



Photos from a different angle

by Paul E. Kandarian

EDITOR'S NOTE: Here is another portrait of an artist, continuing our ongoing series of articles on area artists you may not have heard about but are well worth noting, or about cool art galleries or other artistic entities. To pitch the idea of a story, contact Paul Kandarian at pkandarian@aol.com

If you think Denn Santoro takes weird pictures, it's all right with him. You wouldn't be the first to notice.

Santoro, now 53, was a high school kid in North Attleboro when he joined the yearbook staff looking to take photos and learn about shooting. He was given a camera by the photographer in charge of photos and whipped off a few rolls. When the guy developed them, he called Santoro to his office.

"He said, 'You've got a really weird eye,'" Santoro recalls proudly. "I studied with that guy and have been shooting ever since."

Lucky for him, and those art lovers who appreciate weird—and wonderful—photography. Santoro's stuff is mostly of buildings, but buildings in ways you don't usually look at buildings.

"My photos focus on the interplay of shapes and angles and light," he says from his Rochester home, which doubles as his photographic base of operations and also headquarters for his other business, Resource Development Associates, a management consulting company.

"I see things differently than most people. I like to show you the world in a way you're not used to seeing. I like to get people to puzzle over things."

One of his most enigmatic photos is of the Academy Building in Fall River, an architectural masterpiece built in 1876, a stairwell of which Santoro captured in such a marvelously angular way that makes the viewer feel like he's looking up. Or down. Or somewhere in between.

For the record, you are looking down, even though it seems to be a ceiling you're looking at up there. Or down there, seemingly. Confusing, yes, much to Santoro's artistic delight.

"I like shooting things that are visually interesting but perceptually difficult," he says.

Case in point is "Let's Take the Elevator," a photograph titled for the question you ask when looking at it: What the hell is that, a staircase? Maybe? Yes, it is, snapped at a very odd angle at the Institute for Contemporary Art in Boston. The photo is totally open to interpretation—as art is meant to be.

Santoro's work isn't all bizarre-angle shots of walls and stairs. He does gorgeous photos of more recognizable structures, such as churches and stoops and cathedrals; Santoro loves to travel, always has, and some of his most prolific and profound work is of buildings in Europe.

He doesn't use Photoshop or any other photographic retouching tool. What you see is what he—and his camera—saw. It's a simple elegance represented in stark black and white or warm color.

For many years out of college, Santoro focused mainly on his work—management consulting, rather than his photographic hobby. A serious accident in 1997 led him to rethink his priorities.

"The accident made me think 'why am I doing other stuff rather than photography,'" he says about weighing the vocation versus avocation crisis. "I still run Resource Development Associates, but I'm doing photography more than ever."

He does some commercial photography, though prefers the more artistic side of his craft. He doesn't do weddings—much, though he has done them. And he's not a photographer of "sunsets and kittens," he says, but takes nothing away from those who are.

"The trick," he says, "is finding your audience."

He has exhibited near and far and one of his most interesting showings is going on now. It is "Re-Visions: Explorations in Black and White Painting and Color Photography," with artist Kim Gatesman, now showing through Aug. 28 at the Metropolitan Gallery at Boston University.

This is a preview of work for a larger show the pair of friends is developing for 2008 and which is slated to be shown at the Alexey von Shlippe Gallery at the University of Connecticut March 6-April 19, 2009.

Santoro is also a member and current president of Gallery X in New Bedford, where work is underway to improve the space physically and exhibitions and events it hosts, including the recent rehab of the Douglass gallery, the ceiling in the main gallery and a mural behind the stage in the main gallery.

The gallery will also host "Walking on Water," a show by the Hancock County Mississippi artists displaced by Hurricane Katrina, scheduled for August at the storm's second anniversary.

As if that plate isn't full enough, Santoro is also a musician, a singer-guitarist who plays at open mike events such as held by Café Arpeggio and New Wave Café, both in New Bedford.

Asked what he'd like to be doing in the future, Santoro says with a smile and a shrug, "I'm doing it now."

For more information on Santoro and his work, visit www.densantorophoto.com

Artist's note: A fine article although that really is a ceiling and I'm not that old