

WHERE TO SEE ART RIGHT NOW



PROVIDED BY FRIEND OF A FRIEND

Friend of a Friend's opening exhibit, "Fiction Folly," continues through April 27.

These galleries show the best of what Denver currently has to offer

By Ray Mark Rinaldi
Special to The Denver Post

Denver's art scene is always in flux. Galleries come and go. New artists emerge, while familiar ones exit the city. For local art fans, making the most of what is out there means locating where the energy is at any particular moment — and heading there when the time is right.

I make my own list every year, places that seem to be capturing interesting art as it happens, or predicting where it will go next. There are plenty of familiar spaces to see art here, from museums like DAM, the MCA and RedLine, to veteran commercial galleries, like Rule, K Contemporary and William Havu. Don't leave them out of your gallery-going afternoons.

But pay special attention, right now, to the spaces that follow.

Igniting Spark

Spark Gallery has been around for 45 years, and at various locations around the city, but its new location sets it up for a complete renaissance: the artist-run co-op is setting up shop at 1200 Acoma St., directly across from the main entrance of the Denver Art Museum.

That will mean greater visibility for Spark's members, and for the local art scene in general, which has gotten little serious attention over the past five years from DAM's globally minded curators.

The new space opens just this weekend, so it remains to be seen how the



PROVIDED BY DAVID B. SMITH GALLERY

Work by Aitor Lajarín-Encina on display at David B. Smith Gallery. The painter is also featured in a show at Friend of a Friend gallery.

move will impact shows or sales, or if Spark can use the moment to take it up a notch with its exhibitions. But the gang is kicking off with a broad and promising introduction to the offerings that its hard-working members create. Many of the featured artists are core creatives in this city, including Patricia Aaron, Peter Illig, Mai Wyn Schantz, Sue Simon, Barbara Baer and more.

Next up: The "Inaugural Spark Member Show, Part 1," starting April 11. Location: 1200 Acoma St. Info: sparkgal-

Good Friends

lery.com

Friend of a Friend gallery occupies a rarified place in the Denver art scene, morphing into something between a project space and a commercial gallery in its latest incarnation, which opened in RiNo last week. It's stepping out in exceptional form with a group outing featuring three intriguing artists: Rian Kerrane, Aitor Lajarín-Encina and Em

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PROVIDED BY ERIKA OSBORNE

Painter Erika Osborne at her current solo show at Visions West Gallery.

Rinaldi

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Kettner. It's the show to see right now.

FOF, as it is affectionately called, is a long-term project by artist Derrick Velasquez, who first opened the gallery in 2019 in the former Evans School, sparking a rebirth of the Golden Triangle as a center for local art. For this edition, he has brought in two co-directors, Jenny Nagashima and Ilan Gutin, both with considerable experience as artists and curators. It will be interesting to see if the trio can generate the same buzz for RiNo that it did for its old neighborhood.

The gallery has limited hours — for now just Thursdays — so it can be a little hard to access, but it often throws special events, and following it on Instagram will give visitors all the info they need.

Next up: The current show, "Fiction Folly," continues through April 27. Location: 3575 Chestnut Place. Info: instagram.com/friendofafrienddenver.

Staying Power

Few Denver galleries can match the roster, or the ambition, of David B. Smith in LoDo. The gallery reps both regional and national names, putting on consistently solid exhibitions for local audiences and taking artists to the most im-

portant art fairs across the country so they can make sales and build reputations. That's crucial.

Smith tweaks his roster regularly to keep the energy flowing, but the current lineup of official and related artists is a good example of what the gallery offers, mixing Denver veterans (like Susan Wick) with widely-known contributors (like Justin Favela, who works out of Las Vegas).

Current exhibitions feature two of Colorado's best painters. Boulder's Sarah McKenzie takes up the main space with her realist paintings of prisons and museums. The project room, a compact closet gallery in the back, has the enigmatic landscapes of Aitor Lajarín-Encina, who lives and teaches in Fort Collins.

Next up: current shows continue through May 3. Location: 1543 Wazee St. Info: davidbsmithgallery.com

The West, updated

Visions West has a loyal clientele but it gets overlooked as a place to see art in Denver. That's unfortunate, since it has some of the most compelling exhibits in town, along with one of the most distinct, and likable, personalities.

As its name implies, the gallery features artists from this part of the country, and it is not unusual to



PROVIDED BY VISIONS WEST

Painter Robin McCauley has an exhibit at Visions West.

see elements of the things that have defined Western art for more than a century now. There are lots of mountains and plenty of cowboys on display.

But this place is not caught up in the past. The work is hyper-contemporary, and its artists are leading the way to new definitions of old genres. The current exhibit, "The

Love Language of Fire," is a good example of that. Painter Erika Osborne's landscapes of charred but reviving forests "explore the evolving relationship between humanity and wildfire." The work is smart, of-the-moment and, somehow, optimistic.

Next up: Osborne's show continues through April 18, along with exhibi-



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The CU Experience Gallery is located in the Denver Performing Arts Complex downtown.

tions by Robin and Robert McCauley. Location: 2605 Walnut St. Info: vision-swestcontemporary.com

Expanding roles

The CU Experience Gallery has been around for a while now (it used to be called the Next Stage Gallery) but it seems to have found its voice lately, transforming into one of the more interesting places to take in art in Denver. The space is a collaborative venture between the University of Colorado Denver and the city's department of Arts & Venues.

Experience Gallery makes the most of its location, in the plaza of the Denver Performing Arts Complex downtown, which means it has a steady audience of theater and classical music goers who can avail themselves of its offerings before they attend concerts and plays. A stop here nicely rounds out a night at the theater.

But the work is not to be taken merely as an appetizer. It is, by and large, provocative and challenging and built off strong curatorial themes. Recent shows have featured such artists as sculptor Katie Caron, filmmaker David Liban and the digital art explorers taking part in the city's annual Digi-rati Emergent Media Festival. It's unpredictable, in a good way.

Next up: The group show

"Two Sides, One Coin," exploring the coexistence of darkness and light, runs April 24 to May 18. Location: Denver Performing Arts Complex. Info: cudenverezapgallery.org.

The standard bearer

I update this list every year, but Robischon Gallery is always on it. The place has been around for nearly five decades and it has been a leader — maybe the leader — in local art for all that time. Here is why: It has the right combination of great art and good shows.

Robischon represents the top tier of Colorado artists — folks like Stacey Steers, Stephen Batura, Derrick Velasquez and Trine Bumiller — and is the local rep for national names, like Kiki Smith and Ann Hamilton.

That gives it a lot to work with when putting on exhibits for the public in its LoDo headquarters. Under the hand of gallery co-director Jennifer Doran, the offerings come together under cohesive themes and take on the quality of museum shows. You heard me say all this before, but Robischon deserves the nod, again.

Location: 1740 Wazee St. Info: robischongallery.com.

Ray Mark Rinaldi is a Denver-based freelance writer specializing in fine arts.