

Fabulous FUNKY FREE



By Brenda Kohlmyer

Fremont residents and businesses display an almost dogged determination to be anything but boring. This small business district across the Fremont Bridge from Seattle's upscale Queen Anne Hill hugs the Lake Washington Ship Canal.

It could very easily have been just two more stoplights in the way of commuters heading somewhere else, but in the early 1980s local land and business owners decided to create a central plan for the community and aggressively courted restaurants, shops and businesses that change Fremont's image as a biker hang-out.

Even as the 1970s-era smoke shops and bars gave way to Starbucks, the galleries and artists

who had moved in to take advantage of low rents continued to flourish and contribute to the local community.

The Fremont Arts Council was formed in 1978 by local artists out to promote the arts in every aspect of the community and, among other artistic activities, the group hosts two fun and frivolous parades during the year. One is the Troll-A-Ween, the other is the annual Solstice Parade. Held in June, it's a summery mix of art cars, wild masks, inventive costumes and nudists on bikes...although the latter are slowly giving way to wearing body paint which may or may not count as costumes.



A look down Fremont Place toward the sign marking Fremont as "The Center of the Universe."

street-side art. Now a massive brushed metal art piece vines up one corner of the building while rusted iron cutouts stand above the PCC Market courtyard. Frescoes of Saturn, Mercury, the sun and moon grace the alley façade overlooking pRiceless Works Gallery, and outside Peets Coffee Shop glass finials in the shape of flower buds act as gems catching the sun on an iron fence.

Possibly the most famous of the area's public art pieces is installed kitty-corner from the Epi Center. "Waiting for the Interurban," stationed on a traffic island

The Fremont Rocket sits at the convergence of old and new.



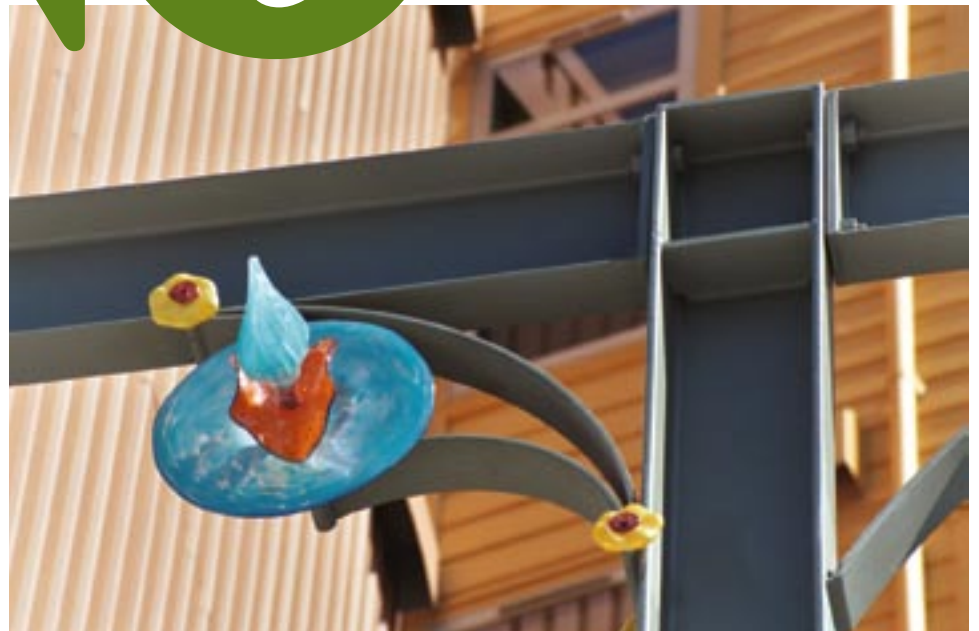
at the corner of 34th and Fremont, has been photographed for postcards so many times it's almost as closely identified with Seattle as the Space Needle or the Pike Place Market sign. The five grey people, their dog and the overhead pergola are also a favorite place for interactive art. Sometimes intended as a political statement, but more often than not to mark holidays or personal celebrations, the additions frequently include colorful balloons, streamers and seasonal clothing.

FREMONT

The decades-long collaboration between business and arts communities has created a vibrant and busy locale that has become a destination neighborhood.

Today, Fremont is best explored on foot, not only because of confusing side-street traffic caused by two block-long one-way streets, diversions around the Sunday Market and the sometimes hard-to-find parking—but also because art is on display everywhere.

When the new Epi Center mixed-use complex went up, the design included



Blue and orange glass details the Epi Center railing.

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Flower finials on the iron fence enhance the sunny patio outside Peet's Coffee Shop on the corner of 34th & Fremont.



Fremont Neighborhood Galleries

Gallery 154 – 154 N. 35th St. Showcases a variety of fine art including sculpture, paintings and photography as well as multimedia installations and masks.

Fremont Fine Arts Foundry – 154 N. 35th St. Open by appointment, this foundry is one of the oldest arts establishments in the neighborhood.

Art/FX Studio & Gallery – 420 N. 35th St. This small studio is housed in one of Fremont's original cottages. It's overflowing with arts and crafts, fine photography and whimsy.

Edge of Glass Studio – 513 N. 36th St., #H This studio focuses on blown glass pieces, some functional, some just for the beauty of the form. Functional pieces include lamps, vases, wall art, finials and even business card holders. The back of the building is a well-used studio where you can view art in process or take a glassblowing class.

pRiceless Works Gallery – 619 N. 35th St., #100 Take the stairs from Fremont, down the alley behind the new Epi Center, hang a right at the parking lot and you've found pRiceless Works Gallery. It features cutting edge local artists working in glass, fabric, collage, neon, metal, and any other media you can name.

Built, Art & Design – 3516 Fremont Pl. N. This new gallery opened in April and includes fine photography, paintings and sculpture. Furniture runs the gamut from funky to finely-crafted.

M:Pulse – 3516 Fremont Pl. N. The focus here is fabric, specifically vintage clothing that's been deconstructed, then reconstructed into one-of-a-kind pieces.

Treofeo – 3601 Woodland Ave. This new gallery and photography studio features fine art created by Northwest artists. There is an early focus on glass, mixed media, paper and photography.

Frank & Dunya – 3418 Fremont Ave. N. Fun, functional fine art and craft by local artists. This shop showcases a variety of jewelry, frames, chandeliers and other pieces of use-it-every-day art.

“Waiting for the Interurban” isn't the only artwork in the area targeted for hit-and-run embellishment. A few blocks away, a bronze statue of Vladimir Lenin occasionally stalks out of his background of flames sporting a crown of dried leaves and a yellow rubber ducky on his cap.

This is very much in keeping with the eclectic nature of the publicly-displayed, but not always publicly-owned, artwork permeating Fremont. Stroll the neighborhood and you'll also find a troll under the Aurora Bridge, a rocket mounted to the corner of a low brick building, a huge iron mask outside Gallery 154 and dinosaur topiaries near the Lake Washington Ship Canal.

Galleries in the area display much the same mix of whimsy and seriousness.

The monthly First Friday art walks are a good way to get a feel for the contemporary art displayed in Fremont's galleries. The walks draw art lovers from throughout the region, some out for an evening of good art and lively interactions, others attending new openings which are traditionally held in conjunction with the art walks.