

# NEW HAVEN REGISTER

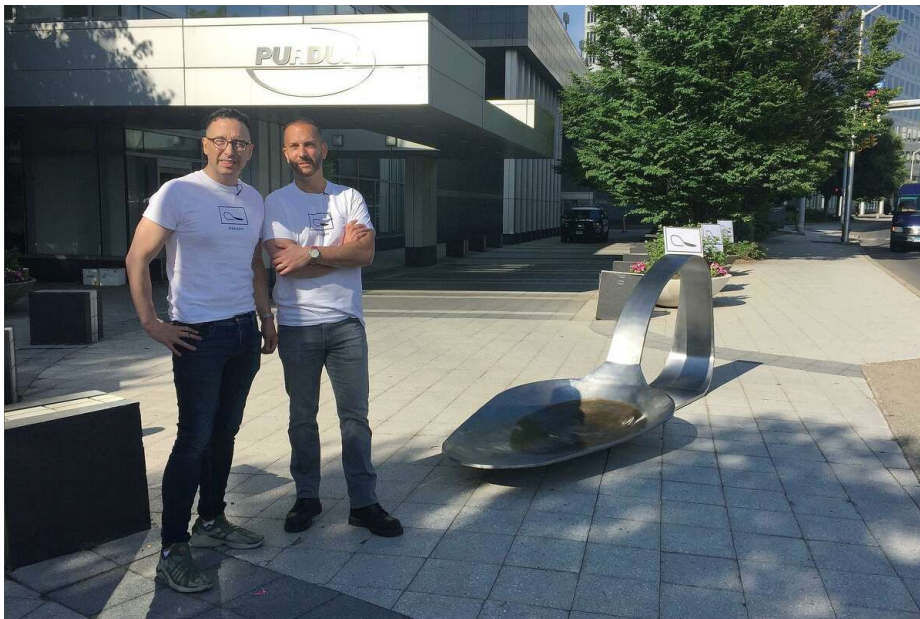
NEWS

## Stamford art gallery known for heroin spoon protest to close

Ignacio Laguarda

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Art gallery owner Luis Alvarez, left, and sculptor Domenic Esposito stand with an 800-pound sculpture of a bent, burnt heroin spoon placed in front of the Purdue Pharma headquarters in June. Alvarez plans to close his downtown Stamford gallery in January.

Susan Dunne / Associated Press

STAMFORD — The art gallery infamous for its heroin spoon sculpture protest this summer at Purdue Pharma is closing its downtown location.

Fernando Luis Alvarez Gallery, which opened nine years ago on Bedford Street, will shutter its doors in January, but the owner said his business will live on.

Alvarez has not announced details about the gallery's plans but said it would involve a "multifunctional innovative platform." The next step, he said, will be "different and bigger" than the Stamford gallery.

Louisa Greene, director of development and marketing for the Avon Theatre, called Alvarez a "wonderful patron of the arts."

"For me, Fernando Luis Alvarez is not only an artist himself, a very talented artist, but an art patron of up-and-coming artists, and he has a wonderful eye," she said. "We've been blessed to have him for as long as we've had him."

The downtown art center made international headlines in June when Alvarez and artist Domenic Esposito placed an 800-pound silver heroin spoon sculpture in front of Purdue Pharma's Stamford offices to protest the manufacturing of OxyContin.

Opioids — including prescription painkillers such as OxyContin, heroin and fentanyl — killed more than 42,000 people in 2016, more than any year on record, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Many cities and states, including Connecticut, have sued Purdue over alleged deceptive marketing of its drugs, which many believe directly fueled the nationwide opioid epidemic.

Alvarez was arrested for the stunt and was allowed to participate in an accelerated rehabilitation program. He will be cleared of all charges if he stays away from Purdue for one year.

Esposito's sculpture, which was seized by police, was returned to the gallery and has been on display in recent months.

The gallery has also gained less controversial fame from its sponsored exhibition at the Louvre Museum in Paris, and played an integral role in saving the Yerwood Center on Stamford's West Side. The gallery also recently acquired a discarded 12,000-pound sculpture by Charles O. Perry that once stood at the Stamford Town Center mall. The sculpture was transported to Wilton, where Alvarez plans to restore it.

Nathan Lewis, one of the artists sponsored by the gallery, said he was attracted to Alvarez because of his passion for the arts.

"One of the reasons I signed on with the gallery was because of how much of a dreamer he was in terms of the art world," he said. "What I like about Fernando is he does believe in his artists and if they have an idea and he thinks it's strong, he'll let you do what you want."

Lewis called it an "honor" to have "Visions," an exhibition of his work, on display as the last show for the downtown art exhibitor.

Shelby Head, who recently was featured at the gallery in her solo exhibit, "An Infrastructure of Silence," said the closing is a "loss to the community."

According to a press release from the gallery, the decision to close was part of the original plan when it opened.

"Since I opened the gallery in 2008, I knew that it would be a decade thing before I had to reinvent myself," Alvarez said.

The gallery's final day on Bedford Street will be celebrated Jan. 26 from 6 to 9 p.m. with an awards ceremony for the "Alvarez Gallery Agents of Change in the Arts and Community Awards."

"I'm not leaving," Alvarez said. "We're just re-shifting our model. I love Stamford. We were made in Stamford."