

A gallery of ideas at Myrtis

New exhibition space opens with show exploring social, political climate in U.S.

By Edward Gunts
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Myrtis Bedolla, along with husband Alex Hyman, has opened Galerie Myrtis on North Charles Street. *Stars and Stripes: Pride or Despair* runs at Galerie Myrtis through Oct. 10. The gallery is at 2224 N. Charles St. Hours are 2 p.m.-6 p.m. Thursday-Saturday and by appointment Tuesday and Wednesday. Go to galeriemyrtis.com. (Baltimore Sun photo by Elizabeth Malby / September 4, 2008)

The theme was the American flag, but not all the art was Yankee Doodle dandy.

Christina Batipps showed a map of Texas with stars in the background and stripes along the southern border to indicate where a fence will be constructed to keep out illegal immigrants.

A collage by Halide Salam intersperses symbols of the American dream with scenes of tortured prisoners at the now-shuttered Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

Susan Brandt transformed an American flag into a *burqa*, a long, enveloping garment traditionally worn by some Muslim women and a sign to many Westerners of the women's oppression.

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These and other works are featured in the inaugural exhibition at Galerie Myrtis (pronounced "Mur-teese"), a new Baltimore gallery whose owner doesn't shy away from art that provides social and political commentary. To the contrary, she welcomes it.

"We're going to have the pretty pieces that you can put above the sofa," said Myrtis Bedolla, the founding director. "But we want to take it beyond that, to use art as a tool to educate and inform. I believe in freedom of expression."

With this exhibit, *Stars and Stripes: Pride or Despair*, Bedolla is planting a flag of her own.

Her gallery, which occupies the first floor of a Victorian-era town house at 2224 N. Charles St., replaces one she had on Capitol Hill in Washington.

The building is part of the Old Goucher historic district and just north of the [Station North](#) Arts and Entertainment District. Bedolla said she was familiar with Baltimore and

its arts scene because she has taken courses at the Maryland Institute College of Art and

A native of Chicago, Bedolla said she has a background in business, not fine art. Besides running the Washington gallery, she has worked as an art consultant, independent curator and artists' representative. She runs a separate arts consulting firm, called Creative Artisans, which also moved to Charles Street.

Bedolla lives above the gallery with her husband, a computer systems expert who works in Bethesda, and one of her sons. She has been renovating the gallery space for the past two years and officially opened it Aug. 30.

Bedolla said the gallery will feature contemporary works by some of the artists she represented in Washington as well as new ones - from emerging to mid-career painters, sculptors and photographers.

For the first exhibit, which runs through Oct. 10, she called for works that feature "symbolic interpretations of the flag" and "explore the current social and political climate in the United States." Artists from different religious and cultural backgrounds responded with works that celebrate and challenge long-standing notions of democracy and national pride. One recurring theme is exploring the ways American funds are used and misused under the guise of patriotism and how that affects other countries, including Iraq and Afghanistan.

Bedolla said she was delighted with the submissions.

"Artists are wonderful storytellers," she said. "While some of us are celebrating being Americans, myself included, we're also deeply concerned about what we're doing to people outside this country in the name of patriotism, the effect we're having on other cultures. All of us are very deeply concerned about what is going on. Fortunately, artists are able to express that" through their art.

As part of Bedolla's effort to make the gallery a forum for expression, all of the artists whose work is in the first show will gather there from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m Sunday to talk about the themes they explored.

For the near future, Bedolla said, she's planning exhibits on Cuban art, graffiti and works by artists older than 55, among other subjects.

Beyond that, she said, Galerie Myrtis will continue to seek artists who make thought-provoking pieces.

"We'll be pounding the pavement," she said. "Up until now, we've been concentrating on getting the gallery renovated. Now we really want to get the word out. We're here for the long haul."