

[Best of 2006: Arts](#)

First published in print: Thursday, June 15, 2006

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BEST PERFORMANCE ART VENUE

Nicole Peyrafitte's Experimental Cabaret at Tess' Lark Tavern

453 Madison Ave., Albany. 463-9779. <http://nicolepeyrafitte.com>;
<http://www.larktavern.com>

Yes, we know all about delightfully strange art happenings at iEAR at RPI, but Nicole Peyrafitte's Experimental Cabaret -- held at Tess' Lark Tavern at 7 p.m. on the second Monday of the month -- has been a marvelous boon to thinking-outside-the-box artists, and it's decidedly more democratic. Since the monthly shows began back in November, Peyrafitte has hosted a wide variety of unclassifiable multimedia performance art -- improv poetry 'n' dance, PowerPoint 'n' stand-up comedy, poetry 'n' live jazz, video 'n' DJ, whatever. You just never know what you're going to see and hear -- and that's the beauty of it. Ex Cab is on hiatus for the summer, but Peyrafitte promises to rev things up again for a second season beginning in October.

BEST PERFORMANCE ARTIST

C. Ryder Cooley

<http://www.carolynrydercooley.com>

It was impossible to miss her at last month's opening reception for the MFA Thesis Exhibition at UAlbany's University Art Museum. There she was: suspended in a rocking chair more than a dozen feet above the gallery floor, singing quiet, mournful songs and accompanying herself on musical saw, while a pair of silent black and white films were screened on the wall behind her. On the other walls were her drawings -- of birds, trains, portraits, deer and odd scenes -- mounted on found, weathered pieces of wood. No question about it, Cooley makes some mighty haunting and hypnotic performance art. Whether solo or in collaboration with her frequent performance partner Sarah Gonek, Cooley has definitely made her mark on the local art scene, performing at Nicolle Peyrafitte's Experimental Cabaret, Albany Center Galleries' Menagerie Art Circus, the Bing Bamboo Room, North Adams' Contemporary Artists Center, the Gasholder Building, the Spectrum 8 Theatres and various anti-war rallies.

BEST ANIMAL BAND

Evolution Revolution

<http://www.myspace.com/evolutionrevolution>

Hair of the Dog? Blackcat Elliot? Monkey Gone Mad? Nope. Good bands all, but beyond their band names, they don't really have a whole lot to do with the animal kingdom. No, the top honor goes to Evolution Revolution, led by the one and only reel-to-reel tape manipulator Jason Martin. The band not only sings Martin's quirky fauna-friendly anthems, but the floating membership of musicians also regularly performs in animal costumes, too. And they're at home in such high-art venues as MASS MoCA and the Albany Institute of History & Art, as well as such rock 'n' roll spots as Valentine's and Positively Fourth Street. Check out their self-titled five-song debut, which comes tucked inside a 50-page book brimming over with stories and drawings by Martin.

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