

Standing by his man and his art

Kenny Goss talks about his foundation's new direction, celebrity and 'Dallas'



ALAN PEPPARD

apeppard@dallasnews.com

Contractors are scurrying to finish the 12,000-square-foot Goss-Michael Foundation art gallery in the Design District for its invitation-only opening party Thursday, while art preparators are uncrating massive works such as Damien Hirst's 10-foot sculpture *Saint Sebastian*.

The cacophony is an ashram of tran-

quility to locally raised collector Kenny Goss, who spent the fall in a maelstrom of one of Britain's biggest tabloid stories. On Sept. 14, Goss was photographed wiping away tears outside Highbury Corner Magistrates Court after his partner of 14 years, singer George Michael, was sen-

tenced to eight weeks in jail for smashing his Range Rover into a defenseless Snappy Snaps photo shop in North London while under the influence of cannabis — not his first mishap with drugs, cars or the law.

Michael served 27 days, and Goss stood by his man. Then the Texan got on a plane to Dallas, where the two keep the bulk of their enormous collection of contemporary British art, reported in the media to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars, and where they have a home in Highland Park.

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DAVID WOO/Staff Photographer

"I don't think only rich people should get to see art," says Kenny Goss. In the background is a work by Angus Fairhurst.

Goss-Michael adamant about nonprofit emphasis

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The new gallery is a larger version of the venue Goss opened near the Crescent five years ago. Then, it was a for-profit art gallery and Michael jetted in to attend the red-carpet grand opening. In 2007, they refocused their mission as a nonprofit art foundation to promote YBA (Young British Artists), give scholarships to art and music students and exhibit their

growing private collection.

Now over 50, Goss still looks like the fit University of North Texas cheerleader who became wealthy as an executive with Lawrence "Herkie" Herkimer's Cheerleader Supply Co. Finding a quiet spot in the former warehouse, he sat for some questions Tuesday.

In 2005, you launched this venture as a retail art gallery, then switched midstream to a private foundation promoting Young British Artists. What's up with that?

First, it's what I was collecting. This amazing movement, the YBA group, was

not even acknowledged here. There was not a single Damien Hirst in Dallas, and he is the most successful living artist in the world, if you judge it monetarily. [*The Sunday Times* Rich List puts Hirst's net worth at \$345 million.]

Isn't that how most people judge things?

That's how many people judge things.

If you and George are privately funding the whole operation, then you really put the non- in nonprofit. Don't those bills add up?

Yes, the bills add up, but it's not something we think about. George is the most generous man on the planet. I'm the materialistic one. But I don't think only rich people should

get to see art. This way, kids can come and see this YBA art without having to be rich and go to New York or London.

What does this new building give you that the old venue did not?

A lot more space to show our collection and put up some of these major pieces. We have one of the most important Damien Hirsts, the *Saint Sebastian* [2007 purchase price: \$5.6 million]. We have about 500 artworks, 80 percent of which are museum pieces that are too large for our homes.

But do you own everything you exhibit at the gallery?

We own about 50 to 60 percent. Then, whatever artist we're showing fills out the rest.

Dallas seems like a counterintuitive locale to promote YBA. How have some of the artists you've exhibited reacted to the local scene?

The very first show we did was Tracey Emin, who is a very good friend of mine. She was amazingly well received and went back to England and told people, "You've got to do this in Dallas."

In Britain, they all remember the TV show *Dallas*. So when the artists come, every single one of them wants boots and hats, they want to go to Southfork, and they want to see a rodeo. After that, they want to go to the museums.

Describe George Michael's input regarding the foundation.

He has opinions, but he does the music. For the art, he trusts me. What he gives is 100 percent support and encouragement. I was working for Herkie Herkimer's company, and then we were bought out. George said, "Kenny, why don't you do something you've always

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dreamed of doing?" He gave financial support, but his real input was encouragement. He has never questioned for a second what I was doing, and I'm a working-class kid from Texas who had never been in a museum until I was 19.

How often is George in Dallas and how often are you in London?

I spend a lot more time in London. I spend a third of the year here. He's here probably a month out of the year.

Everyone can agree that George's car keys need to be melted into a paperweight. But he has shown dignity in

an undignified situation by declining to do the celebrity talk show perp walk. In many ways, you are the more public of the two. How do you handle the downside of having a famous partner?

It's not about me. I'm not famous. The constant paparazzi attention is not about me. One thing I like about Dallas is that there is no paparazzi. Do I wish he hadn't gotten in the car? Absolutely. I think that phone call to me, when he called and said it happened again, wasn't easy. But when you love someone, you support them through the good and the bad.

But when he got out of jail, you were the one forced to answer questions about whether he'd gone to rehab.

Oh, that was just someone who'd shouted a question outside the house [in London]. It was surprising how quickly a month went by. I'm sure it didn't go that quickly for him. When someone you love gets themselves in a situation like that, you have an understanding of why it happened. George is my family.

Look, George is the most sweet, kind man I know. He would give his last penny to someone who needed it and not expect any public acknowledgment.

Are there plans for the foundation to outlast the lives of its founders?

Well, I'll be 53 soon. I hope I'll be around a little bit longer, but absolutely. Most of our trusts are set up to be permanently endowed.

Plan your life

The Goss-Michael Foundation art gallery opens Friday at 1405 Turtle Creek Blvd., Dallas. Hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays and Mondays by appointment. Free. 214-696-0555. www.gossmichaelfoundation.org.