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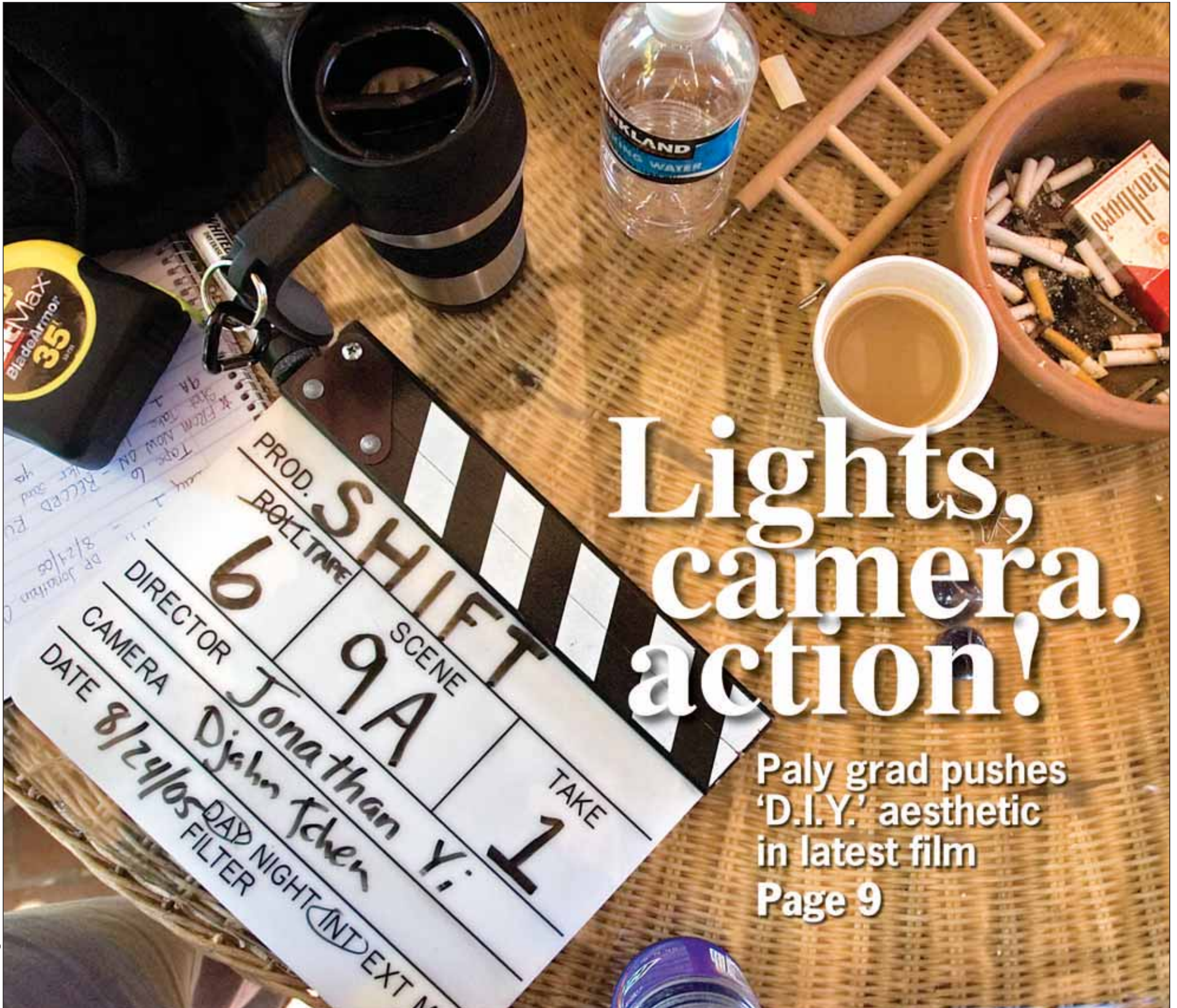
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Nicholas Wright

Where paintings and other visual art now dwell at the ART21 Gallery in Palo Alto, drama classes and plays will soon come to life, if all goes according to Meredith Hagedorn's plan.

Actors find their lair

Dragon Productions plans to lease space at the ART21 Gallery for a 40-seat theater and classroom

by **Rebecca Wallace**

A theater company has signed a lease to bring a 40-seat theater and performing arts classes to downtown Palo Alto.

