

CULTURED

How Epidemic Agency Inspires Creative Collaborations, From Studio and Sushi Bar

Written by Rachel Marlowe
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Spencer Lewis and Caitlin Lonagan

Part creative strategist, part art collector and part designer, Darren Romanelli, also known as DRx, is the king of collaborations. His Epidemic marketing agency offices in Los Angeles serve as spaces for cultural experimentation, bringing together artists and musicians with businesses and brands over his salon-style Pancake Epidemic breakfasts and, more recently, the Darren San Sushi concept he started with Chef Taka Hirano, a local fresh fish wholesaler that has devoted his life to sushi for the past 20 years. While the menu has changed over the past few years, the intent has remained the same: to provide a forum for conversation and coaction. It was here that Cultured sat down with artists and partners Caitlin Lonagan and Spencer Lewis at the Darren San Sushi x Sapporo omakase room to discuss their colliding worlds and creative collaborations.

Lonagan, Romanelli and Lewis first met several years ago at a dinner hosted by Gavin Brown and Laura Owens for Alex Katz. "Darren had so much enthusiasm," Lonagan recalls. "Then we got to know him overtime through art events." Romanelli went on to invite Lewis to work in one of the Epidemic rooms which culminated in a record book with producer, DJ and rapper Alchemist called *A DOCTOR, A PAINTER AND AN ALCHEMIST WALK INTO A BAR*. "Alchemist made music while I painted and Darren

made jackets based off my palette," says Lewis. "In the end we had an album, a bunch of paintings and a bunch of amazing clothes."



Darren Romanelli in the Darren San Sushi X Sapporo Omakase Room.

It was Lonagan who approached Romanelli about a project of her own, however. "I had these loose pieces that were different than my usual paintings," she says. "I usually work on stretched canvas and I made these works that were more modular that I had been hanging on my studio walls. I wanted to see what they would look like outside of the studio and Darren is a kindred spirit who I thought would understand the project, and that this site would enable the work to be received in a different way."

CAITLIN LONEGAN

"I was very excited," says Romanelli. "We had a couple studio visits previously, so there was already a working dialogue between the two of us." The canvases—a series of abstract meditations on color, form and gesture—now hang in the entryway of the Epidemic offices, suspended from the ceiling with a system of dowels and tulle panels. "It's the first artwork you see coming up the stairs, and it's almost a palate cleanser," he says. The location was intentional for Lonigan. "One of the things that I think happens a lot with paintings is that we have expectations of them," she explains. "I wanted to try to sidestep that by having people just to be able to walk by." For those who linger, Lonigan also installed a library in the entryway to act as a discussion around the work that includes *Conversations with Samuel Beckett* and *Bram van Velde* by Charles Juliet, *Proofs & Theories* by Louise Gluck and *What's in a Name* by Portuguese poet Ana Luísa Amaral. "Maybe this selection is my why and how to make art," she says.

Over last year's lockdown, Lonigan started XVXV, a publishing project to provide an avenue for ephemeral, small run artist projects centering on existing work that hasn't found a public. "Part of the idea is rescuing existing content that I felt artists do all the time but doesn't make it into the world," she says. It started with one of her own sketchbooks, scanned on her studio printer and bound with the help of her assistant. A book by Lewis is up next, again using existing work. "I'm excited to try to facilitate art getting out into the world," says Lonigan, leaving us to wonder if perhaps Epidemic's collaborative spirit is infectious.



The Epidemic Office Space.



Works by Lonigan Hung in the Epidemic Office.