

at a glance

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The Columbus Dispatch

Eclectic new gallery applauds creations dubbed 'pop surrealism'

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BY **BILL MAYR**

For The Columbus Dispatch

This is the first in an occasional series of profiles featuring newer galleries in central Ohio.

Find a niche and develop it.

Laura Kuenzli is applying that business axiom to Rivet, the art gallery-toy store she opened during the summer in the Short North.

"I noticed there wasn't a place (in Columbus) already offering this," said Kuenzli, 33.

This, she said, is pop surrealism, which features touches of contemporary comic-book art, punk, anime, science fiction and street culture.

That translates, for example, into drawings or paintings of innocent-looking, waiflike girls who seem to be on their way to a punk-rock concert. Some of the toys are stuffed critters that look as if they escaped from an alternate universe; some are punk or science-fiction characters made from vinyl or polymer clay.

"I'm a collector of the art and toys," said Kuenzli, of the Harrison West neighborhood.

"I like this style a lot."

So, naturally, she thought others might enjoy it, too.

Pop surrealism, sometimes called lowbrow art (not meant pejoratively), has been around for a while, possibly tracing its roots to the pop art of the 1960s and '70s as part of the general invasion of popular culture into the fine-art world.

Most pop-surrealism galleries are in Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York.

Kuenzli suggests it's time for Columbus to join in.

"More people are going outside the normal bounds of toys and art," she said. "These toys have a lot of character. They make you feel like a child again, but it's a step up from the GI Joes and Barbies."

She explained her fascination with the art: "I like that it can play with your mind, that you can draw your own conclusions. I like a darker, more-curious style of art; this genre definitely has that."

She draws on a network of artists and toymakers throughout the country.

Jenny Harada, formerly of Columbus and now working in New Jersey, makes whimsical stuffed dolls.

In Phoenix, Jill Penney makes polymer-clay sculp-tural dolls and busts; her husband, Daniel Torrente, makes illustrations.



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Laura Kuenzli, owner of Rivet in the Short North



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About 75 artists are represented in the gallery. Toy prices range from \$4.50 to \$130; art fetches from \$50 to \$1,000.

Kuenzli's place is a couple of doors south of 5th Avenue in the less-frequented northern end of the Short North.

"It's harder . . . because people don't want to walk all this way."

She hopes to one day offer pieces by other national and international artists. Plus, she wants to try some do-it-yourself sessions.

As for the art and toys she now sells: "It's nice to see the realms where the artists can go with their imaginations."

Prize entries

Here are some imaginary awards that should be handed out at the "Graduate Student Group Exhibition" organized by Ohio State University's Art Department.

Best Use of Slip Nicole Gibbs, who painted two abstract images using ceramic slip (a liquid clay) and ink.

Best Use of Coal Slurry Will Tucker for *Honeysump*, which combines a bubble machine with wastewater from coal mining and cleaning. Tucker also wins Best Use of Coal Tar for his *Pure Energy*, which includes a large blob of solid coal tar. Big surprise: Tucker hails from eastern Kentucky.

Most Exuberant Use of Paint Talia Shabtay for *That Baton Was on Fire*, a large, flashy, splashy abstract painting with sparkles in it.

The exhibit, featuring the works of 19 first-year grad students, continues through next Thursday in the Hopkins Hall Gallery & Corridor, 128 N. Oval Mall. Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, until 7 p.m. Tuesday and 3 p.m. Thursday. Call 614-292-5072 or visit www.arts.ohio-state.edu.

billmayr@mac.com

Rivet 1200 N. HIGH ST. (614-294-8697, WWW.RIVETGALLERY.COM) Some might call it lowbrow art; it isn't. noon to 7 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 5 p.m. Sundays free

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