

FINEART

A New Orleans art director opens gallery in the River Arts District

BY STAFF

An Art Gallery has recently opened in the River Arts District, managed by an experienced New Orleans Art Gallery manager, Christin Zelenka.

She left New Orleans because of Katrina and has relocated in the River Arts District where she has attracted local, national and international artists to her venue.

Their first opening is a Group Exhibit on May 5 from 5-8pm., which coincides with the River Arts District's First Friday at Five event.

Christin Zelenka, the Assistant



Group showing at the gallery

Director of a New Orleans Art Gallery for over 12 years, had first heard about Asheville from the Asheville artists that

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she represented. She missed her first chance to visit Asheville, when she drove into North Carolina, from New Orleans, three days after Katrina. She was worried that the gas shortages would prevent her from making it to her in-laws house if she stopped in Asheville.

Now, almost six months later, as she sits behind the desk of the Contemporary Art Gallery, which she recently opened, in the heart of the River Arts District, the twinkle in her eyes and easy laugh fool you into thinking it has been easy getting to this point.

She explains how she and her partner, Glenn Garson, named the gallery Bella Vista Art. "You know that 'Bella Vista' means 'beautiful view' in Spanish?" She tells how her family pitched in and gave them enough money to get back up on their feet, and how the Red Cross put them up at a motel while they looked for

a house for themselves and their two dogs.

"We came out of a horrible disaster with a beautiful view of the people around us and when we were thinking about a name for the Gallery we wanted to express our feelings from the whole Katrina experience" she says as she showed me around the Gallery. "We feel very blessed and hopeful about the future, and we chose to locate our Gallery in the River Arts District because we feel that it is a bright light of hope for the artists in the region"

When they were up in Maryland, at her in-laws house they made a decision to live somewhere that they loved and then make it work rather than just going for a job and learning to accept the place they lived. They first came down to Asheville about three weeks after Katrina, looked around and went back up to Maryland.

Two weeks after that, they moved to Asheville with everything they owned. First Christin was going to open a small Frame shop in the River Arts district, in the old Highwater Clay Warehouse, down the hill from the Grey Eagle and next to Clingman Café. She kept eyeing the 1500 square-foot space next to hers and imagining what a great Gallery space it would make. Finally, in early February, she signed the lease on the big space.

"Katrina was horrible, but turning a warehouse into this lovely gallery almost drove me to tears every night while Glenn and I fixed it up."

Now when you look around the front part of the gallery, you see the crisp clean white walls, with subtle grey trim along the edges of the stark black floors. The back of the gallery is a warm toned brick-walled sitting area with an inviting leather couch and glass tables. Behind the

Gallery is a patio framed by some orchids in the window.

"We have been lucky to attract some great local, national and even international artists" says Christin as she points out the impressive marble and soapstone sculptures by local artist Bernie Segal.

"We feel that something horrible like Katrina which took so much from us also gave us so many opportunities" she says as she gestures and points around the room.

If you would like more information about this topic, or you would like to schedule an interview with Christin Zelenka, please call Glenn Garson at (828) 768-4248 or email Glenn at: ggarson00@gmail.com