

American University Museum exhibit focuses on the past's impact on the present

by Aaron Leibel
Arts Editor

It's all about time. That's the context for photographer Gail Rebhan's exhibit, *A Cultural History of My Neighborhood: Photo Collages*, at the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center in the District through May 15.

A related public art project consisting of four large photo collages is on display in the windows of an empty building at the corner of Brandywine Street and Wisconsin Avenue, in Northwest Washington.

"It's a nonjudgmental look at neighborhood change and development, showing how the past impacts the present," says the District resident.

The neighborhood in question is Tenleytown-American University Park-Friendship Heights, the second oldest in the city.

For example, she notes that one of the collages shows a building, which is now a Best Buy, when it was a Sears store. The building is surrounded by newspaper articles about the site and a quote from someone who remembered it as a bar before it became a Sears

store.

"The exhibit focuses attention on different uses of land," she says.

It shows "how neighborhoods evolve," the professor of photography at the Woodbridge Campus of Northern Virginia Community College says. "The buildings reflect the needs and values of the neighborhood at the time."

One site, for instance, which was once the Washington Home for Foundlings, is now a retirement community.

The exhibit also shines a light on the nature of society, the Temple Sinai member says, noting, for example, that

It shows 'how neighborhoods evolve'

a listing of businesses in 1943 includes two laundries, one for black people and

one for white people, testifying to Jim Crow laws then in effect.

But there are economic perspectives as well, Rebhan, 57, says, pointing to the replacement of laundries with restaurants in the area.

The collages combine historic and new photographs, newspaper articles, telephone books and other artifacts.

The four public art collages are: An artistic composition on the intersection of Albemarle Street and Wisconsin

Avenue, N.W.; the Friendship Terrace Retirement Community building; Brandywine Street and Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.; and a site across the street from the Brandywine and Wisconsin intersection. The public art project is a collaboration among Rebhan, the museum and Iona Senior Services.

There are 15 collages at the A.U. museum.

Rebhan, who has a bachelor's degree from Antioch College and a master's degree in fine arts from the California Institute of the Arts, has exhibited her work across the country, including in the Washington area at the Corcoran Gallery of Art; the Luther Brady Gallery, George Washington University; McLean Project for the Arts; and Pyramid Atlantic in Silver Spring.

Currently, her photos also are in an exhibit, *Women of the Book: Jewish Artists, Jewish Themes*, at the Park School in Baltimore through April 14.



The photo collage "Albemarle Street and Wisconsin Avenue, NW, 1949/2009" from the exhibit at the American University Museum at the Katzen Center