



Jill McVarish works on a painting in her gallery.

COLIN MURPHEY PHOTOS

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The gallery serves as both McVarish's studio and an exhibition space, where one wall is devoted to a rotating exhibit of her own work and the remainder given over to the art of some of her favorite fellow artists. "It's really cool to finally have a gallery and show the kind of work I like," she said.

### Hilarious and gorgeous

First up (showing through Friday, April 13) is Sam Vaughan, from Berkeley, California, an old classmate of McVarish's from the San Francisco Art Institute.

Vaughan's silkscreens and stone lithographs reflect the influence of the northern renaissance artists, with a hint of the baroque and a strain of the sublimely ridiculous, perhaps best illustrated by a series of prints called "Cute Commies." Hard to describe in print, but suffice it to say, if you've ever wanted to see Karl Marx clad in only a G-string and stockings, or a naked V.I. Lenin demurely wielding a parasol and a handkerchief, now's your chance.

Portland-based painter Gustavo Ponce follows from Saturday, April 14, through Friday, May 11, and Lisa Kaser, will be showing her watercolors and drawings Tuesday, May 15, through Friday, June 8.

As for McVarish herself, her own art, favoring oils on linen, combines classicism with the contemporary, and realism with the absurd. You could be looking at a painting by one of the Dutch masters — a key influence, inspired by her time enrolled at the prestigious Garrett Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam — if it weren't for the incongruous figures and impossible scenarios captured therein. Anthropomorphized animals play classical instruments. Sesame Street's Elmo re-enacts "The Death of Marat." Ronald McDonald is made up for the



A painting by artist Jill McVarish




A Jill McVarish painting hangs in her Astoria gallery.

Day of the Dead.

The results are both hilarious and gorgeous, which should give art lovers ample reason to visit the gallery — not to mention the means to subsidize it. McVarish's work has been commissioned by a number of high profile patrons (such as TV host and podcaster Chris Hardwick, who purchased seven of her Muppet paintings and promoted her work to his fanbase), and the high demand

for her unique approach to art should help sustain this new endeavor.

To that end, McVarish has artists booked into the space for the rest of the year, and is considering using the gallery as an occasional performance space. But first comes branding.

"We're in the middle of getting a new sign painted for above the door," McVarish said. "I intend to stay for a while." 

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