

December 21, 2006 *Free*

alive!

www.columbusalive.com

407
things to do
this week

IT'S YOUR CITY
IT'S YOUR LIFE

4 | **ALIVE&KICKING**

www.columbusalive.com | **alive!** | UPFRONT | Thursday, December 21, 2006

inside **alive!**

UPfront

- 6 | Cast & Crew
- 8 | City Limits
- 9 | Look Alive
- 10 | The Daily Show
- 11 | Mental Floss
- 12 | News Quirks
- 13 | Extra Points
- 14 | Alive & Unedited
- 16 | Pulse



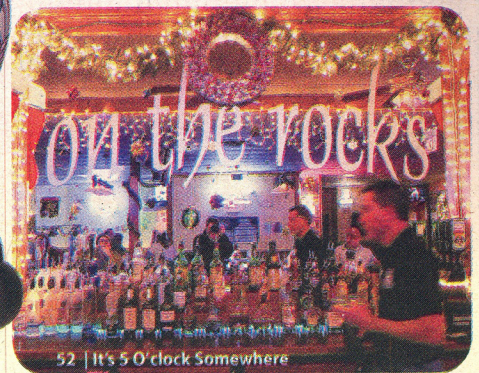
Robin Barron & John Miller
The young duo behind
CONVERGENCE,
a local personal chef and sommelier service

living
20 | Venture

ARTS & entertainment

- 34 | Artscape
- 36 | The Big Screen
- 42 | TV Diva
- 43 | Game On!

34 | Artscape
Designer Dolls
"OPERATION: FRAGMENTATION"
at Bar of Modern Art, Downtown



NIGHTlife

- 50 | About Last Night
- 51 | You've Been Spotted
- 52 | It's 5 O'clock Somewhere
- 53 | Mixologist

food

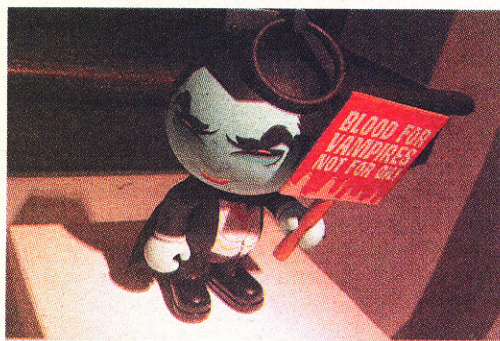
- 54 | Menu
- 55 | Taste Test



46 | Locals Only
the COLUMBUS Music Video Showcase
at Little Brother's

SERIOUS toys

BY TRACY ZOLLINGER TURNER



It is rare for your average American high school student to get much of a sense of East Asian culture from history or literature textbooks. And yet there is a constant pop culture dialogue between the two continents through things like animation, videogames, digital pets and off-the-wall game shows.

One of the trends that came to the fore in Hong Kong and has taken off in the States over the past decade is the sale and collection of designer toys. It usually begins with a vinyl doll that individual artists—whether they are already established in comics, animation or fine arts or simply toy-loving amateurs—customize with paint, resin, Sculptey or just about any other material imaginable.

While the art of designer toys isn't itself a new one, the scale of the current trend and the cyber-network of toy fiends is. And while many major cities have held exhibitions for this growing trend, Columbus is now getting in on the action, with *Operation: Fragmentation*, on view at the Bar of Modern Art through January 21.

A gift retailer by trade, guest curator Laura Kuenzli said she's well connected with many around the world in the "lowbrow and subcultural DIY art movement." Wanting to bring a taste of what's happening elsewhere to Central Ohio, she provided a white vinyl "Nade" (a featureless human figure with a grenade pin on its head) and a genuine military surplus ammunition case to about 20 individuals, many of them fine artists who had never customized a toy before.

While the general features of the doll and ammo case are the same, the resulting work is really varied. Many of the artists took the military framework of the raw materials and created offbeat protestations for peace. Mike Maas of Tempe, Arizona, turned his Nade into a protesting vampire and the ammo case into a wooden coffin in *Blood for Vampires, Not for Oil*. Seattle's Jenna "Soopajdelux" Colby created an even more child-like message with her big-nosed sad figure, holding a kitten on the precipice of her open ammo box, which reads "war kills kittens and puppies too" on its lid.

Some of the show's most ambitious pieces have a science-fiction quality, like *Professor Whistlecraft's Astounding Incendiary Automaton* by U.K. artist Doktor A. A copper-colored contraption filled with watch gears, some of which are movable, and a large, comical moustache, the automaton looks as though it stepped from the pages of a Jules Verne novel. Glass artist Todd Cameron of Minnesota made his figure's

face a window into its brain—a glass grenade—then put the entire piece into a frosted bottle.

For the Canton artist team that goes by the name "Giant Japanese Mon-

ster, Bad!" making sure that the toy remains playable was as important as giving its piece, *you get what you deserve*, the custom treatment. They cut off the head of the figure, transformed it into a monster and chained it to the ammo box, adding a bootleg cast of Skeletor from He-Man. The lawyer-by-day that makes up one half of the team has collected toys since childhood and has "every He-Man toy ever made," but he doesn't leave them untouched in a glass display case.

"People come down on different sides of the question of whether this is an art or a toy," he said. "[Kuenzli] comes down on the art side; I come down on the toy side. They're only fun if you can play with them."

Artist Walter King hadn't done much playing with toys since he was young, but his awareness of the movement grew from conversations with his painting students at the Columbus College of Art and Design. A painter, illustrator and printmaker who has shown internationally, his *Roly Poly Camo* piece is covered in white, brown and tan stencils that look like soldiers in a fetal position, creating an overall camouflage effect on the doll and ammo box, which is also filled with matching plastic soldiers.

Playing with the toy wasn't part of the framework that King considered while working on the piece. "I'm a fine artist, so I think of it as sculpture," he said. "But if you buy it, you can certainly play with it all you like."



"OPERATION: FRAGMENTATION"

WHEN: Through January 21

WHERE: Bar of Modern Art, Downtown

WEB: operationfragmentation.com