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**ART**

## Canvas queen

In a new exhibit at Scandals, Michael "Misha" Kennedy paints more than a pretty face

BY TIMOTHY KRAUSE

Michael Kennedy may be more familiar for his impressions of Misha than Monet, but give this drag queen a paintbrush and he'll show you all shades of pretty.

*Spring Folly*, his first exhibit in 15 years, will be on display all month long at the Scandals Other Side Gallery.

"Art has always played a part of my life, whether it's been on my face or on the canvas or on the stage. I don't think that's going to change," says Kennedy, assuring that Michael's pigments won't replace Misha's performances.

Kennedy studied fine and applied arts while attending University of Oregon. But when he began to build a successful drag career in Portland, his work in the visual arts had to take a back seat. Now returning to the easel with a renewed passion for painting, he hopes this new exhibit will relaunch his artistic career.

"I painted one, and that opened the floodgates. It just came pouring out," Kennedy remarks. "All the things I've experienced over the years of my life have really made a remarkable difference in my work."

Which is to say his work has made a long journey from the once-restrained pastels he created while in Eugene. His work has matured, just as he has, to the point where he feels a freedom of expression.

"I think that's the joy in being a queer artist—that we know who we are," Kennedy observes. "We're often unbridled spirits, and we portray that in our art."



"Dandelions" (below) is Kennedy's favorite piece, but we think "Asian Carnival" hits a little closer to home



A total of 15 acrylic pieces comprise *Spring Folly*, which presents a variety of still life, pastoral landscapes and nature images, many that hold subtle surprises upon closer inspection.

"I think my exhibit is very playful. It's lively," says Kennedy. "That's why I named it *Spring Folly*. There are lots of elements of life in my work."

A landscape called "Dandelions" is his personal favorite, one he notes was inspired by classic impressionists. A peaceful mix of spring colors draws the viewer in deep toward the horizon and then back to the flowers in the foreground. Kennedy's seemingly contradictory calm use of bright colors spurs reflection on equally contradictory elements of distance and immediacy.

Kennedy often chooses simply to paint things he loves, such as the cheeky green apples of



When Michael Kennedy isn't painting his face, he's painting his world on canvas

PHOTO BY MAURITZ DAVIS