

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

WEEK OF JANUARY 19-25, 2011

A GUIDE TO THE GREATER FORT MYERS ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT SCENE

"My experience of working with these colors is so varied and so engrossing, when basically I'm working with red, yellow and blue (the primary colors)." — Marylyn Dintenfass



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Marylyn Dintenfass poses before "Parallel Park," a permanent public installation at the new Lee County Justice Center parking lot.

Marylyn Dintenfass, the downtown parking garage public artist, exhibits at Bob Rauschenberg Gallery

BY NANCY STETSON

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(New York City/September) — You think you know color. You think you've seen color before.

And then you see one of Marylyn Dintenfass' paintings, and your optic nerves get jazzed and your brain cells start to rearrange themselves, and you realize you're seeing color in an entirely new way.

Like a redhead who dares to wear hot pink, Ms. Dintenfass combines colors in a way others don't.

"Even though she's using these crazy

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>>inside:

See Marylyn Dintenfass works through February 19.

C4



Caprice

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WEEK at-a-glance



Baring it all

A close look at Broadway Palm's "The Full Monty." C8 ►



Monsters among us

Imaginarium exhibit brings prehistoric creatures to life. C17 ►



Winning Pooch

A dog wins tickets to Florida Rep's "Sylvia" for his master. C23 ►

Rauschenbergs from private collection on exhibit at Naples Museum of Art

BY JAMES LILLEFORS

Special to Florida Weekly

Dr. John and Fran Fenning first met the pioneering artist Robert Rauschenberg in 1987. Over the next two decades, the Fennings established a close friendship with him, while building what is today one of the largest private collections of Rauschenberg art in the world.

The Fennings' riverfront home in Fort Myers resembles a Rauschenberg museum, with nearly 80 works by the artist dating from the mid-1950s to

2008. The exhibition "Works by Robert Rauschenberg from the Dr. John B. and Frances C. Fenning Collection" at the Naples Museum of Art marks the first time pieces from their collection have been shown publicly.

On display through March 20, the exhibition demonstrates the inventiveness,

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ROCI Announcement Print, 1984



Fabulous Mexican fare

Finding La Fogata restaurant is worth it. C31 ►

COLOR

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colors that are out of the natural palette... somehow, they work..." says filmmaker Julie Mintz, who is making a documentary about Ms. Dintenfass. "She's got these bubble-gum pinks next to the deepest, most organic, slimey greens. And it works.

"She gets color on a totally different level than anyone else I've seen."

Or, as Ms. Dintenfass likes to explain, when it comes to color, she possesses perfect pitch.

Seeing the shades in between

"I'm actually doing a whole series now called 'Perfect Pitch,'" says the internationally known artist, standing in Babcock Galleries on New York City's Fifth Avenue. "In music, it's the idea that a composer can sit and compose in his head without any reference to an outside source. With me, I can do the same thing. I can compose with color."

When she was a young girl, she thought everyone saw color the unique way she does.

"I could see a multitude of shades of color," she says. "I thought everybody (could see) the thousand shades between blue and green."

Musicians have a finite number of notes available to them, but the way they place them next to each other is what creates unique melodies. Even though everyone uses the same limited number of notes, she says, "Music can sound so different."

It's the same with Ms. Dintenfass' art.

"My experience of working with these colors is so varied and so engrossing, when basically I'm working with red, yellow and blue (the primary colors)."

Behind her on the walls in the gallery, her paintings hang alongside work by such renowned artists as Chuck Close, James Rosenquist, Andy Warhol and Wolf Kahn. The exhibit, fittingly, is called "Color Conscious."

"I think she's an amazing, amazing artist," says John Driscoll, owner of Babock Galleries, "almost a colorist without peer."

The artist herself says that in her work, color is the medium, not the message.

"In my work, all of the things are not what they seem," she says. "They're narratives. The color becomes the characters in this narrative. So there's a story there. The color is what tells the story."

One of the paintings in "Color Conscious" was also in a previous show at the gallery called "Good & Plenty Juicy," a name which would also work as an apt description of her work's succulent sensuality.

The painting's four panels form a square, three of them showing pink and white circular forms against a black background — a color she rarely uses. The colors recall the coating of Good and Plenty candy and the taste of the dusky licorice.

