

Galleries feature distinct styles, from quirky to sublime

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Special to The Advertiser

Honolulu Star Advertiser, 24 March 2002

<<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2002/Mar/24/il/i112a.html>>

Two very different galleries, worlds apart yet fairly close in distance, have opened right next door to reasonably priced restaurants; they might be just what is needed for a break in your routine.

Workspace

A tangerine orange sign on Wai'ala'e Avenue in Kaimuki reads "workspace." It hangs next door to Saigon Vietnamese restaurant. Up a clean flight of rubberized stairs a tangerine door allowed entry to a front room filled with an unusual collection of small-scale soft sculptures, T-shirts, trinkets, books and funky souvenirs.

In the next room, the 250-square-foot gallery space is exhibiting its grand-opening show, "i love workspace." This quirky world of light boxes, soft sculptures, photographs and "naughty" drawings bursts at the seams with the unexpected. The five members of workspace "are committed to their artistic practice and the shameless self-promotion that such an endeavor demands," their press release says.

Five belong to the humorous hui that owns and operates the gallery: Ryan Higa, Kris Higa, Duncan Dempster, Ari Eichelberger and Cade Roster. Young, curious and talented artists, Dempster and the Higas met while studying art at the University of Hawai'i. Ryan Higa and Dempster are on the board of directors of the Honolulu Printmakers (where Higa will be demonstrating Japanese-style woodblock printing with water-based pigment at 1 p.m. today at the Academy Arts Center). Dempster is a teacher at the University of Hawai'i.

Ryan Higa says he is inspired by the "sticky weirdness and uncomfortableness" in the "relationship dance." His blue-background drawings, "tangle tango" and "doo honey doo bop," reveal his cartoon-like characters in various stages of interacting. His pink-background series, "dangling participle," is the beginning of a larger narrative in progress and feature androgynous, zipped-up bodies, nude except for their boots. Soft sculpture is the chosen medium of both Ari Eichelberger and Kris Higa. Higa has a cushiony collection of amicable "world invaders," and Eichelberger's brightly colored friends include "leon, samone, mavis and edgar."

Duncan Dempster's light boxes illuminate figures in action scenes such as, "the fall" and "escapist." He applies a vinyl medium to the surface glass to intensify the color saturation. Be sure not to miss the one hung over the doorway.

Cade Roster photographs the wooden puppets that he builds and sets in lush settings in "simple syrup" and "slip up."

Nothing in the exhibit costs more than \$300. Besides being affordable, this is a gallery to watch for art on the edge.

The hui has plans to curate the work of other artists. In the meantime, Cade Roster will open a solo show 6-9 p.m. April 4 that will include an autograph session with special guest artists who are making spontaneous drawings. I asked Higa if this meant a psychic sort of personalized drawing thing, and he said, "No, nothing that metaphysical."

Their announcement reads, "We are friendly people." They are.