

In Verse!

JEZ gets the inside story on West Midtown's trendiest new gallery.

When making the rounds in the ATL art scene, it's unlikely that you've stumbled upon anything quite like {Poem 88}. Even its name sets it apart from the rest, which is kind of the point. Everything about the gleaming new gallery screams excitement, fun and intrigue. "I want this gallery to be available to participate in all dialogs of art," says Robin Bernat, owner and curator of the hip art destination. Originally opened in October 2010 at Tanner-Hill Atlanta Project, the collective moved to the Westside 'hood this past May.

As is immediately evident when you step inside, Bernat's invit-

ing showplace opens its arms to media of all persuasions—whether that means spoken word, performance art, film or music. One month might bring a photography show, while the next will play host to original poetry. This isn't your run-of-the-mill gallery, so be prepared for a new art experience that includes exposure to works that might be described as unusual or strange. But that's a large part of the appeal. "Their work is very challenging," Bernat says of her artists. "They're not just pretty pieces; it's also about how they're made."

And Bernat would know. She's been immersed in the art world for more than 20 years. Besides holding a long-term stint at Emory's Michael C. Carlos Museum, she's also served on the board for Art Papers and has worked with underprivileged teens at the original Image Film and Video festival (now known as the Atlanta Film Festival 365).

Now that's she's branched out on her own with {Poem 88}, she represents a dozen emerging and mid-career artists. "A lot of them were without representation and over time were reaching out to me for advice about where their art would be a good fit in Atlanta," she explains. "My focus [at the gallery] is based on the philosophy that emphasizes a solid conceptual framework and excellence in art-making."

Within Bernat's stable of artists are talents such as versatile painter and screenwriter Kristin Gorell, whose Israel-inspired works are the theme of an upcoming solo show running Dec. 3 through Jan. 21. Also included is installation artist Nancy VanDevender, whose eclectic works rely on the mixed-media hodgepodge of photography, graphic design and digital artistry—all of which combine to form vivid visual tapestries reminiscent of tattoos and graffiti (her latest exhibit, *Sex Drive*, will be on display at the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center until Dec. 18).

Then there are people like Christina Price Washington, Holly White, Phillip Buntin and David D'Agostino, all of whom work in both traditional and nontraditional formats—think painting, drawing, photography, installation and experimental filmmaking—and have pieces in museums and private collections. While the artists may not all work in the same media, they do have something in common: They're integral to the communities in which they live. "They're teachers, lecturers, professors and writers," Bernat says.

Art for the people by the people? What could be more poetic than that? 1100 Howell Mill Road, schedule appointments at 404.735.1000, poem88.net —SARAH GLEIM



The Westside's eclectic new gem. {Poem88}



Robin Bernat sets poetry in motion.

Portrait of Robin Bernat by Shannon Dobrow; gallery exterior photo by Jon Ciliberto



Installation artist Nancy VanDevender's piece "Did Did Not And If I Do" is made from several portrait and documentary photographs that she combines with graphic design imagery of graffiti and other decorative elements and then "weaves together into a visual tapestry."

David D'Agostino's contemporary landscapes are dominated by three imageries: decorative, whiteouts and post-human. The series of works represents traditional beauty at one end of the spectrum, and according to D'Agostino, "the end game of climatic calamity coupled with the beginning of a new, nascent, psychedelic beauty as depicted by the final series of paintings *Apocalyptic Harmonium*" (seen here) at the other.



"Pulling the Wool" is part of painter and photographer Sharon Shapiro's *California* exhibition, in which she celebrates female sexuality through erotic and sensual portraiture.



"There's a definite element of chance involved in Ryan Nabulsi's camera-less photographs," Bernat says. "He manipulates the chemical process of a Polaroid to achieve a photo that's not just for documentation—it's also art."



"Christina Price Washington's 'Yes? Aren't there two?' are postcards that she painted over with gouache," Bernat explains. "They are actually two still images she used to create an experimental film, 'untitled.'"

Kristin Gorell's abstract works on canvas, which depict her contrasting lives in Atlanta and war-torn Israel, are part of her solo exhibition at {Poem 88} throughout December and January.