

The Herald-Sun

# BUSINESS AND MORE



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John Pelphrey plays with son Porter, 2, on Thursday inside the LabourLove gallery in downtown Durham.

## LabourLove's goal: Be an art gallery built for everyone

For the couple, both 33 years

BY MONICA CHEN

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DURHAM — T-shirts. Beer. Music. Burgers. Cupcakes. Oh yeah, and quality original art, too.

When LabourLove Gallery opened to the gallery-hopping public during downtown's Third Friday recently, owners laid out a smorgasbord of activities, treats and buying options.

All the better to entice customers in a down economy, according to John Pelphrey, a former product manager in the pharmaceutical industry who opened the gallery with wife, Kelly Dew, a painter who studied at The Art Institute of Chicago.

The gallery is the first retail tenant of Scientific Properties' Golden Belt campus on East Main Street. Situated in 1,771 square feet, LabourLove is the culmination of 12 years of planning and all of the couple's savings.

The gallery in its inaugural exhibition also includes a personal touch: Dew's paintings were created when she was pregnant with the couple's 2-year-old son, Porter.

LabourLove is the most re-



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Kelly Dew shows off her paintings inside the LabourLove gallery in the Golden Belt in downtown Durham.

cent addition to Durham's downtown art scene, filling in the missing piece left by the closing of Branch Gallery this past winter and offering a decidedly warmer and more open approach to the curating and selling of art.

Like other galleries, LabourLove displays the \$1,200 paintings, but Pelphrey said they'd also like to educate people in art and help them fine-tune their taste.

"It's kind of like helping you to understand what kind of wines you like," he said.

Starting this summer, the gallery plans to offer an art on loan program, children's art classes and mid-century furniture reupholstered with its own artwork. The couple also hopes to hold quarterly art openings for local elementary school students, with proceeds donated to participating schools' art funds.

For the couple, both 32 years old, this approach to the gallery business developed from experience as art lovers and also from economic necessity.

Pelphrey has said that galleries often feel unwelcoming to those who don't step in the door looking like they've got cash to burn.

On his business travels, he used to check out local galleries and clock how long it took for someone, anyone, to say hello.

"I was once in an art gallery in Seattle for an hour, and then the only thing they said to me was when I was walking out. 'Have a nice day,'" Pelphrey told The Herald-Sun in February.

Speaking on LabourLove more recently, Pelphrey said the gallery would like to be known "as the place where you can come and enjoy the artwork."

"We hope that while we're giving young artists a chance to build a résumé, we're also giving young art collectors an opportunity to get used to it as well, so that when they do get into a fine art establishment, they're not intimidated."

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# ART

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As for economic necessity, the couple recognizes that the recession has not been kind to most industries. Many people have lost their jobs, and the \$1,000 painting is, now more than ever, out of their price range.

With that in mind, the couple announced LabourLove's grand opening in a tongue-in-cheek fashion. "Local couple declares an end to the economic crisis!" they wrote. "LabourLove Gallery to open May 15th with blind ambition."

The gallery's rental art program could be an especially good deal for budget-conscious art lovers. Pelphrey said their pricing is currently planned to be \$30 a month, or roughly 3 percent of a value of a painting. The subscription would be on a six-month or 12-month basis.

"If you fall in love with the piece, we'd sell it to you. If you had the same piece for six months and you say you want to buy this piece now, we'd credit that back to your account," he said.

The reupholstering idea is a more ambitious take on the popularity of T-shirts. The couple has already bought an Eames chair and plans to style it like the artwork on the walls.

Art classes will be offered to children ages 18 months (with parent) to 8 years old, with explorations of color and mixed media.

Their business model drew as



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**Kelly Dew, John Pelphrey and son Porter Pelphrey appear inside LabourLove on Thursday.**

much on retail as on art galleries, Pelphrey said, with chief inspirations being '70s icon Andy Warhol, who turned Campbell's Soup cans into art, and contemporary artist Shepard Fairey, creator of the famous "HOPE" poster of President Obama.

Although Fairey is currently in a legal battle with The Associated Press over the image, the artist has a popular online retail store that sells other images as cheaply as \$35 a print.

LabourLove will also have a retail store on its Web site, to open soon.

"We want to sell art, but we want to treat it more like a retail business would," Pelphrey said. "Some artists think they're above that, and those artists die poor."

"We tell them, 'Let's find a way to find a way for you to make a living through your art. Let's look at it as finding a way for you to do what you enjoy,'" he added.

The concept appealed to artists in LabourLove's inaugural exhibition.

"They had the artists' best interest in mind. They give

you options other than just selling your original work," said Luke Miller Buchanan, a Raleigh artist with mixed-media works that depict places of memory and neglect.

And it seemed the concept, even unstated, also appealed to the gallery's first patrons.

"I like its vibe," said Jen Sheppard of Cary, remarking on the cupcakes and other offerings on the gallery's opening night. "I like to see there's a collection of work."

The gallery's opening drew more than 400 people.

Daily coverage of Durham.

*Pulcinella's*

DURHAM