

Colorful, creepy creatures seem to be watching visitors

By Kalzaad Kotwal
FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The first show of spring at the Sharon Weiss Gallery welcomes the season with a whimsical and brilliantly colored exhibit of new works by Craig Carlisle.

The Los Angeles resident and graduate of the Columbus College of Art & Design made his mark in the mid-1990s with his aptly titled series of "Big Head" paintings. He continues with similar subject matter but has reduced the scale of his paintings.

Bamboo at the Chocolate Mountains presents a purple donkey with a red-and-orange target as its nose. The brightly hued animal is posed on a landscape of parrot greens, shocking pinks, light blues and rich browns.

Carlisle's signature technique is detailed crosshatching and other texturing to create an impressionistic hint. On the surface, *Bamboo* and other works seem like paintings fit for children's rooms. But the juxtaposition of elements, the use of hyper-bold colors and the characterization of animals allow Carlisle to create surreal images with a slightly sinister bent.

Innocence coupled with the bizarre can be found in many works, including *Alice in Wonderland*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Charlie*



Bamboo at the Chocolate Mountains and the Chocolate Factory.

The portrait *The Gardener* is filled with whimsy and wit. A bald man peeks out from behind a bouquet of flowers painted in spectacular yellows, blues, pinks and reds. Is the gardener shy and hiding behind his love of all things floral, or is he lurking in the bushes, tracking his prey?

Carlisle has begun to invent new crea-

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

tures including Teddy Birds. These fuzzy, overweight birds are part stuffed animal, part avian invention.

Teddy Bird at the Cadillac Ranch takes the character to the Texas art/tourist site where a series of cars seem to be diving into the Earth. A peculiar character is put into the context of another oddity, and the result is a funny painting.

Like most of Carlisle's creations, the Teddy Birds inhabit the fine line between cute and creepy.

Their large bellies seem to defy the laws of flight, the conventions of gravity. Their conical noses and maniacal grins seem to portend something sinister.

Another unsettling quality: As you look at the paintings, the creatures' eyes seem to follow yours. From the heads to the Teddy Birds and the purple donkey and shocking pink clown, their large, round eyes stalk your gaze.

Carlisle has returned to Columbus with a show that exhibits his sense of humor and art.