

THE RADAR ART

BY MARK D. SULLIVAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL SWEN



HAIL THE PRINTS Amen, Bering and James and, at right, Amen's new work

PICTURE THIS

In time for FotoFest, a formerly quaint gallery goes big-time, highlighting a bold installation

When artist and gallery owner Blakely Bering met her future husband, fellow Houston artist and gallery type Austin James, it wasn't exactly love at first sight.

"We didn't like each other much," confides James. "She thought I was a dork. I thought she was a bitch. But it turned out to be completely the other way around." That said, theirs was to be an auspicious union. "We ended up getting married, and knew we wanted to be life and business partners. It's been Bering & James ever since."

The couple has run their quaint storefront Bering & James Gallery in Rice Village for four years. But now, just in time for FotoFest, they are moving and expanding in a big way—and marking the occasion with a fascinating collaborative show featuring a major sculptural work by interior designer Kelly Gale Amen and photographer Scott Griesbach.

The gallery (805 Rhode Place, No. 55, 713.524.0101) is housed in a newly renovated historic building dubbed Rhode Place Warehouse, sandwiched between hipster bistro Gravitas and the recently completed and confusingly named Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, just a stone's throw from the western edge of Downtown.

The jump to the 3,500-square-foot space from their 700-square-foot former roost is a big leap for the two artists, but they hedge their artistic bets with entrepreneurial prowess.

In its latest incarnation, the Bering & James Gallery (www.beringjamesgallery.com) is expanding the number of artists they represent, not only putting a premium on both quantity and quality, but giving themselves the flexibility to get back to the business of creating art.

"At the old space we got so carried away with being brokers," says James, "that we hardly ever had time to get our own work into the gallery.

That will change here. "We will always have a strong inventory of our work here," James adds.

The art itself is as much of a collaborative effort as the gallery. Bering—she of the local institution that is Bering's hardware—insists they wouldn't have it any other way. "In fact, we even paint on the same canvases together," she says. "In our studio we have Austin's work, my work, as well as our work."

The new space officially opens March 17 when FotoFest fans can check out the Amen-Griesbach piece. "No Shortage Here" takes the iconic symbol of an oil barrel—as rendered in a Griesbach photograph—and turns it on its head in a satire on global violence and energy consumption.

Known as the Daddy of Art Furniture with a reputation for cutting edge concept and design, Amen excitedly describes his politically expressive piece: "This year's theme [for FotoFest] is Mother Earth and Violence. I believe that violence is a byproduct of whatever is the most important commodity globally, and that would of course be oil.

"I have taken that and added silk screen onto a bench that is upholstered in plastic," he continues, giving details on the piece's cutting-edge installation. "Every veneer, every plane—the top, the knees, the legs—all have oil barrels on them. It then has a resin covering on it, which looks like oil dripping, and there are 6,000 nail heads on it to puncture it to show that it's volatile."

It's a heady debut—literally full of energy—for an intriguing new gallery. Notes Bering: "The fact we're opening our gallery with this particular exhibit just as the Enron trial is getting underway and [as city officials are] calling for more energy conservation definitely makes us feel we're on the right track." ■