

Factory Obscura shifts crowds into nearby record shop

By: Molly M. Fleming The Journal Record February 2, 2018 0



A crowd waits outside Current Studio, 1218 N. Pennsylvania Ave. in Oklahoma City, to see the art exhibit Shift. (Photo by Brent Fuchs)

OKLAHOMA CITY – John Dunning gets several calls each day to his store, Trolley Stop Record Shop. The business is on N. Pennsylvania Avenue, in a shopping center between NW 11th and NW 12th streets.

Dunning said he expects callers to ask if he has the record of a certain musician, if he buys records, if he sells record players, and if he knows someone who can fix a record player.

Since November, there's been a

new question in the repertoire, he said.

"People call us to check on the line," he said.

It's not the line to his store. It's the line to his neighbor, the art exhibit Shift, put on by Factory Obscura, a B Corporation.

Shift is an immersive art experience at Current Studio, 1218 N. Pennsylvania Ave. It's modeled after Santa Fe, New Mexico's Meow Wolf. The exhibit encompasses visitors with lights, colors, and 3-D artwork.

The line to get into Shift has reached up to an hour-and-a-half wait.

By Friday, the visitor total had topped 12,000 people.

As people wait, they get curious and wander into Dunning's store. Dunning has been there since April. The store was previously in a center at NW 18th Street and N. Classen Boulevard.

The art exhibit is open Thursday to Sunday, from noon to 6 p.m. But the influx of people to the center has been unintentional publicity for Dunning's store.

"A lot of people didn't know we were here," he said. "Other people didn't even know we existed at all. There's been a lot of public education about it."

He said the people who have made their way into the store have made some purchases. He's also let them use his bathroom.

While Shift has brought new people to his store, he's happily returned the favor and sent his customers to the art exhibit. He said his customers have come back and thanked him for the recommendation.

"(Shift) and I are like peanut butter and jelly," he said.

He said in his record store, he sees how music can be a bridge between generations, with grandparents teaching their grandchildren about certain artists. He said Shift is the same way. He's seen multiple generations in line waiting to see the exhibit.

"It just shows how compatible we are together," he said. "I'm just sad they're not going to be there anymore."

Current Studio and Shift end on Feb. 25.

But Factory Obscura is already planning its second exhibit, which will be even bigger, said Kelsey Karper, one of Factory Obscura's founders.

Shift was done for about \$70,000, which came from private donations. Admission is free. The artists were paid for their work.

Now, Factory Obscura will have a visitor track record to use to help find a location for its next exhibit. It will have a \$16 million budget, though that price includes real estate and construction.

Investor letters will be circulated in mid-March, Karper said. The initial goal is \$2 million.

"The owners and developers of the properties we've been looking at have all expressed a lot of enthusiasm in having us involved," she said. "They see the potential for Factory Obscura to be the anchor of a new neighborhood development or the key attraction to a certain part of town."

She said investors who have followed Shift's progress have been thrilled with the turnout. People have traveled to Oklahoma City solely to see the exhibit, and are coming from Arkansas, Kansas, and Texas.

Factory Obscura's inspiration, Meow Wolf, has given its investors a return for their money. Since it opened in 2016, more than 400,000 people have been to see it and it has generated \$7 million in revenue, according to figures reported by Meow Wolf Inc.

Karper said she's had a twofold response to the visitor total.

"I'm both overwhelmed by it, but not entirely surprised by it," she said. "This is what we hoped for, that people would respond in such a great way and embrace this idea."

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