

INTERVIEW BY SHAWN O'SULLIVAN

THE RALLS COLLECTION MARSHA RALLS

■ **MARSHA RALLS** lives with art, ensconcing herself above the gallery in the Georgetown townhouse where the Ralls Collection resides, and where she exhibits paintings, sculpture, photography and prints of many of the world's most renowned artists, about half of them photographers. Raised in Texas, Ralls, like many of her fellow Washingtonians, has become a citizen of the world, and her gallery and business interests reflect that. Appointed commissioner of the arts and humanities for the city of Washington, she champions funding for the arts, and has also traveled to Shanghai, Bangkok and Beijing—Washington's sister cities. She is heavily involved in issues regarding children, education and human rights. An avid mountain climber and marathon runner, she climbed Mt. Rainier in 2001, and recently scaled the Grand Tetons with her two sons to raise money for Tibetan artists in exile. She has just opened an office in Dubai, where she is working with corporations and hotels to feature fine artists from the U.S. as well as the local community, and is also involved in the first ever Gulf Art Fair, March 8 to 10, 2007. An inquisitive and enthusiastic traveler, art is her way of both approaching the greater world and drawing it in. She thinks globally and acts locally.

■ **B&W:** *When did your interest in art photography begin?*

■ **RALLS:** I was inspired by Robert Rauschenberg. I met him on my first trip to Washington in 1986 while attending his exhibition at the National Gallery. A year later, I went to work for him part-time in his New York City studio. Later



I landed a full-time position at Sotheby's. I worked there for two years in various departments throughout the company. Photography was just emerging as a hot medium to collect. It was at this time, more than 15 years ago, that I became interested in photographs. I opened the gallery in 1991.

■ **B&W:** *Who are some of the photographers you represent?*

■ **RALLS:** Most of the photographers that I've been showing have been with me a long time, 10 or 15 years. Many of them work in black and white: Sally Gall, Michael Kenna, Tom Baril, O. Winston Link, for instance. I love black and white photography, but I also exhibit color work by Carol Beckwith, Angela Fisher, James F. Dicke II, and Kenneth Parker.

■ **B&W:** *Now that prices are sky-high, can one still start a collection?*

■ **RALLS:** Absolutely. Photographs by the world-renowned Michael Kenna start at \$1,500. Of course, his prices can also reach well over \$10,000, but if you collect early he's quite affordable. Most of my contemporary photographers are in the \$500 to \$5,000 range.

■ **B&W:** *What prompted you to open up to other countries?*

■ **RALLS:** I love to travel. So many people started their collections from traveling—going to different countries and bringing back artifacts. I enjoy going to a new place and discovering the creative community. There are always exciting new finds and of course the opportunity to meet established masters as well. Often,

when traveling or doing business aboard, I look for different ways to share the art and culture that I have experienced, whether to bring attention to the lack of freedom of expression of the people of Tibet, for instance, or to show emerging artists of other countries. I think China and the Middle East are both exploding with energy and creativity.

■ **B&W:** *So, what you're saying is that art and politics do mix?*

■ **RALLS:** Most of the artists I show are American, but because I have so much interest in human rights and other causes, I will do special exhibitions. I curated a wonderful exhibition both for the gallery and the United Nations that featured four *National Geographic* photographers who documented indigenous cultures. I'm doing a show in DC this spring of artists from the United Arab Emirates. When the political arena changes, there is always an explosion in the creative expression. I definitely have an interest in international affairs and have spent years encouraging entrepreneurship. In fact, this spring I will chair the NFTE (National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship) *Dare to Dream Gala* in DC, supporting the next generation of entrepreneurs. Yes, I do think that the arts can help save the world. Art is organically grown. It is the soul of a community.

■ CONTACT INFORMATION

The Ralls Collection
1516 31st Street NW
Washington, DC 20007
Phone: 202.342.1754
Email: maralls@aol.com
Web: www.rallscollection.com