



STEPHEN SALPUKAS

# The Image Thief

The photography of Miami's Elena Ehrenwald adds stillness to a globe-trotting gallery. **by Brandon Reynolds**

**T**he Gallery Art & Design is a cappuccino in disguise: rich, bringing in elements from distant places and, as owner Amalia Pizzardi says, working best in small portions. "I prefer very few things with artists who can guarantee quality," she says. Pizzardi, who's likely to offer you a cappuccino in an irresistible accent (a marriage of her time spent in Mexico and Italy) started the first Gallery Art & Design in Mexico City in 1994 as a response to what she saw as cultural neglect. The gallery became a home for talented international artists living in Mexico, a model that was replicated in Milan when Pizzardi moved there in 2001. She established a gallery here when her family moved to D.C. (she found Richmond more exciting than D.C. and has another home in Goochland). A "good Italian wife," she says with a laugh, she refuses to settle, splitting her time between her galleries, seeking art with more than decoration as its goal. The gallery's latest show, "Latin Ambience," reflects her desire for "talented artists with a precise message," bringing together three photographers — Elena Ehrenwald, Viviana Peretti and Lissette Solorzano — with images of Mexico, Colombia and Cuba that are far from the happy photos of tropical beaches. Ehrenwald was up from Miami for the opening of the show.

**Style:** What draws you to photography?

**Ehrenwald:** Photography for me is just like painting. Actually, photography is painting with light. ... I recently had a big exhibition in the Mexican consulate in Miami ... and the theme was "The Prison of Memory." Which is really a thing that comes back to me all the time because I am a person that always tends to

hold on to the past and to memories. And it keeps me awake at night. I mean, what's the function of memory? Is it really useful to hold on to your older memories? It weighs you down? Or is it something that you use to go forward and look into the future? I don't have the answers, I just make the images that go with recollections of the past, of my country, of past experiences, and that really shapes my life and my own landscape.

*A lot of the landscapes are dusty or foggy. What is the function of the mist?*

It's not dust, it's just a way of making these images a little bit surreal. I always imagine that these images come from my dreams. ... And that's why I give them that effect of fogginess. Sometimes they're out of focus intentionally because I just feel that

dreams are like that: They come and go, and sometimes they're so real and sometimes they're not. Some of my images have [a few] different negatives, so it's actually a landscape that doesn't exist.

*When you're out there looking for the scenes or the people, what is it that catches your eye?*

It's just a matter of instinct, I guess. ... Sometimes I think I see things that are there that other people just don't see. I mean, it's there, but you just aren't drawn to it as I am. It's not very intellectual; it's a matter of instinct that I see something and it has to be mine. I have to take it. And I take it in the camera. **S**

*"Latin Ambience" is on display at The Gallery Art & Design, 16 S. Dooley Ave., through March 19. 355-0102.*

**Mexican-born artist Elena Ehrenwald's shots are part of an exhibit of dreamy, foggy and surreal photographs of Latin America at Carytown's The Gallery Art & Design.**