importance of mid-century artists, especially those overlooked by art history as it has been written so far, Sager said.

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Reeves owned a 15% share in the gallery before last month's announcement, she said. Before taking on a different level of responsibility — and moving her name out front — she

sought assurance that her functional partnership with Sager would largely remain unchanged.

In her role as director, Reeves appreciates the chance to engage the public and commit to a substantial level of writing and research on featured artists. She didn't want to relinquish tasks she relished.

"It's what we decide it is," she said of her role, summing conversations with Sager.

The pair's relationship, as they describe it, rests on great similarities and subtle, significant ways of influencing each other. Both Sager and Reeves are working artists. He paints melancholy Midwestern scenes and slightly askew portraits — with occasional turns into abstraction — often characterized by their use of light, dark and resultant gray; she invests considerable attention into fiber-forward work that considers the effects of time, touch and memory.

In shared creative activity, curating and arranging exhibits along with designer Jonny Pez, Sager and Reeves constantly look for new ways of ordering daily chaos to present viewers with a seamless experience.

"We're artists and we get to be around spectacular art — and that's huge," Reeves said. "... Then the little thing, that's behind the scenes, is we're nerds. We're both really organized people who are seeking efficiency. That's why it feels like a tight ship."

The pair also has developed a common voice, presenting long-form written commentary on featured artists via social media and other public-facing avenues. The ability to carry on and refine these conversations in a shared document reflects the nature of their bond, they said.

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Sager values the freedom to float concepts by Reeves without fear of sounding or being judged as foolish; to edit and be edited by another person is a special act of faith, Reeves added.

To share the most personal work of your life — art-making and writing — with others requires "building the kind of trust that allows for that to feel OK," Reeves said. Achieving that level of vulnerability is rare, she added.

When Sager acquired the space — originally known as PS: Gallery — from previous owners

Jennifer Perlow and Chris Stevens, he identified fully as an art-maker. He preferred creating in solitude and owned a certain level of skepticism, he said, but believed it was crucial to further the gallery's work.

Now he sees himself as fully artist, fully gallerist. Both he and Reeves affirmed that their position as working artists stokes a passion for speaking with and on behalf of other creators.

"There is a real pinch-myself element. I get to do what I absolutely love every single day," Sager said.

And identifying and collaborating with friends such as Reeves and Pez has brought no small change.

"It gives me a sense of belief in humanity," he said.

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Together they hope to present a balanced composition — the quality of their presentation and personalized connections in harmony.

"Every business is relationships," Sager said. "There's a lot of snobbery in the art world. In spite of that, we've come to the burgeoning of every relationship with that Midwest friendliness — but also showing that we know where our expertise lies, and what we can bring to the conversation."

Sager Reeves will finish out its 2021 schedule with a November exhibit, then its annual Masters Exhibit in December. 2022 is booked both for exhibits and sponsorships, Sager said; and the gallery is in the first stages of a new charge, representing the estates of artists and art collectors, he added.

Learn more about the gallery and its upcoming exhibits at <https://sagerreevesgallery.com/>.

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