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projects focus on supporting artists, providing gathering spaces and creating social experiences that don't revolve around drinking alcohol.

The Grotto Experience Bar

Before Carr opened the store in 2019, the space was a storage room.

"There was a leak, because many places downtown here leak ... I thought, 'I love this place and I've put a lot into it, so where would a place be that leaking is OK?'" Carr said.

Though the leak has since been fixed, that's how the Grotto was born. With builder's foam and paint, the space was transformed: trees climb from floor to ceiling and gray rocks lead toward the Grotto at the back of the store, with a trompe l'oeil mural of a cavern stretching into darkness.

Imagine heading out to the bar on a weekend night, but instead of drinks on the menu, an "experience tender" shows you a list of mysterious experiences to choose from. That's where the Grotto Experience Bar comes in.

"We have about 40 different experiences that we play. A lot are what would be called social practice art," Carr said. "We're going to have one called 'ego-birthing' where we create an ego for you. You leave with it and you make a commitment concerning this ego that you have in your possession. It takes a half-hour to make it and we interact with you to make it very specifically for you."

The idea behind the bar formed when Carr's son, Harper Carr, would sing for customers while working in the shop. It turned into a bit and soon they started providing a menu of songs and performances to choose from.

Many menu options are also intended to be silly or slightly alter your perceptions.

"What I'm trying to get more into is providing experiences that are fun, but don't necessarily involve alcohol," Carr said.

Enter the Portal

Walk into the shop, turn left towards the Grotto, pass the Experience Bar, and then... "This is going to open up into a secret passage that goes to the space next door, which will be a 'speakeasy' that we call the Portal," Carr said.

It's a square room, eccentrically designed, with one blood-red wall featuring a large black painted keyhole.

"We can't have a bar down here, obviously. What we plan to do is have a monthly event where we might get a liquor license just for temporary events," Carr said.

The space will host performances, gath-



Photos by Caitlin Seyfried

ABOVE: A variety of stickers and other unique art is available to buy in the store. **BELOW LEFT:** The shop features one-of-a-kind clothes. **BELOW RIGHT:** 'Kosmic Karen' greets visitors.



erings and interactive art. The Portal is open during the Astoria Second Saturday Art Walks.

Beyond the Portal, a larger room currently doubling as Carr's studio is swimming with sculptures and supplies. The space, dubbed "the LAB," is a spot for building workshops. Work that's in progress is displayed in windows for visitors to see.

Large tentacles emerge from the floor behind one window, part of an installation

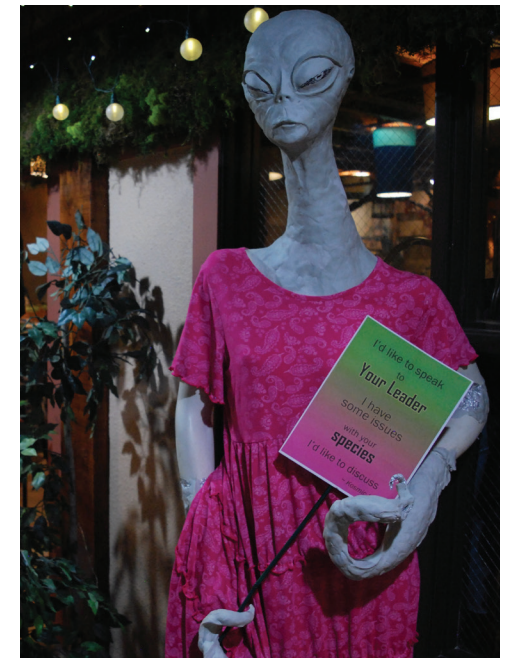
piece Carr is building.

"Nothing's finished here. I'm a very show-your-work kind of person. Everything's half-finished," Carr said.

The space will also feature murals from rotating artists.

Building art culture

Wanting to support local art, Carr created a micro-grant project in late 2019. The program awards local artists grants of \$300. Artists can apply for the grants at



weirdsistersfreakboutique.com

Carr recently crafted a new plan to fundraise for the micro-grant — she sells donated clothes at the shop.

"Astoria has a lot of community, but sometimes it's harder for people who are a little alternative to find that community," said Carr said. "I wanted to be the funkiest place in town. I'm pretty sure I'm close to the funkiest place in town."