

weekend



Getting Happy

Lora Drasner's eponymous gallery

visual arts

Entering the gallery world in eclectic fashion

Stewart Oksenhorn
The Aspen Times

In the new Drasner Gallery, the Picasso corner, with a few typically twisted Picasso pieces, hangs right above a table with colorful, fluid glass sculptures by contemporary, Denver-based Kit Karbler and an oversized book of the works of American pop artist Robert Indiana. That leads the viewer toward what gallery owner Lora Drasner calls “the happy corner” — “C’mon Get Happy,” a print in cotton candy colors by Deborah Kass; the even more upbeat “Flowerball Red,” by Takashi Murakami; and a piece by Romero Britto, in a similarly playful mode. Next over are a couple of serene images of the Buddha — not just any Buddha figure, but photographs of the largest seated Buddha in the world. These were made by Drasner herself.

This is only the beginning of the eclecticism. There are explosive colors, especially in a glossy, advertising-inspired photograph by David LaChapelle, “Chanel on Ice.” There are muted tones — a black-and-white photo, “Warhol, Last Sitting,” the last picture taken of Andy Warhol, which happens to be also by LaChapelle; and “Within,” a grey-themed Jasper Johns print. Paintings and old-fashioned prints hang beside works by Alain Godon and McKay Otto, contemporary artists who both use innovative techniques. (Godon’s bildoreliefo technique, which he started using in 2008, turns an original oil paint-



DRASNER FROM B7

ing into a digital work. Otto's method employs the run-resistant ice-skating stockings that Peggy Fleming used; according to Drasner, the artist has bought the entire existing supply of such stockings.) The artists represented in the gallery are from contemporary Brazil, Tokyo and Texas, early 20th century Europe, the New York City of the 1960s.

This might not be exactly what many art galleries look like. It doesn't have the narrower focus of Aspen's David Floria Gallery or the Baldwin Gallery, both of which have carved out more or less recognizable niches of contemporary art. But for Drasner, who enters the gallery world with today's grand opening, it is what collections of art look like.

"My thing is, you walk into someone's home and they don't have one artist on the wall. They have a variety, I know I do," Drasner, a tall blonde in her mid-40s, said. "It's what that person likes. And they work together; they complement each other. If you have one artist, no matter how good he is—I won't say it's boring, but it's not as exciting. But you put McKay Otto next to one of my Buddhas, and they light each other up. That's what most collectors do."

Even with the broad range of art, Drasner believes she has an identifiable aesthetic. "My taste is happy — bright, colorful," she said. "I don't like anything gloomy or depressing. In people or in art."

One aspect that sets the gallery apart is the work from the Mourlot Estate. In 1852, a lithograph print shop, Atelier Mourlot, was established in Paris. Under Fernand Mourlot, the shop became prominent toward the middle of the 20th century, attracting Chagall, Miró and Braque. In 1945, Picasso became enamored of the lithograph process and essentially set up shop at Mourlot; in time, he would create some 400 images there. Although the press is no longer active, Eric Mourlot, a grandson of Fernand, began a few years ago to work with various galleries to sell pieces from the Mourlot Estate, which also includes works by artists from the American pop art movement: Rauschenberg, Rosenquist, Lichtenstein. Drasner is the exclusive Colorado gallery representing the estate.

Drasner, who grew up outside of Seattle and in Los Angeles, refined her visual sensibility while studying at the New York

The Drasner Gallery

Grand opening today, at 5 p.m.
520 E. Hyman Ave.

School of Interior Design, before going into real estate. She began collecting art some 15 years ago.

In 2004, she married Fred Drasner on a boat in Venice's Grand Canal, and the two embarked on a three and a half-year maritime honeymoon, logging nearly 50,000 miles on the sea. On a crossing of the mid-Atlantic, en route from the Canary Islands to Antigua, Drasner was struck by a particular sunset.

"It was a week crossing, with days where you wouldn't see another boat," she said. "I had a small camera and started taking photos. I had modeled before, so I was familiar with the other side of the camera. Then I got real serious, got a real camera with a huge lens."

Drasner stuck with sunsets, but tied them to specific locations: Miami, Sydney, Darwin's Arch in the Galapagos, the coastal Croatian city of Dubrovnik. She turned the photos into the 2008 book "Sunsets," which is in its fourth printing. The Drasner's boat is gone — while anchored in Sausalito, someone offered to buy it, and Fred, taking the view that "You should never fall in love with inanimate objects" — accepted the bid. But Drasner is still shooting: Her work is on permanent display at the Four Seasons hotel in Miami, and she is planning a second volume of "Sunsets."

The Drasners settled on land, in downtown Miami, and that's when Drasner's collecting moved into a more serious mode. The Miami Art Museum asked her to give a tour of the couple's collection, and Drasner found she enjoyed talking and thinking about art.

It's fascinating, why some artists become famous and some don't. Why is this painting worth millions, and this painting is just as good, and you buy it for a thousand dollars?" she said.

Last summer, the Drasners spent time in Aspen. Now they live here — and Lora's got a gallery to run, as well.

"It was either open a museum or open a gallery," she said. "I wasn't ready to open a museum. Maybe in another 20 years."