



PHOTOS TONY FOUHSE

Tony Fohuse's ByWard Market crack addict series of photos includes Jonathan, above, Jessica and Melissa, below, and James and Alesha, bottom.

Beauty in the pain

Powerful images of crack addicts leave lasting impression

BY CONNIE HIGGINSON-MURRAY

Ottawa photographer Tony Fohse went looking for people last August, people who weren't too busy to spend time with him so that he could shoot his Polaroids. It was that simple. Where he ended up was downtown on the corner of Cumberland and Murray streets near The Mission and the ByWard Market. Fohse knew the people hanging around there wouldn't be in a hurry, and, for \$10 each, the crack addicts on the corner were willing subjects.

After three months work and over 60 set-ups and shots, Fohse has produced a tightly edited exhibition of 14 photographs that opened at La Petite Mort Gallery yesterday. Titled *Tony Fohse: User*, the tiny collection packs a powerful punch. The photos, shot always at dusk, are imbued with the deep blues that come just after sunset when the light is failing. Although each one has its own dynamic — some are obviously posed while others seem like a chance encounter with a profoundly human moment — they share a netherworld feel and exemplify the hard-edged world of drugs.

"I want people to feel sad when they see these pictures," says Fohse, "I want them to feel empathy. But, perhaps more nebulous, I also want people to see that the subjects in the pictures are human and that we all share a commonality with the people on that street corner."

Fohse says his approach is always the same, whether he's taking a picture of someone in small-town Mississippi, an executive in Los Angeles, or a crack addict on a street corner in Ottawa. "I set up situations. I pay attention to what people do naturally, then I morph it a little and take a picture."

Gestures play an important part in Fohse's poses. Religious iconography is an intentional theme that runs through the collection. Take the photograph entitled *Jonathan* that opens the exhibition. The gentle-faced man gazing upwards bears an obvious resemblance to the famous painting of St. Sebastian pierced with arrows. "The one, too, of James and Alesha captures the sense of a religious painting," says Fohse, although he firmly underlines that he didn't want to make his subjects into saints or martyrs.

"These are people who are usually vilified and I am showing them from a different vantage," he says. "They aren't just something that lowers property values, they are interesting and real."

Ironically, given it's subject matter, *Tony Fohse: User* is a collection that sings with beauty.

Tony Fohse: User runs until Dec. 2 at La Petite Mort Gallery, 306 Cumberland St. For information, call 860-1555.

