

Balloon artist opens pop up shop

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"Pop-Up Immersive Art Installation" is what the front window says as you approach 825 SW 5th Ave. in Portland. This is a very succinct definition for a space filled with balloon installations encouraging the visitor to immerse themselves into the balloon world created by Kameron Messmer, founder of the Joy Store.

Upon entering, there is a multicolored balloon installation with a big screen television in the background. The TV reads "part art exhibit, part playland, part selfie museum, part interactive, part experiential installation for all ages, especially adults." "Where every hour is happy hour" and "you walk in the store and literally can't stop smiling."

About 50 yards to your right is "The Balloon Typhoon," which houses three "Super Fan Max" machines and hundreds of balloons which bounce off the floor, walls and ceiling. As you watch the passersby, you witness their giggles.

Messmer grew up in Billings, Montana, in his father's magic store.

"My dad was just the store-owner, but I was pretty much the only employee there, so he's like, 'You gotta learn everything that comes in,'" said Messmer. "Every book, every trick, everything

that came in, I got to pull apart and play with to demonstrate to sell."

Messmer moved from Billings because, "Montana is just so small and spread apart. It is no place for an entertainer to make a living."

He moved to Portland, planning on working parties as the "Daredevil Circus Wizard." Then the pandemic hit, and no one was having parties. Businesses were departing from downtown Portland.

Messmer has a month-by-month lease on 10 offices, planning on filling them with other artists. When he has additional help, he will be able to set regular business hours.

Presently as the only worker, he can only commit to weekends. We interviewed him on a Friday and his doors were not open to the public. Suddenly he ran over to the door saying, "Oh! These guys always come in." He turned the lock, opened the door, and ushered in three developmentally disabled guys and their caregiver.

Although Messmer's business cards say "Daredevil Circus Wizard," his website is kameronmessmer.com.



Kameron Messmer plays in the balloons at the Joy Store in Portland. Photo by Ayla Fashana.