The fourth panel, the lower left one, shows circular shapes with greens and reds and yellows and orange, suggesting red hots and mint flavors, mixed with citrus.

"The fourth quadrant is like the annotated version," she says. "It's giving information that is not readily available in the main part of the painting. The information it's giving can be many different things. But it's another take on what's happening in the painting. It's existing with this other lens.

"All these paintings are just sections of something that's so much bigger," she says. "It's always meant to be a section of what it is."

Off the grid

Although she works with a grid, her shapes and colors buzz with so much



Marylyn Dintenfass creates vibrant paintings in her New York studio.

COURTESY PHOTO

energy they threaten to fly off the surface.

"The grid is a usual sort of containment for something that really isn't conceived to be contained," she says, "and so this grid is holding it together. The image and energy exist in a much larger plane. I like the idea of choosing what (the viewer will) see." It's merely one section of something much larger, she adds.

Her series are planned, but there's also an element of discovery in them.

"I take a look at what shows up," she says. "There's a part where you're in control and a part where you're out of control.

"There are absolutely times, especially in the case of the fourth quadrant, where what I thought would work isn't there. Then I have to wait until something shows up."

She tries different components, she says, but the painting could sit around for as long as a year or two, until the finishing piece shows up.

She's working on a new series now, called "Drop Dead Gorgeous," inspired by "these gorgeous flowers that will kill you.

"These are the things that are of interest to me, the duality of experience. To have this edge, this sense of two things happening at the same time, the duality of what the human experience is all about."

■ ■ ■

(Fort Myers/ January) — Marylyn Dintenfass' work is "luscious and scrumptious and sexy," declares Barbara Hill.

Former founding executive director of The von Liebig Art Center in Naples, Ms. Hill was public art consultant to the city of Fort Myers for almost five years. It was under her guidance that the city's public art committee commissioned Ms. Dintenfass to create a work for the Lee County Justice Center Parking Garage in Fort Myers.

The "Parallel Park" installation consists of 23 segments of Kevlar material, each 33 feet high and 23 feet wide, based upon eight of Ms. Dintenfass' oil-on-paper monotypes. They are positioned on all four sides of the garage.

"Marylyn's work was considered the most bold, the most colorful, the most vibrant," Ms. Hill says, adding she's very pleased with the completed project. "It was a terrific outcome.

"The fact that the committee and the architect and the city and the county, together, made that leap for Fort Myers, is huge, because it's a pretty bold work for a fairly reserved community. My hat's off to all of the people who made it happen."

On a garage, in a gallery

In addition to her seven solo museum exhibitions and numerous group shows, Ms. Dintenfass has created 26 public art installations at places that include the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City; the Enfield, Conn., Superior Courthouse; Tajimi Middle School in Japan; and Ben Gurion University in Israel. Her work can be found in the collections of more than 25 major museums, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City; the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington D.C.; the Detroit Institute of the Arts; the

Minneapolis Institute of Arts; and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas.

In addition to her permanent public art piece at the parking garage in Fort Myers, Ms. Dintenfass' work is on exhibit at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Edison State College through Feb. 19. The solo show displays the monotypes that served as the basis of the garage work, along with other paintings in her "Parallel Park" series.

While the works on paper are 35 inches by 35 inches, some of her panel pieces are as large as 80 inches by 80 inches. So full of light that they practically glow, their names relay the romance of automobiles as well as the artist's sense of play: "Maybellene in a Coup de Ville," "Dashboard Lights on Paradise Night," "Shiftstick, Knees, and Thighs," "Wheels Whining, Clutch Crying, Honey We Gonna Fly."

"What you see is the emotional, psychological, intellectual impact that a car has when she sees it," says Mr. Driscoll of Babcock Galleries in New York. "A car goes by, she takes in the full range of what that car is doing: the shine on the chrome, the color on the car, the smell of the leather, the sound of the engine, the oil spill that accumulates on the garage floor when it's sitting for three days. She starts to think about the experience of cars as a young person... You could find a guy and park somewhere, you could go to a drive-in movie... You could get away from everything. You could have encounters in it with others."

