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THE BOSTON GLOBE

Arts & Reviews

Heidi Johnson: Fun Everyday

At: O'H+T Gallery, 450 Harrison Ave.,
through April 1. 617-423-1677,
www.ohtgallery.com.

By Cate McQuaid

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Kitschy chaos

Layered chaos is also at work in Heidi Johnson's dense, bright, and comical paintings at O'H+T Gallery. There's so much going on in these paintings, a viewer can struggle to comprehend it all — or just surrender. This artist glories in paint, applying glazes and using lush brushwork and brilliant tones. Her intricate compositions boggle the mind.

And then there's her subject matter, so engaging it can easily make you lose sight of her technique. Johnson paints tropical fish (and, in one case, birds). Her paintings suggest a ridiculously crowded aquarium, in which fantastically patterned fish swim around fish-tank tchotchkes such as ceramic castles. The tchotchkes are only the beginning; they have led the artist's imagination down a path festooned with kitsch.

Look at "Fishy Santa." The pink-cheeked jolly old elf dominates, with a sack of toys at his feet and a wickedly grinning snowman at his side, along with snow-covered firs and a house in the distance. Green-and-red patterned fish add a holiday glare to the scene, swarming around Santa, who spurts blue bubbles. Johnson's work has a lighthearted



eye-candy feeling, but the sheer density of imagery unsettles. These paintings may be sweet, but they comment, in the way of a painter committed to age-old techniques, on the visual saturation of contemporary society. With a touch of whimsy, Johnson offers her own vision of life run amok.