

MIDTOWN

Two art events join forces on Saturday

By JENNIFER FRIEDBERG

CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

Almost a decade ago, when Art Supply and Art Square Studios opened in Midtown, the neighborhood was an urban wasteland compared to what it is today.

The store had been located at Richmond and Montrose for 40 years until the landlord sold the building and co-owners Vikki Trammell and her husband Ben Russell began looking for space.

"This building was just crying to be something," Trammell said of the space the store and studios now occupy at 2711 Main St. "Initially people thought we were crazy. Now they say, 'boy were you smart.' We're on the (Metro) train line, there are new condos and all of this activity, and the Midtown Management District keeps the business community thriving."

Trammell and Russell bought the building in December 1997. Following renovations, they opened the store and began leasing the artist studios in 1999.

They were originally interested in the building because it was affordable, but since moving in they have found it to be a great location between downtown and the Museum District that has gotten better as the neighborhood has improved.

"It's always good for galleries when there is combined living and business in the area," Trammell said.

Ninth year

That first year they also began the Midtown Visions Cultural Arts Tour. The ninth annual event is Saturday from noon to 5 p.m.

This year the tour is being combined with Art in the Park, a Midtown arts festival in its second year, on the same day. It is being hosted by the Midtown Management District at Elizabeth Baldwin Park, on Elgin at Crawford just south of downtown.

Organizers hope both events will showcase the arts scene in Midtown.

"I think people just don't know it's here, that the art community is so vibrant in this



COURTESY ELIZABETH SMITH

ON DISPLAY: Elizabeth Smith is just one of the artists whose abstract oils on canvas will be showcased on the Midtown Visions Cultural Arts Tour on Saturday. Shown is a detail from a work entitled *Within the Daybreak's Pink*.

AT A GLANCE

Midtown Visions Cultural Arts Tour

■ **When:** Saturday, noon to 5 p.m.

■ **Where:** Art Supply and Art Square Studios, 2711 Main St.; Community Artists' Collective and Midtown Art Center, 3414 La Branch; Houston Community College Central College Fine Arts Department (students' works will be displayed at Baldwin Park); Lawndale Art Center, 4912 Main; Inman Gallery, 3901 Main; Station Museum of Contemporary Art, 1502 Alabama; Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, 4848 Main; The Ensemble Theatre, 3535 Main; FineSilver Gallery, 3913 Main; Diverseworks' *This Old House*, 1625 Alabama at Almeda; and CTRL Gallery, 3907 Main.

Art in the Park

■ **When:** Saturday, noon to 5 p.m.

■ **Where:** Elizabeth Baldwin Park, Elgin at Crawford just south of downtown

For more information, visit www.midtownvisions.com or the Management District Web site at www.houstonmidtown.com and look for Art in the Park under "Midtown Updates."

neighborhood," said Cynthia Alvarado, the district managing director who is organizing Art in the Park.

About 38-40 artists will showcase their works at Art Square Studios during Visions

and about 28 will be at Art in the Park. With 11 other venues participating in Visions, pieces from more than 100 artists will be on view within a 3-mile radius.

Artist Elizabeth Smith, who

has been renting space at Art Square Studios since it opened, said she has watched the growth unfold in Midtown. She has also enjoyed the community atmosphere at the studios.

"It's really open and everybody is real low key about what they do," she said. "There are people of all levels. There are people like me who they call 'mid career' along with students just starting out."

Smith's abstract oils on canvas will be showcased on the Visions tour. She has been part of the tour every year since its beginning.

Abstract atmospheres

Many of her pieces this year are landscape-influenced.

She describes her work as, "abstract atmospheres that I hope the viewer feels invited into."

"(Inspiration comes from) every scene I look at when I ride the rail and get flashes of images and I get a lot of inspiration from the natural world."

Both Visions and Art in the Park will include works by a range of participants — from beginners to seasoned professionals — as well as collectors' pieces along with more affordable options.

"It's a great way of seeing a broad spectrum," Trammell said.

"Everyone should have the opportunity to have art in their home that's not a poster print," Alvarado said.

Art in the Park has expanded this year from 22 artists to about 28, but Alvarado said there is a committee that selects the artists involved and "we did tell some people no this year."

"It's a really well-rounded group," she said. "It truly is a fine arts festival. It's not a crafts fair."

They made sure everything is hand done, and nothing is imported or mass-produced, Alvarado added.

There will also be several art cars to view at Art in the Park along with a GEM electric car. The tip-based service Ricky Rickshaw Rides will be out to bring visitors to the different studios. Many of the studios are also along the Metro line.