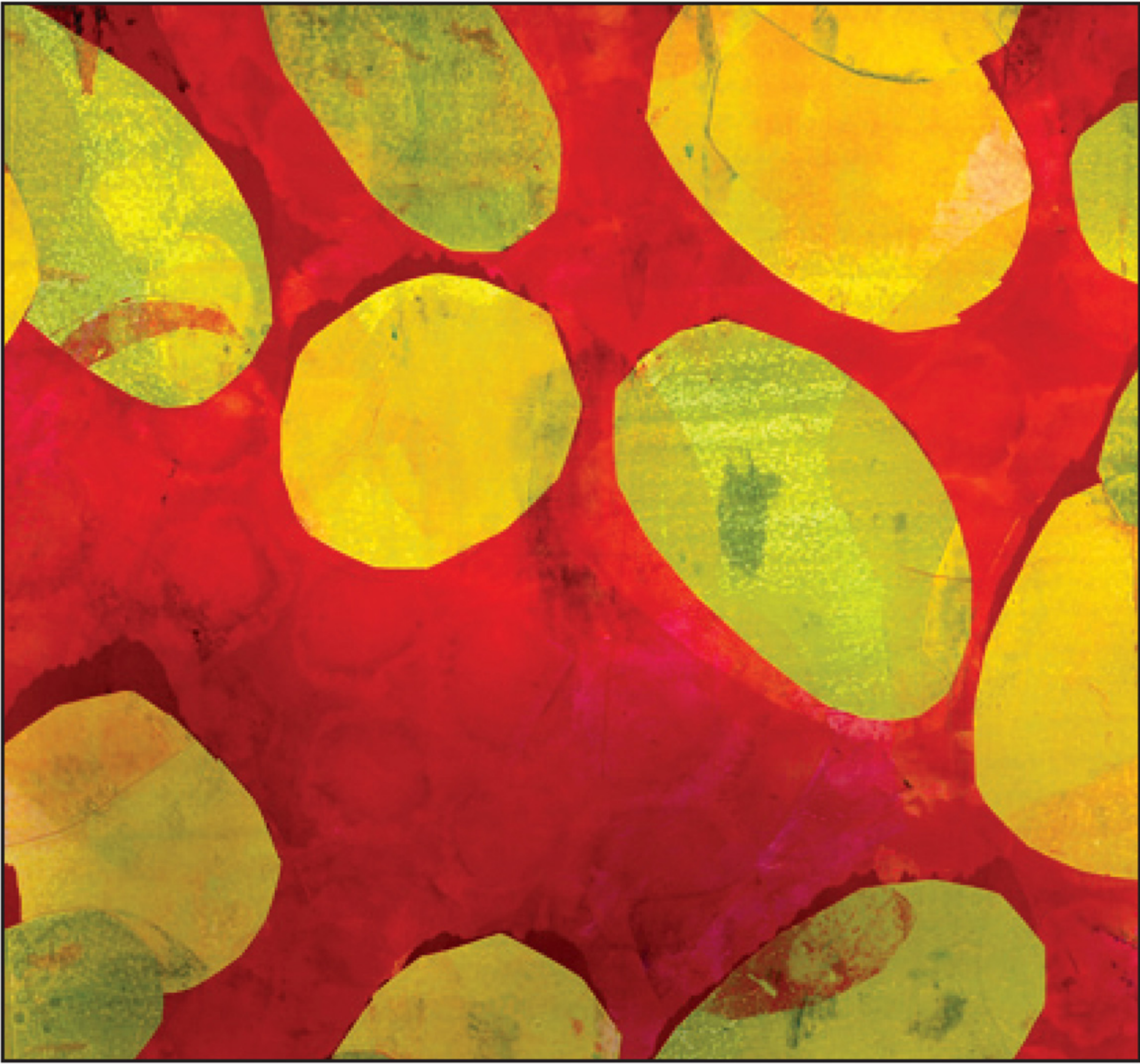
"These paintings are all autobiographical," he adds. "They look abstract to us. But to her, they're manifestations of real experiences, real thoughts, real psychological impressions."

