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THE GALLERY

Photographic Exposure

It's the classic Montrose story with a twist. Dilapidated old house is demolished to make room for new construction. But instead of four generic townhouses taking shape, an innovative new art space is born.

Designed by architect Fernando Brave, **The De Santos Gallery** opened October 11, 2003, and immediately added cultural cachet to an ever-evolving neighborhood. With concrete floors, oversized glass windows, simple pine staircases and a soothing lily pond, the visually arresting three-story space includes a main gallery on the first floor, office and studio space on the second and an apartment and large outdoor deck on the third that offers a sweeping view of the city. The apartment is sometimes used as a place to house exhibiting or visiting artists.

The gallery, located at **1724-A Richmond Avenue**, is a project of Luis and Gemma De Santos, longtime supporters and collectors of photography in all its forms. "We've always enjoyed art, especially photography – it's been a big part of our lives for many years," says Gemma, whose husband is a noted Houston radiologist as well as a photographer. "This is a way for us to share our love of photography with the community."

The gallery is dedicated to showcasing – and selling – work from artists who reflect the couple's own aesthetic sensibilities, rather than exhibiting what's currently trendy and "hot." Bound by no conventional guidelines, their tastes run from the classic and traditional to contemporary and emerging photographers worldwide. The result is a uniquely personal and passionate connection between the De Santoses and their chosen artists.

"It's an interesting, amazing place to be, and I've got the job I've always dreamed of," offers Gemma, whose previous careers include nursing, real estate and raising a family. "I think we're filling a necessary space in the art world, and getting more people excited about photography. And based on the feedback we've received, everyone has loved the space and the shows.

"Photography is art," she adds, explaining, "our goal is to advance it as a distinct 20th and 21st century art form. That's why, in addition to exhibiting good work, we'll play an educational role in Houston's creative community." They plan on organizing lectures by critics, collectors and photographers on a regular basis – to inform, entertain and challenge the public.

Exhibits at De Santos change every four to six weeks, so there's always something new to see and learn. The opening show featured the art of Joan Myers, a New Mexico-based photographer who works with platinum printing techniques. Myers has produced an impressive body of work in a variety of subjects from portraits of women to studies of religious rituals and local ecologic and historic events. She recently returned from Antarctica where she spent several months documenting the Austral



Luis and Gemma De Santos

Summer. The exhibit was based on her book, "**Santiago: Saint of Two Worlds**" documenting the historical pilgrimage through the north of Spain to the city of Santiago de Compostela where Saint James is buried.

Currently, Linda Butler is exhibiting a retrospective show – "**The Secret Life of Objects**." Working with a large format camera (either 4x5 or 8x10) in black and white, Butler imaginatively captures interiors and still-life images. Light creates a mysterious presence in many of her photographs and adds to the illusion of sculptural dimensionality. In the retrospective, she displays photographs from her three published books on the Shakers, Rural Japan and Italy. Her show also includes new images – many of which prominently feature glass eyeballs – from a strange, private collection in San Francisco. Her most recent photographs are from rural China.

According to Gemma, the hardest part of running the gallery is selecting which artists to feature. "It requires a lot of effort to get the right artists in here, but it's a good job to have," she smiles. If you think you have what it takes, the De Santos Gallery accepts portfolios for review. They can be submitted by regular mail or sent digitally; either way, they must be accompanied by the artist's statement. Portfolios can be returned by arranging it with the gallery.

The De Santos Gallery is open from 11am to 5 pm, Tuesday through Saturday. For more information, call 713 520 1200 or visit www.desantosgalleries.com.

**we're filling a necessary
space in the art world**

