

Peripatetic painter ready to move into brand territory

By Kalzaad Kotwal
FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Craig Carlisle will have two home-comings of sorts this month: his 10th solo exhibit at the Sharon Weiss Gallery, featuring a new body of work, and the inclusion of one of his signature "Big Head" paintings in the Columbus AIDS Task Force "Art for Life" Auction on April 15.

Born in Oklahoma City, he lived in Columbus for more than 10 years, including his tenure at the Columbus College of Art & Design, from which he graduated in 1988.

The 41-year-old painter has also lived in New York and San Francisco and currently resides in Beverly Hills, Calif.

Q: What sparked your "Big Head" paintings?

A: I was working on a series of floral paintings and struggling a lot with those. I thought about leaving art to go and do something more serious. And so I thought that if I am going to quit, I may as well paint for fun. I kept my studio at the (Columbus) Buggyworks



Craig Carlisle

► "Works by Craig Carlisle" continues through April 30 at the Sharon Weiss Gallery, 20 E. Lincoln St. Hours: 1 to 4 p.m. Sundays, noon to 4 p.m. Thursdays, noon to 5 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Call 614-291-5683.

for one more year, didn't exhibit or sell at all and just worked. That is what came out. I always liked the idea of the Big Heads, but I had thought that it was too weird and that no one would buy them.

Q: Your works seem to have a cute, cuddly quality combined with a more sinister edge.

A: That creepiness is in the eye of the beholder. It is not intentional. I know I do like art and psychology. I have also studied art therapy. I do think about certain themes in paintings and the mystery behind them.

Q: What themes and mysteries do you pursue in your work?

A: Optimism is one theme that I hold



Mr. Wiggles With the Blue Flowers

true to. I like things that are full of life.

Q: Who are your artistic muses?

A: In college I was drawn to the German expressionists and their gutsy, intense painters. Currently, I am drawn to contemporary Japanese painters like



Hermosa

Yoshitomo Nara and Murakami. I am also inspired by children's books.

Q: Why did you leave Columbus to go to New York?

A: I had a fairly successful early career in Columbus. I felt like I needed

to go to the next level. . . . I worked out of a storefront on the Lower East Side and eventually found the George Billis Gallery in Chelsea to represent me.

Q: What prompted your move to San Francisco?

A: I needed to get away from the concrete jungle. I have always wanted to live in California.

Q: And the move to Los Angeles?

A: After 9/11, when the market crashed, no one was buying art, I had an opportunity to go to L.A., where the cost of living was lower than in northern California.

Q: Is there a difference in how people in different parts of the country respond to your work?

A: It really is the same. I find that the people who collect my art do so because of how it makes them feel. Some see the creepy side, and that is what they are into. Others don't see that at all.

Q: What's next for you?

A: I am going to take my work in a more commercial direction. Children's books, branding. I have just trademarked the Teddybird character.