

EAST BAY express

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Between the Lines

By Rachel Swan



Bunny Suit by Nikki Shires

Local curator and photographer **Svea Lin Vezzone** met the Australian artist **Nikki Shires** last summer, right around the time Vezzone was conceptualizing Swarm Studios and Gallery, now a hip storefront salon on the cusp of Jack London Square. "She [Shires] said, 'I do art,' and pulled dozens of drawings out of her bag," Vezzone recalls. "I was blown away. They were interesting, so well executed, and incredibly narrative. I'd call them romantic. She doesn't think of something before she paints it; she just draws the lines and fills them in." Apparently Shires has a predilection for quirky subjects: characters with exaggerated, flailing limbs, people dressed in clown or bunny suits, hairy fairies, that sort of thing. She pegs them with obtuse, meandering titles that convey an elaborate scene or backstory, e.g. *Bringing in the New Year With Sausage Girls*.

Vezzone decided to incorporate the work of a few like-minded up-and-comers, including the imaginative and intentionally jarring sculptures of Richmond Art Gallery ceramics teacher **Tiffany Schmierer**, and the paintings of **Andrew Junge**, who's most famous for installing a Styrofoam Hummer in the San Francisco Exploratorium. The combination makes sense, Vezzone says, given that Junge and Shires have similar tastes. They both work intuitively, drawing lines on the canvas then filling in the contours with characters and scenes.

Swarm Gallery's new group show runs through September 3, with a reception for the artists on Thursday from 6-9 p.m. Free. SwarmStudios.net