

"I'm afraid that if you look at a thing long enough, it loses all of its meaning" — Andy Warhol

# Artful thinking outside the box

By D.K. ROW  
THE OREGONIAN

For 21 years, the Unkeles family, owners of a box-recycling company called Carton Service, has rented studio space to artists in 10 Portland-area buildings.

Their refreshingly casual way of leasing space with only a handshake has worked well for the Unkeleses and current family leader Ken. They've rented to more than 400 artists in those 21 years, many of them for more than a decade and several for 18 years.

Now, roughly 160 of the artists are participating in a massive show that honors that: "Twenty-One Years of Studios: Friends of Carton Service" at the Unkeles-owned Cathedral Park Place. Like many huge group shows, the paintings, photographs, sculptures, installation and video works make a sprawling, exhilarating art experience that's also very arbitrary.

What rises above the show's vast unevenness is a celebratory spirit, a bond between artist and landlord in the name of art. From the show's DIY aesthetic with its occasionally makeshift exhibit walls to the artwork, "Twenty-One Years" is about creating something worthwhile: This is the ultimate community art show.

The exhibit's curatorial spirit is a charmingly loose arrangement. Unkeles simply asked each participating artist to submit one work. The result is a cluttered mix, ranging from the great to the mediocre to the plain bad. It's a melange of old and new names, featuring familiar players such as sculptors/conceptual artists Dana Louis and Jerry Mayer, photographer Cherie Hiser and painter Max Grover, as well as a slew of more recent arrivals to the local scene such as conceptual artists Cris Moss and Emily Ginsburg, painter Alex Hirsch and photographer Tamara Lischka.

Sometimes the mix creates jarring — though highly interesting — juxtapositions. It's not often you'll see an exquisite portrait by Stephen Hayes in the same show



FREDRICK D. JOE/THE OREGONIAN

More than 160 artworks by as many artists spanning 21 years are on view in the community celebration "Twenty-One Years of Studios: Friends of Carton Service" at Cathedral Park Place.

as an installation featuring the first typewriter used by conceptual roustabouts Swallow Press (x2). Or a soothingly crafted linen quilt by Lori Mason showing so close to an ingeniously crazy mixed-metal-and-rubber sculpture by Gini Chin and Tim Miller; in this fabulous concoction, viewers step on foot pumps, which push air into sausage casings that hang like locks of hair, making the curls puff and move.

Still, the three people who've hung the show — artist Louis, Haze Gallery (a Cathedral Park Place tenant) director Jack Shimko and independent arts manager Wendy Miller — have done a fine job of trying to create a few distinctions. They've generally separated paintings and works on paper from photographs, sculptures and other works, even creating distinctions within each genre, in particular with paintings and works on paper. One wall is dedicated to figurative and representational art, another to abstrac-

## review

*Twenty-One Years of Studios: Friends of Carton Service*

**Where:** Cathedral Park Place, 6635 N. Baltimore St.

**Admission:** Free

**Closes:** July 25

tion.

On another that could be called the Rorschach wall, Ginsburg's series of screen prints features dark-colored blots and figures on a white background that look like shadowy cutouts. Paces away is former Portlander Head Clausnitzer's mixed-media work, a collection of messily arranged colored circles that resembles a spirited version of Damien Hirst's famous dot paintings.

While most of the show's pieces are paintings, there's a heavy helping of photography, much of it good, from Hiser's portrait of a drag queen to Lischka's

chilly, fetishistic close-up of a baby duck in its eggshell to Steve Steckly's hallucinatory look at some railroad tracks.

Perhaps the most-developed and well-considered section is in Shimko's Haze Gallery in Cathedral Park Place, where artists Meg Rowe, Ellen George, Jacqueline Ehlis, David Airhart, Joe Thurston and Cris Moss have presented a series of separate works, including environmental installations using soil, abstract paintings and huge portraits brimming with outrageous color and huge proportions. These different artists share an affinity for polished craft, intellectual curiosity and the understanding that good art is composed of both, not just one, of the two former characteristics.

Some artists have used the moment to display recent formidable developments in their work. In a room dedicated to Lyle Williams, the Carton Service handyman known to all of the artists and who

Please turn to Page 27

*Continued from Page 25*

died this year at 82, is one of the show's exceptional offerings, a mixed-media work by Cynthia Lahti called "If Tears Could Build a Stairway." Referencing figures from Auguste Rodin sculptures, animals, design motifs and sleeping children, and showing off more unabashed color than the artist has used in her entire career, Lahti has constructed a highly personal dream universe, not simply a narrative in the form of a winding frieze on a wall.

Perhaps the one work that best sums up the show's community-based engagement is a collection of photographs by Julie Keefe called "Work in Progress (17 Years at the Warehouse)." The collage is a distillation of 17 years of life at the North Coast Seed Building, where Keefe rents studio space. Smiling couples, newborn babies, guys playing basketball and other festive scenes have been arranged like a cluster on a refrigerator door.

Like the exhibit as a whole, it's about the ebb and flow of life, one we hope to see many more years of at Unkeles' artists warehouses.