



ARTIST AT WORK Carrie Secrist charts the next 20 years.

## Work of Art

Lake Forest High alum Carrie Secrist marks 20 years at her West Loop gallery.

| By Selena Fragassi | Photography by Saverio Truglia |

"I think this career found me," Carrie Secrist says as she begins the story of her lustrous 20-year journey as an independent art gallery owner. We sit at a rustic round table in the makeshift office of her West Loop shop. Behind us is a fierce, jewel-encrusted panther, and just around the corner sits Secrist's relatively new gallery director, Stevie Greco, a young brunette who busies herself with emails and phone calls to keep business moving on a quiet Saturday. It soon becomes clear how much the two symbolize the evolution of Secrist's career.

The former Lake Forest resident, who initially wanted to be a dancer ("I was the only freshman to make the pom squad at Lake Forest High School. There's a picture of me leaping on an old cover of the *Forester*, our yearbook."), instead found herself double majoring in business and art at Miami University of Ohio. After relocating to New York and working in the education department of the Whitney Museum of American Art, she returned to Chicago and advanced through the ranks at the Museum of Contemporary Art. "I couldn't live the New York dream on an intern's salary," she says, laughing. By 23, she had purchased her own eponymous gallery, which has remained strong, even after being tested by failing economies and the ever-changing seller's landscape on the Internet.

There was a time in 2009 when she considered shutting the whole operation down. "If the art world wasn't going to continue the way it had, I just didn't want to do it anymore," she says, referencing the overzealous art fair circuit that she likens to Vegas and the infiltration of Internet dealing, which impacted her regular traffic. "You can't see art from a computer screen nor can you have a communication about it online," Secrist insists. "I was disillusioned by it since the reason I was interested in art in the first place was the dialogue."

By hiring Greco, who comes from the noted Donald Young Gallery, Secrist is able to continue the conversation and build on her original vision, which includes multilateral offerings like opening a film screening room and introducing new talents like Andrew Holmquist and Derek Chan. Together, Secrist and Greco have developed not only a partnership but also a set of criteria that predicate the gallery's curation and will undoubtedly lead its future: "We personally have to love the piece, and we have to be able to sell its purpose," says Secrist. "I want only art that people simply must see."