



ART SEEN Gallery director Kirby Scudder is suddenly finding himself riding the wave of Pacific Avenue's new art scene.

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Art & Artists - 2003 Well Hung

Pacific Avenue's new art gallery creates a buzz | by Christa Martin

Two weeks ago on a very normal Friday night, something very un-normal was happening on Pacific Avenue. An art gallery opened. In the former Eclectix store, people huddled together, sipped drinks and waxed artistic. Some were dolled up, others in Levi blues. Everyone was abuzz with excitement. And for good reason.

The event was something to get excited about, especially if you belong to the bountiful artistic crowd that breathes and works in this county. Until now, most creative types have showcased their fare in coffee shops, hair salons and one of the few other galleries in town including the Felix Kulpa Gallery, Prey for Art, Full Support Productions, MichaelAngelo Studios or Atelier, which recently shut its doors. But this new, unnamed gallery—it was dubbed Vapor for a few days—at 1319 Pacific Ave., has a different motive. It plans to exclusively show and sell only the work of local artists in a

4,000-square-foot, three-story building, smack in the middle of the town's hottest shopping district. And it has a mental quartet behind it that are convinced that the gallery will be a success.

At the helm of PR for the gallery with no name is the single-monikered Chip, a local, familiar, friendly face who has the chutzpah and networking capabilities to launch such a grandiose project. His cohorts include artist Kirby Scudder, a wise-cracking, knowledgeable virtuoso of selling art; Anita Elliott, a passionate art-loving attorney; and Marcelo Siero, a serious-on-the-outside type of guy whose new Web site, artists.com, will serve as the backbone for the gallery.

It's a bold move to open an art gallery here. But the foursome thinks this is the perfect time and the perfect location. They pooh-pooh all the moaning about how people don't buy art here, how our community is too small to support a gallery and all the other negative chatter.

"We're a one-street town," says Chip. "If you're going to have one gallery in town it needs to be on Pacific Avenue. ... When you step back and look at the demographics of Santa Cruz, there's no reason why a gallery can't work here. We have the quality of artists, the demographic of art buyers and the community support."

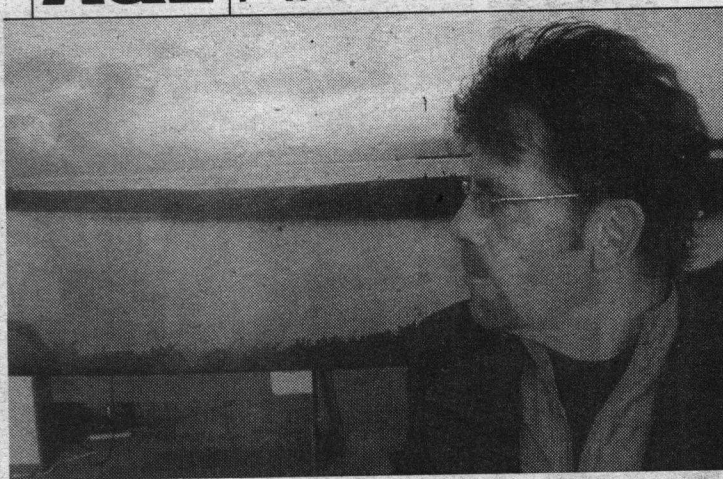
Myth No. 1: People go to Carmel to buy art. Chip's rebuttal: "Open Studios sold more than \$1 million of art in its weekends with 300 artists. If you have a forum for people to buy art they will buy art."

Myth No. 2: Santa Cruz is too small to accommodate another art gallery. Scudder's rebuttal: "A town in Idaho has 3,000 people in it and 20 galleries. ... There's no correlation between population and success of galleries."

In fact, this no-named gallery has only been open for about three weeks and has sold about 10 pieces so far, which Scudder says is pretty good, considering that they have kept things relatively

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quiet on the PR front. Still, even without advertising, if an art gallery opens, especially on Pacific Avenue, the artists will come out of their sacred creative spaces, bearing portfolios and asking what it takes to get their work in the gallery. Already, Scudder guesses that hundreds have padded through the doors of the gallery and made inquiries. Not all of them will make it onto the walls of 1319 Pacific Ave. The work has to make it through the curatorial vision of Scudder, who is currently the full-time, non-paid employee for this venture.

"I'm new here so I don't have any bias to any particular person and we don't have a bias to any particular medium or genre," Scudder says.

Tuesdays and Wednesdays are open for professional artists to pop in and show their portfolios, no appointment required. The venue can house the work of 18 artists maximum on the combined first and second floors, with the third floor being reserved for special exhibits.

The feedback from artists and the public has been glowing, and the gallery's brainchildren are pumped with excitement about its future, yet at the same time they remain grounded in reality.

"We're a long way off from people saying, 'Let's go to Santa Cruz to look at the galleries,'" Chip says. "There are 250 artists per square foot [here] but we don't have places for artists to sell [their work]," he jokes.

That's part of what prompted the foursome to collaborate with now city council-member Emily Reilly when she was serving as mayor. Talks started with Reilly and Ceil Cirillo from the city redevelopment agency, about three months ago. One by one the foursome was brought on board, each for his or her specific talents to contribute to making this gallery a success. Mostly, though, they all have a desire to promote selling the work of artists in Santa Cruz County. Scudder is the only actual artist of the small group. His accomplishment at selling his own work on Pacific Avenue in the former Warehouse Music made him an ideal visionary for this project.

The gallery works like this: Artists, after being approved by Scudder to feature their work, drop off their art and Scudder curates the vast, two-story show. Of whatever sells, the gallery keeps 40 percent, which goes into keeping the gallery alive. The process takes the artist out of the business side of things, a responsibility most artists will gladly shake off.

"It's a beautiful gallery and I hope they can do it," says artist Jack Howe, who is showing his assemblage work at 1319 Pacific Ave. "They're smart in rotating people. There are so many good artists in town."

Including Howe. His work is definitely original. It's called junk art—creating something amazing out of someone else's scraps. Much of Howe's work is narrative in nature and numerous pieces currently in the show at the gallery feature dolls. Fans of his work include Nicolas Cage and Christopher Guest. Typically Howe shows his work, which can range in price from \$300-\$7,000, in more metropolitan towns, but with the opening of the not-yet-named gallery he has a chance to publicly share and sell his work locally.

And if the foursome, Chip, Scudder, Siero and Elliott, have it their way, Howe is just the first of many local artists to show work at 1319 Pacific Ave. Moreover, in theory, if things go as the visionaries are dreaming, this town will become a place people visit to see open art galleries, not ones with an "out of business" sign flapping in the window.

Info: 1319 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz, 426-ARTS.