

Things looking up in new Grass Valley gallery

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The first thing to do when you go to Julie Baker Fine Art, a new gallery in Grass Valley, is look up. Renowned conceptual artist David Ireland and gallery co-founder Richard Baker have collaborated on a ceiling installation for the space, situated in a new building in downtown Grass Valley.

The gallery promises to set a new standard of sophistication for art in the foothills by establishing a dialogue among local, Bay Area and New York artists. It's a coup to inaugurate the space with an ongoing installation by Ireland, a Northern California artist who has had many major museum exhibitions.

For their installation, titled "Overhead," Ireland and Baker have painted the ceiling tiles of the gallery in deep, saturated primary colors. It takes on a deeper quality as you notice ceiling tiles that are missing, revealing the interior workings of the building — electrical wires, and the ribs and bones of the building, splattered with paint.

"This ceiling is an abstracted version of the Sistine Chapel," said Ireland.

The gallery's inaugural show is titled "Baker's Dozen," with 13 paintings by 13 artists. It's a strong first show, with pieces ranging from New York artist

Susan Homer's lilting floral motifs in red on white to Nevada City artist Erin Noel's blocky abstraction of what might be an aerial landscape.

One of the standouts is New Yorker Tracy Miller's gutsy "Want Ads," a contemporary interpretation of the traditional Dutch still life. Another is San Franciscan Nellie King Solomon's "As Is," a large-scale diptych in red and black inks.

Chicago artist Shona McDonald offers a conceptual piece made up of the innards of envelopes torn into thin strips. New Yorker Jason Middlebrook gives us a delicate painting of surreal

biomorphic forms exploding in a kind of ecstatic dance.

The gallery has received a warm response from the local community, and will work with the Nevada County Arts Council and the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento to build awareness of contemporary art in the area.