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ARTS &
CULTURE

Bring on
Da Art

Bring on
Da Funk!

A GALLERY-HOPPING EXPERIENCE

BY JOAN TAPPER PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY MOSS





In the zone (clockwise from above): Welcoming doors at the Arts Fund Gallery; Dug Uyesaka with an array of his work; a colorful corner in an artist's space; canvases by Michael Irwin on display in the loft at Studio 121; a painting by Erika Carter backs an impromptu still life at the Green House Studios.



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WATCHING THE CHANGES in Santa Barbara's Funk Zone over the last few years has been a bit like viewing a speeded-up silent movie, as this once-industrial neighborhood with its under-the-radar artists' studios has fast become the hot spot for wine tasting, sipping handcrafted beer, and dining at the trendy Lark and Nook restaurants. Yet while visitors began pouring in, the art scene there remained elusive as development pushed some painters and sculptors out and others maintained workspaces that weren't readily accessible to the public.

Happily that has changed. New galleries and studio spaces have emerged, joining longtime favorites and turning the loop formed by Santa Barbara Street, Yanonali Street, Gray Avenue, and Mason Street into a genuine arts district. The galleries generally have

GALLERY (michaelkate.com) supports local artists as well, not only by using the wall space around its furniture store to exhibit dramatic, abstract, and contemporary artworks but also by hosting conversations and panel discussions with the artists themselves. Says curator Jan Ziegler, "I try to pair artists whose work speaks to each other with complementary styles, palettes, or statements, not necessarily similar. It's more about having some kind of visual conversation going on." As it happens, the autumn show, which runs through November 6, is a showcase for its Funk Zone neighbors.

Straight across Santa Barbara Street is a light-green cottage that's home to **GREEN HOUSE STUDIOS**. **ERIKA CARTER** (erikacarter.com)—along with **VIRGINIA McCRACKEN** (virginiamccracken.com), **DONNA**

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regular, mostly weekend, hours, but since the artists tend to open their studios by appointment, the easiest way to visit is during the lively Funk Zone Art Walks (funkzone.net), events coordinating exhibitions and open studios, which take place every two months on a designated Friday night.

Begin at the **ARTS FUND GALLERY** (artsfundsb.org), run by the nonprofit that has supported Santa Barbara County artists for some 30 years. The gallery draws on the Arts Fund Gallery Committee as well as a changing roster of guest curators to stage six group shows a year in its intimate space. "The Arts Fund has changed a lot in the last six years," says board member, artist, and curator Nancy Gifford, pointing to a more active board and the involvement of younger people with a thriving teen mentorship program. "We're very eclectic. We like to reach deep into different areas, but it's important to have a gallery in Santa Barbara that shows Santa Barbara artists."

Diagonally across the intersection of Santa Barbara and Yanonali streets, **MICHAELKATE INTERIORS & ART**

AYSCOUGH (donnaayscough.com), and **LIZ BRADY** (lizbradyart.com)—create their paintings and multimedia pieces here and periodically open their doors and garden to Art Walk visitors, sometimes even providing live music.

"We're a working studio," says Carter, pointing out that cleaning up the space for the several hundred folks who show up during an Art Walk can take up valuable painting hours but adding that art aficionados are always welcome by appointment.

As a longtime resident of the Funk Zone, Carter has seen the changes firsthand. "These are serious artists," she says. "You don't pay rent like this if you're not serious. The new galleries and studios are good for collectors, but the best thing for the artists is that you are part of a community."

Midway down the block on Santa Barbara Street, an eye-popping magenta-and-cerulean façade hints that artists are at work. Once a Weber's bread production facility, the **STUDIO 121** loft has been the professional milieu of abstract painter **MICHAEL IRWIN** (michaelirwinart.com) for more than two decades. >



STUDIO



On the art trail (clockwise from above): The namesake structure that houses Gallerie Silo; Michael Armour in his exhibit space inside; printmaker Barbara Leung Larson at Studio 111; paintings in progress by neighboring artist Marlyn Daggett; art extends to the funky façade of Studio 121; tools of the painter's trade; Karen Lehrer adds details to one of her mixed-media works.

He was joined a couple of years ago by an old colleague, **DUG UYESAKA**, who says he “does a bit of everything—prints, mixed-media, collage, and assemblage.” Former scenic theater artist **JEANNE WEBER DENTZEL** (jeannedentzel.com) recently moved in to exhibit her abstract still lifes.