The artist sometimes finds clues to offer the viewer in popular songs, poetry, literary passages, Mr. Driscoll says. "She offers something to get the viewer introduced a little bit to what she's thinking about," but without negating the viewer's initial impression.

For example, "Maybellene in a Coup De Ville" refers to the Chuck Berry song, and the vertical piece titled "This Side of Paradise" was inspired by a passage about a yellow Stutz Bearcat from F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Tender is the Night" — "Every book he wrote has a fast, sexy car in it," Mr. Driscoll says.

A lifelong love of cars

"Parallel Parking" opened Jan. 14, with Ms. Dintenfass giving a lecture at the Edison State College gallery to almost



Firebird

300 people. The next morning, she led a guided tour around the parking garage. People followed her, asking questions and documenting the tour by photographing and filming it.

"Her work is so luminous. That's one thing I really like about it," says Ron Bishop, director of the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery. "Light comes from those pieces. You can see the layers... of paint that contribute to that. I don't know where she finds her palette."

The works are not meant to be literal representations, he warns.

"I think that's Marylyn's playfulness and her interest in cars in general," he says. "She has a lifelong interest in cars. Growing up in the era she did, cars were hugely important in culture. I don't think we're looking at wheels or stripes on the pavement or tire tracks. It's not that literal."

"We want to identify it, regardless. That's our brain's job. But art gives us freedom to think otherwise, to step outside of the literal."

The exhibit at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery is "the place to see where the garage art came from," he says.

Ms. Hill hopes that those who see "Parallel Park" at the garage will be curious enough to visit the gallery to see

how Ms. Dintenfass' work looks on the smaller scale, on gallery walls.

"It's an interesting perspective on her work," she says, "in both ways, going from the large to the small and the small to the large."

Though Ms. Dintenfass created a site-specific work for the parking garage, she maintained the iconography for which she's known. With the energy and movement of her circular forms, "she's conveyed on the exterior what happens on the interior," Ms. Hill says.

The work is even more amazing, she says, when you consider that Ms. Dintenfass' images are enlarged and printed on a strong mesh material.

"Half of the image is not there," Ms. Hill says with amazement. "It's holes! How do you make *that* work?"

"It's pointillism in three dimensions," says art historian Aliza Edelman, who's written an essay for Ms. Dintenfass' upcoming book about the project, also called "Parallel Park."

It's a rare artist whose artwork can maintain that vitality and color that holds its own on such a large scale, Ms. Hill says.

"That's due not only to Marylyn's ability to do these images with these incredible colors, but also the printer's techno-

logical expertise in securing the ink saturation, so these colors were kept pure and maintain their vibrancy," she says. "There were some different opinions at that time, what the ink saturation should be, what percentage. It was going to be less, but Marylyn said, 'It's got to be this.' And there it was."

The printer used archival ink on the panels, which are also laminated and coated with UV protection. They're extremely strong, created to withstand hurricanes and flying debris.

Depending upon the time of day, time of year and the angle of the sun, the panels always look different. At night, when backlit, they seem like ghosts of their daytime selves.

Ms. Dintenfass' solo exhibit at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery gives the community an opportunity to become more familiar with her work on a more intimate level. It's even more complex when seen as oil on paper or panels, with various layers and detail that can't be seen on large banners.

"She really gets us with light and color," Mr. Bishop says. "That's the invitation. What you find after that is the master behind her work..."

"The scale she works at certainly allows us to find a lot of detail. It's the luminosity, the veils of those layers and how the light is allowed to pass

through and spark them, that allows us to enjoy them."

Mr. Bishop is pleased to host the exhibition just a month after the official dedication of Ms. Dintenfass' public art piece downtown.

"I thought it was a really nice opportunity to not only show a really strong artist's work, but to also have that link to the community," he says, adding that although the pieces in the gallery are much different than what's on the parking garage, gallery visitors definitely will recognize where the garage art came from.

As Mr. Driscoll says, "It's just delicious color." ■

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in the know

- >> "Parallel Park: Marylyn Dintenfass," a solo exhibition
- >> When: through Feb. 19
- >> Where: The Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, Edison State College, 8099 College Parkway, Fort Myers
- >> Cost: Free
- >> Info: 489-9313 or www.bobrauschenberg-gallery.com

