



Sandra Pohl displays paintings by Mark Brown on the wall of the new Downtown Arts Center in Chinatown.

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## 'A DREAM COME TRUE'

Gallery owner Sandra Pohl spearheads a Downtown Art Center

By Rasa Fournier  
Special to the Star-Advertiser

Within the downtown arts district, two things are certain: Artful events are afoot, and somewhere at their epicenter, Louis Pohl Gallery owner Sandra Pohl is doing the moving and shaking.

Look behind the scenes of happenings like First Friday and Second Saturday and you'll see Pohl's hand sowing the seeds, collaborating with fellow entrepreneurs to nurture a culturally flourishing community.

On May 20 — her birthday — the 73-year-old Pohl welcomed the Honolulu Star-Advertiser to the soft opening of her newest venture, the Downtown Art Center.

The center is the elaboration of a dream that dates to 1985, when Sandy's husband, the artist Louis Pohl, retired from teaching at the Honolulu Art Academy (now Honolulu Museum of Art). He had dreams of opening an art center in Chinatown, but Pohl died in 1999, before the effort could come to fruition.

Earlier this year, Sandy Pohl and the nonprofit Creative Arts Experience, which she founded, secured space in Chinatown Gateway Plaza for a multi-artist gallery. Pohl credits Honolulu artists Su Shen and Morris Atta as instrumental in pushing the project forward, beginning in 2014, joining her in asking the city for space in Chinatown Gateway and lobbying the state Legislature for grant funding.

Pohl answered some questions about her new endeavor.

**Question:** What do you hope to accomplish with this new gallery space?

**Answer:** Downtown Art Center is a springboard. Have you heard of the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, Va.? It's a WWII factory that produced torpedoes. It's

### ART EVENT First Friday reception

**WHERE:** Downtown Art Center, Chinatown Gateway Center, 1031B Nuuanu Ave.

**WHEN:** 6-9 p.m. Friday

**COST:** Free

**INFO:** DAC-arts.com, 521-1812

**NOTE:** Beginning Monday, gallery hours are 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Friday, or by appointment.

three stories high and had broken windows, but it was transformed into a place to go, with all kinds of art shops run by artists. I went there in the '90s and loved it, and that's what a group of us have been wanting in our community. We began lobbying for a state art center, run by a nonprofit and artists, where we can have exhibits and art classes.

After working on a plan and four years of discussion with the city, Creative Arts Experience, our parent nonprofit, signed a license starting with this 1,500 square foot space. We have one large exhibit space and a few smaller adjacent rooms that will also house exhibits.

We will have our grand opening when the relocated Satellite City Hall next door opens sometime in the summer. The city gave us this space that had been sitting vacant.

What we are doing is not high end — it's open to the whole community. The people involved in making this happen are a handful of volunteers who see the project as larger than ourselves.

We want something that lasts beyond our working lifetime. We plan for it to grow into an even bigger

center with lots of exhibit areas and artist workspaces.

**Q:** What are your immediate plans for the new center?

**A:** The current exhibit is up through June, featuring work from art nonprofits like Hawaii Craftsmen and Pastel Artists of Hawaii. We're having an artists' reception on First Friday, June 7, with music by ESD: Every Single Day.

Every Tuesday beginning June 18, noon to 1 p.m., we'll have brown-bag music. Terry Oyama, whose band is ESD, volunteered to organize it. He's also programming an evening event where the art created is inspired by music (dates to be announced).

In July, we will begin having Saturday art classes.

**Q:** Tell us more about the July art classes.

**A:** They will be taught by established artists like Carol Khewhok, who will be teaching \$20 skill-based art classes in drawing, watercolor, pastel. We want people to come learn and play with us, to make stuff together. These are artists who are good with people. They have this sense that anybody can paint, which was Louis' philosophy: Everybody is an artist, we just have to bring that out in people.

**Q:** Where does your support for DAC come from?

**A:** The state gave us a \$75,000 funding stream that should start in October. Meanwhile, we've been relying on volunteers and donations. I donated shelves, and we've had chairs, tables, computers and money donated. We have a webmaster and musicians donating their time. We're seeking assistance from corporations. Honolulu Printmakers and Hawaii Craftsmen are our strategic partners.

Bringing people together is exciting. When they believe in a cause, they say, 'I

can do this,' and they help make it happen. Word gets around and next thing you know we have music in June and art classes in July. That doesn't happen when you're working alone, like with the Louis Pohl Gallery.

**Q:** Speaking of ... what's the latest with the Louis Pohl Gallery? And with you?

**A:** I'm still making a living running Louis Pohl Gallery, which I've been doing since 2002. We've relocated four times and we've been at the 1142 Bethel St. space, which I love, for seven years.

**Q:** With all you do — your gallery, the new DAC, the events you help facilitate — what motivates you to continually dive right in?

**A:** I love Chinatown. I read once that if you have events in the neighborhood, people will come. I have this little store and no money for advertising. I had to figure out other ways to get people into my store. That's what artists do.

I grew up in the neighborhood. My grandfather had a grocery store. When I was a kid, 10 years old, I used to wander all over by myself. In those days there were gypsies, and sailors falling out of the doorways in the middle of the day. You'd have to dodge them. Now I live five blocks away.

I was here before First Friday started. I helped start it. There's a problem with homelessness now, but people don't realize things used to be worse, 20 years ago. There were drugs on the streets and dealers would openly solicit passersby. ...

We have accomplished so much over the years. Now that I'm 73, I can try anything. I wish I had known that when I was 50. If you don't try, you'll never know. We've been trying to get a space for five years. We kept working at it. DAC is a dream come true.