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## Absolute positivity

Dar Freeland balances a positive spiritual message with brash, fun artistry

BY KELLE SCHILLACI

It's kind of hard to sustain a bad mood when you step inside Dar Freeland's Face Up Gallery. That is, of course, unless flashy, bright-colored stuff depresses you. Freeland's brashly cheerful collection of Day-Glo animation-style paintings functions as equal parts Simpsons-style eye candy and stylish self-help reminders - with an edge.

The artist's most recent series was inspired by a message scrawled on the wall: "Go 100%, Sleep at Night." It's these slogan-friendly philosophical tidbits that permeate much of Freeland's work, as well as, it seems, her psyche.

"Most of what I share through art is what I observe and experience on the journey, personally and with others," Freeland says.

Her signature characters are long-browed or sharp-chinned, open-mouthed or pursed-lipped, their exaggerated noggins attached to spindly necks. The expressive, colorful style draws viewers in, and their decidedly cheeky nature makes the underlying message just as accessible.

"What one finds in the art is really an amalgam of many different teachings," Freeland says, citing Eastern philosophy, specifically Tibetan, as a powerful influence (making her loopy-scrawled dictum "Suffering is over-rated" more tastily ironic).

As veteran Arts Factory residents, Dar Freeland and partner Brian Swanson (whose cool digital works and illustrations hang in the adjacent portion of Cricket Studio) took over the space back in 1997, having escaped California shortly after the Northridge quake. The two got in on the ground floor of the Arts Factory phenomenon. First Friday attendees are likely to recognize not only the signature style of Freeland's hung work, but the gallery itself, which is a veritable Pee Wee's playhouse of brilliantly colored, jigsaw-piece floors, exaggerated arrows, wall-sized murals and catchy phrases tagged in archways.

"A bored mind creates drama," an audience favorite, is available in a mounted print or colorful postcard. "We do art so you don't have to" states consumer-friendly messaging touting the artist's catalog of original artwork, prints, shirts, bags, and other knick-knacks.

A recent series of black and white cartoons is tucked in back and reads more like elaborate paint-by-number canvases waiting to be filled in. They remind me of another Freeland project. Freeland is a talented creator of mandalas (intricate geometric patterns often used during meditation to represent the cycle of desire and suffering). It's a skill requiring a patient, steady hand and meticulous focus. Once the work is complete (a process Freeland described as "healing"), the sand is swept away. It's all about impermanence, and one's ability to prioritize the process over the end product.



"When Love Looks Too Real," acrylic on canvas.

Advertisement



"I experience the creative process as a life-affirming moment caught in time -- whether captured on canvas or just in memory," the artist explains.

Not that Freeland positions herself as a self-help missionary. Like the meaning behind her recent "100%" series, the message is simple: "When we give 100 percent to an effort, we can rest knowing we did everything we could to make it the best it could be. Go 100 percent, sleep at night."

The series consists of four new pieces. In two book-ended works, several characters (more likely the many two-headed versions of one shattered "self") engage in a mental battle of wills - - tossing paranoid thoughts like a brain-jumbled salad of worries and concerns. "When Love Looks Too Real" tackles the heady conundrum of modern relationships. It features a face-off of between two enlarged craniums struggling to relate to one another. Their brains are wired with "sabotage" and "criticize" switches, and alert buttons are poised to either "Invalidate" or "Run!" Meanwhile, their mouths are fastened shut.

What has the potential to read as self-help fluff is balanced by a brash, fun artistry and a warmly wicked satire that you can either read for its deeper meanings or just accept at face value. While Freeland stakes claim to having "a lot of layers and messages" in her work, she is quick to admit: "If people come in and just enjoy the energy, that is enough for me."

Up next for Freeland's colorful cast of characters? An animated film. Stay tuned.

***The "100%" Show***

**Through July 25**

**Face Up Gallery (in the Arts Factory)**

**107 E. Charleston Blvd., #203**

**www.faceupstudio.com**

**Free**

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