The itinerant Dragon Productions Theatre Company, which has staged plays such as Sartre's "No Exit" in various Silicon Valley venues the past four years, plans to settle down at the ART21 Gallery's building at 539 Alma St. The company will be leasing 2,200 square feet of space.

"This has been my dream for a very long time. I pretty much said this was going to be the year," said Meredith Hagedorn, Dragon's founder and executive producer.

Although Hagedorn is still securing city permits for construction, she hopes to begin building the black box theater and space for rehearsals and classes this month. Classes on drawing, movement, and acting would begin in mid-October.

Ideally, the curtain will go up for Dragon's first show in the space on Feb. 23, Hagedorn said. She's already picked the play: "The Heidi Chronicles" by Wendy Wasserstein, a tale of modern women making their way through the fast-changing recent decades.

The play is a favorite with Hagedorn: "That one has been on my list for 15 years now," she said. She also chose it in keeping with Dragon's theme of staging plays that are rarely



The name of Dragon Productions came from the figurines Hagedorn has collected for years.

produced — although she conceded with a chuckle that Santa Clara Players just did it last month.

Dragon Productions — which also includes marketing manager Shannon Stowe, development director Mary Lou Torre and educational director Kay Kleinerman — has already mapped out its first full season for 2006. The planned six plays include Israel Horowitz's "North Shore Fish," from May 2 to May 21; Tina Howe's "The Art of Dining," from June 8 to July 2; and Bertolt Brecht's "The Caucasian Chalk Circle," from

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Dragon

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Aug. 3 to Aug. 27.

Before that, Dragon is staging a play at the Pear Avenue Theatre in Mountain View: "Cloud 9" by Caryl Churchill, from Oct. 13 to Oct. 30.

There's already an array of theater in the Bay Area ranging from large professional to tiny community houses, and Hagedorn says she holds Dragon to the same high-quality standards of TheatreWorks and Palo Alto Players, which both stage shows at the Lucie Stern Theatre on Middlefield Road in Palo Alto.

That theater, though, is not a convenient stroll from the restaurants



Finding a permanent home for the Dragon Productions Theatre Company has been a long-held goal for founder Meredith Hagedorn (left) and marketing manager Shannon Stowe.

and cafes of downtown, she said.

Hagedorn got hooked up with ART21 through serendipity — and a little schmoozing. At a Chamber of Commerce networking breakfast earlier this year, she spread the word that her theater group needed a home. Susan Kraft, gallery director of ART21, happened to be there.

"She came up to me afterward and said, 'I have a space. We want you in our space,'" Hagedorn said gratefully.

Kraft said a theater company is a perfect match with the gallery, which already hosts jazz concerts and poetry readings. There's also a coffee shop.

"We wanted something cultural

that didn't compete with either the coffee shop or the art gallery. We're all thrilled," Kraft said.

ART21 needed to lease out some of its space because it's going to have fewer artists displayed than before, Kraft said. Originally, Kraft was going to partner with 21 artists who would pay for using space and would be guaranteed a show there. But Kraft ended up doing the marketing for 21 artists, which was draining, she said.

For Dragon's grand plans to take place, about \$50,000 worth of construction will need to be done, Hagedorn said. Work will include building a divider wall, making a bathroom ADA-compliant, soundproofing, and bringing in theater seats.

The Internet proved to be a boon for Hagedorn, who found a host of old seats being donated on craigslist.

"Someone in the East Bay was remodeling a movie theater," she said. "He said, 'I've got 300.' I said, 'I only need 40.'"

To further support the project, Hagedorn and her crew are planning a Sept. 24 fundraiser at 539 Alma. Actors from the company's core group will perform scenes and monologues from Dragon's past, current and future shows. ■

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STRATFORD
SCHOOL



What: Fundraising event for Dragon Productions' new theater and class space in downtown Palo Alto. Actors will perform scenes and monologues, and there will be auctions and refreshments.

Where: 539 Alma St. in Palo Alto

When: Saturday, Sept., 24, from 7:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Cost: There is a suggested donation of \$40 to attend.

Info: Call (650) 493-2006. For more information about Dragon Productions, go to www.the-dragonproductions.net.