“For me this is a great space,” says Uyesaka, who had been working in his garage and a spare room in his condominium. It makes me more visible within the art community. There’s a camaraderie; people are there to bounce ideas off of.”

Next door is **CABANA HOME**, a chic collection of furnishings. Co-owners Caroline and Steve Thompson also showcase fine art—paintings, sculpture, and mixed-media—curated by Edward Cella Art & Architecture and host artists’ openings and talks. “Cabana Home shows the Santa Barbara

years ago he and another artist were leasing part of a refrigeration unit a block away. Then the landlord decided he wanted to rent out the entire building. “It seemed like the Funk Zone was on the way out,” Koplín says, “but it’s curious the way things ebb and flow. I was fortunate to discover the place on Mason Street, though we had to transform it into something presentable.”

Originally he thought he’d be using the studio to create his assemblages, but it’s turned out to be more of a place to prepare and stage exhibits, like those tied in to the Art Walk. “Renting a studio is a serious commitment,” he says. “Rent goes out every month. You’re buying supplies. We’re always trying to make things work better.”

You can’t miss **GALLERIE SILO** (galleriesilo.com) at the foot of Gray Avenue, because it’s in, yes, a

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lifestyle in vignettes,” says Steve. “We want to show the customer how to live with art, which includes established Santa Barbara artists, such as **MARY HEEBNER**, **R. NELSON PARRISH**, and **BILL DEWEY**.”

Toward the end of the block, a long row of industrial spaces has been gradually populated by artists, beginning with **BARBARA LEUNG LARSON** (studio111sb.com) five years ago. “This serves as my design studio and painting and printmaking facility,” she says, adding that she also offers occasional workshops, hosts a weekly group of monotype artists, and has shows for other printmakers there. “I think of myself as a source for people who work on paper.

“It’s gratifying to see a thriving arts community,” Leung Larson continues. “I’m interested in building a strong network. The Arts Fund can only do so much. I’d love to see some limited art tours, more in depth, with better access for people from out of town. It would be nice to come up with a way to guarantee that you’d see five studios and learn about the process and what people do.”

Leung Larson’s neighbors now include abstract expressionist **MARLYN DAGGETT** (mcubed.studio), **SOL HILL** (solhill.com), who mixes photography, digital images, and painting, and, since April, mixed-media artist **KAREN LEHRER** (karenlehrer.com).

“I’d been painting alone for three years,” says Lehrer. “This has been the best thing for me. The community—everybody has been super nice.” Still, she points out, her space is “not a gallery, it’s a studio. To get work done I have to close the door.”

Around the corner is **MASON STREET STUDIOS**, a warren shared by artists **PHILIP KOPLIN** (philipkoplín.com), **LISA PEDERSEN** (lisamariapedersen.com), and **JILL SATTLER** (jillsattler.com). Koplín’s experience is a microcosm of the Funk Zone’s evolution. A couple of

structure that started out life as grain storage. Michael Armour has been painting there for a dozen years but only turned it into a gallery with partner Chantal Wunderlich in July, 2015. “I came here to work,” Armour says, “but one day I put my head out the window and there was the Funk Zone. Being here is an advantage for the gallery. People see the space and are curious about it. The Art Walks are amazing. We can get an incredibly lively crowd. It doesn’t matter whether they like the art or not. They come, all ages. It’s been a fun experience.”

Near the top end of Gray Avenue, a sleek contemporary façade marks the entrance to both Skye Gwilliam’s avant-garde **GONE GALLERY** and the **GRAYSPACE GALLERY** (charlenebroudy.com/grayspace), run by his mother, Charlene Broudy. “I own this building,” Broudy says, and originally it was her idea for her son to live and work there. Eventually, though, she decided to remodel and divide the studio, focusing on local contemporary abstract artists in her half. “We’re lucky to have found the building when I did,” she says. “It helps us not be such a commercial gallery, and that’s the pleasure of it. I really like the Art Walk. It gives me a shot in the arm. When I started I thought I’d reevaluate the gallery in a year, and it’s been a year, so we’ll keep on going.”

If it seems like there’s a note of “Let’s see what the future brings” in Broudy’s words, she’s not alone. Artists in the Funk Zone recognize that development of the area is inevitable. Only the timetable is uncertain. Until then, they can work, and everyone else can take advantage of this moment to see some serious art in an interesting neighborhood.

As Armour puts it, “There’s a little bit of culture, art, and class. Will this last? For a short while. We’ll look back and say these were the salad days.” ♦



Lisa Pedersen wields a brush at the Mason Street Studios.