



Cosmo Campoli holds up a glitter-covered teakettle, a model for a children's clubhouse. The youngsters peer out of round windows on the side and play inside. The spout is a chimney. (Sun-Times Photo by R. B. Leffingwell)

A lot of fun for the environment

By Bess Winakor

Cosmo Campoli is Santa Claus in blue jeans, a 56-year-old glitter king with a long gray beard. Some people, including art critics, have called him an artist, even a genius.

His Hyde Park studio resembles Santa's Village, except the colors are glitter-covered and psychedelic hot orange, hot pink, electric blue, flaming red and blaring yellow instead of red and green. And instead of toys, there are things like a teakettle covered in a glitter design that is really a model for a children's clubhouse; an oversize ladybug, which is really a model for a children's theater, and a series of patterned models for gorilla houses with swinging doors a la an old Western saloon. There is also a real ladder and a real iron covered with glitter.

The stuff looks like props from a 1960s discotheque. And Campoli, its creator, has a naivete and optimism about him that is positively refreshing in the 1970s.

If you want an in-person idea of all this, check out Cosmo's "Spumoni Village" exhibit at Gallery 1134 at 1134 W. Washington St., beginning this Friday. Cosmo is having a free, open-to-the-public party, from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. Friday, complete with edible spumoni, strawberries, watermelon, salami and giant cookies, plus Scottish bagpipers.

The art is by Campoli and seven other artists who are or were his students at the Illinois Institute of Technology's Design Institute, or students from the Art Institute of Chicago. After the opening, the show runs Tuesdays through Sundays 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. through June 13.

But back to Cosmo's naivete and optimism.

One of the biggest things in his studio is a poster he designed for a record album cover called "All I Want to Be Is a

Bird Nested in a Tree." The record, by Cosmo, was never cut, but he still wants to replace "downer lyrics" with "upper lyrics that make people feel great" in today's music. "The age of pessimism is gone," he said. "We have to concentrate on days of optimism."

With this in mind, Cosmo wants to redesign the storefronts on South Water St. with art by children so the area will look like "a jewel from a ring" from the air.

He even got the idea and name for Spumoni Village, the exhibit, from some of his ideas for environments and teaching concepts.

A couple of years ago, he was driving to Toronto with an architect friend when he thought of making old cars into homes instead of crumpling them. Each car would be a module in a unit. A family of four could have a seven-car home. Other cars would form motels, even bridges. Cosmo called the idea Kar City.

Then he conceived Potato City, which would look something like diced potatoes, and Egghead City, where each building would be egg-shaped. His students are working now on that concept. "People would live in eggs and look out of a hole in back and watch movies," Cosmo explained.

He conceived Spumoni Village — an idea rather than an actual village — last September to teach his students about color. "I showed them Matisse," he said. He didn't help. I showed them Klee. He didn't help. So I created Spumoni Village with colors like grape, effervescent green, sky blue and dayglo orange." The concept got the color message across to his students. Now their models for Egghead City are in Spumoni Village colors.

Cosmo's glitter is to attract attention. "Don't call it glitter. Call it atomic miniscule particles," he said, laughing.