

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



Ellie and Mehrdad Samimi, Orinda gallery owners.

Sun photo/Trent Nelson

New gallery will feature old masters' styles

By Dorothy Bowen

People in the Sun editor

Forget Picasso. Ignore Renoir. The new gallery, Samimi Art Gallery, in Orinda Village will deal entirely in the beauty and realism of the old masters, say owners Ellie and Mehrdad Samimi. She is director of the gallery and he is featured artist of the first show.

The grand opening of the gallery will be Thursday evening, Feb. 27, 5 to 8 p.m. at 105 Orinda Way, Orinda.

The opening show spotlights the work of Mehrdad Samimi who employs the rich colors and sensuous details of a Rembrandt. Later the gallery hopes to show the work of other local artists, but not the avant garde.

"I'm not into abstract," says Samimi. "I've never been able to understand it."

GALLERY OPENING**Who:** Samimi Gallery**Where:** 105 Orinda Way, Orinda**When:** 5-8 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 27**Call:** 254-3994

He has painted since he was 12 years old, trained by his father, Reza Samimi, an oil painter and royal portraitist.

Samimi attended the University of Arizona from 1959-1964 and received a degree in architecture. He was project architect for redevelopment in Oakland and in charge of the restoration of Victorian buildings in Oak Center. From his office on West Grand Avenue, he worked on many custom homes in the Bay Area. But that side of his career is behind him now.

"I want to be known as an

artist," he says.

He describes his style as classical pre-impressionist and works on landscapes, still lifes, scenes of childhood and commissioned portraits.

The Samimis have lived in Lamorinda for 25 years. Previously his work has been available in galleries in San Francisco and Vancouver. He has traveled to Germany, England, Canada, and Los Angeles to work on commissioned portraits. His work once even took him to Abu Dhabi to do a portrait for a doctor's wife he had met in London. He won't be going back, he says, because of the unstable political conditions.

Situated for browsing, the renovated gallery is located across from the golf course, between two antique stores, and within steps of coffee shops and restaurants.