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Exhibit reflects downtown dance club

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Daily newspaper review of O'Grady's video installation *Persistent*, at Artpace, San Antonio, TX, July 2007. A work on dance, music, economics, and race that recalls O'Grady's own past as a club dancer and rock critic.

New York artist Lorraine O'Grady has memorialized the Davenport, the downtown club that once occupied the space at North fSt. Mary's and Houston streets and featured the city's most innovative DJs.

You can dimly perceive dancers who seem to be floating in the air inside the dark club with heavily tinted windows and throbbing music set up in a downstairs gallery at Artpace. The installation, titled "Persistent," is part of "New Works: 07.2."

"It's becoming a familiar story when the cost of real estate collides with parts of the culture that don't always fit the landlord's agenda," O'Grady said. "I was responding to a story I read about the closing of the club. It seemed like one of the places in the city where all the races came together to dance."

An African American artist who often deals with racial issues, O'Grady early in her career became somewhat infamous as *Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire*, a whip-cracking alter ego who attacked racial divisions in the arts. She just finished spending five years teaching studio art and African American studies at the University of California-Irvine.

Recent projects include an examination of the relationship between the French writer Charles Baudelaire and his Haitian

wife, Jeanne Duval, and a "Miscegenated Family Album," about the resemblance of the women of O'Grady's family to the Egyptian queen Nefertiti.

Photo: Artist in residence Lorraine O'Grady looks in on her video installation at Artpace recalling the Davenport, a downtown dance club.

"But I never do the same thing twice," O'Grady said. "For San Antonio, I just started Googling things I was interested in. At first, I started thinking about doing something with cowboy boots, but when I looked further and found out about the Davenport, I decided it was a story I could relate to because I started out as a rock critic.

"Now the music they played at the Davenport isn't my music, but I can see how it helped to bring a lot of diverse people together."

O'Grady managed to track down a dozen dancers who appeared at the club with the help of Jay Lopez, who works as a DJ when he's not manning the reception desk at Artpace. She also salvaged some of the club's furniture, which is part of her installation.

"I tried to re-create the sensation of standing on the corner of St. Mary's and Houston and hearing the music inside the club," she said. "Getting the tint right on the windows was the hard part. I didn't want you to be able to see too well, but I wanted you to be able to see OK."

The dancers were videotaped in front of a green screen, used for special-effects photography, inside a commercial video studio. The dancers are projected onto three walls inside the gallery space. But for the front, O'Grady created an almost perfect reproduction of the big windows that were one of the club's most distinctive features.

The windows are tinted so dark that it's practically impossible to see inside without cupping your hands around your head and pressing your face against the glass. But if you stand back, the dancers appear like ghostly figures floating in mid-air, moving in sync with the relentless techno beat.

Lorraine O'Grady's "Persistent" runs through Sept. 9 at Artpace, 445 N. Main Ave., (210) 212-4900, www.artpace.org.

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