

## Suddenly, This Summer

Contributed by Jon Dufort

A few weeks ago, all you would have seen at 230 Harrison St. was another empty commercial space: an expanse of nicotine-beige walls behind a dusty plate glass window. Go there today and find a gallery where electronic music and moist snacks are part of the welcome wagon. A soft-spoken hostess will greet you, either Roslyn Esperon or Courtney Rile.

The two Syracuse University graduates met at the Delavan Gallery where Rile works as public relations coordinator; she is also director of communications at the Cultural Resources Council. With the Delavan closed for the summer, the two were able to join forces and open the Contemporary Gallery on June 11 in an attempt to "Test out everything we're really passionate about in one go," as Esperon put it.

They make it sound easy. After scouting out possible locations, Esperon put together a proposal which went something like this: "Would you like to donate space for an art gallery? We will spruce it up with a coat of paint and leave it better than we found it." The first call they made was to J.F. Real Estate, owners of the 230 Harrison St. property, and they agreed to the deal. The space turned out to be much larger than it appeared from the street, measuring 1,886 square feet, and opening into several rooms including a kitchen. The real estate company even foots the bill for the lights.

The biggest investment for the two young women is time. Although they mobilized a small cadre of friends as helpers, slapping up 20 gallons of paint still takes hours. They had a little fun with the color, though. One 20-foot-long wall is painted Pitter Patter, a light blue tint. The bathroom bathes in deep majestic eggplant. The curious can check out the "before" decor in the kitchen, the only untouched area. "We love it: It's a unique space," said Rile.

They've made an effort to make guests feel at home from the moment they walk through the door. Off to the right, a gray loveseat cozies up to a small bookcase full of art and design books, the seeds of an "inspiration library." Soon a space-age looking sculpture of a desk is scheduled to arrive. Leading off the main room is a warren of small offices that have become intimate viewing areas.

The nose knows: "Plate (nose-picking)" by Tijana Djordjevic on display for a short time at Contemporary Gallery. Djordjevic also created "Grass," below.

Each event in the ambitious schedule keeps them up into the wee hours cleaning, planning and preparing. Time got tight before the initial opening and pencil labels identifying the artworks were scribbled directly on the wall as the event unfolded. This "performance" dovetailed nicely into the overriding concept for the gallery and its first exhibition: Whimsy: Celebrating the Power of "Why Not?" According to [www.contemporarygallery.wordpress.com](http://www.contemporarygallery.wordpress.com), two dictionary definitions of "whimsy" clarify their intent: the quality of being quaint, odd or playfully humorous, especially in an endearing way; an idea that has no immediately obvious reason to exist. "We thought that applied to us completely," said Esperon.

Although the artists represented all have a local connection—most are either graduates of SU or exhibited at the Delavan—there is great variety. Playfully humorous pieces include a series of squared-off plates by Tijana

Djordjevic that depict a person engaging in unappetizing morning rituals; flossing teeth and popping zits are examples. Rows of Djordjevic's nearly identical green porcelain shapes sit on the floor of a small room at the far end of the gallery, contributing to an artificial woodlands environment: They become a field of grass before Lew Graham's forest of red trees painted on hollow tri-fold doors.

Jason Yoh strips billboards of their advertising messages in his prints and pairs the pictures with random quotes he collects from people he meets. The standout of Sean Ward's monochromatic paintings, "American Standard," presides over the loo. Tara Hogan collages cute birds, fish and other critters in fun abstract environments. Joshua Daniel Smachlo Kaplan uses nontraditional media including soy sauce. In "Satellite's Return," Kyle Mort presents a moon that's half gift-wrapped.

More than 20 artists are represented, including Rile's works, unique photographic Rorschach tests she dubs chemigrams. The only work not for sale is a long lizard with forks for a spine constructed by Esperon's teen sister Emma.

Perhaps the quirkiest aspect of the gallery is its active use of the kitchen. Esperon bakes every day for patrons of the gallery. She calls her operation Sinfully Sweet and so far all the offerings are free (and delicious). An online rating system lets tasters indicate the sinfulness of their experience somewhere between purgatory and the ninth gate of hell.

The gallery will close forever July 27, but that was the plan from the get-go, as indicated in the name of the venture. It brings to mind Brigadoon, the play about an enchanted town in Scotland that appears for only for one day every hundred years. Like Brigadoon, it's a magical place that will be gone without a trace in the blink of an eye; visit and you might not want to leave.

Gallery hours are Wednesdays through Fridays, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. A viewing of the independent film Skritek takes place Wednesday, June 25, 7 p.m. The official Th3 after-party will be held there Thursday, June 26, 8 to 10 p.m. Visit the Web site for a full calendar of events or more information. Alas, the fleeting nature of the venture means there is no telephone.

—Jon Dufort

Untitled pen and ink drawing by Brian Butler.