

Fotoseptiembre attracts international shutterbugs

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Courtesy  
Fotoseptiembre exhibits include work by (from left to right) Julie Johnson and Marcelo Isarrualde.

Bring your digital cameras, your pinhole cameras, your telephoto lenses, your fisheye lenses, even that old-fashioned negative film.

In September, San Antonio becomes photog central and all are invited. Just don't expect to see a bland slideshow of last year's vacay to Hawaii.

Fotoseptiembre USA brings an influx of international artists and strong showings by local photographers. The name of the game: experimentography. Festival Director Michael Mehl is happy to showcase more experimental pieces and eclectic bodies of work than in years past.

"This year, there is more of what we want to see, which is the experimental, the personal," Mehl said. "More people are showing their personal sensibilities, their personal aesthetics."

Photo hounds will be happy to know that some festival exhibits open in August and others last well into October. In total, the festival will showcase 100-plus photographers at exhibitions in San Antonio, Boerne, New Braunfels, Fredericksburg and Kerrville.

Mehl also believes the festival is bettered by a strong international contingency, a growing aspect since the festival's birth in '96.

"It evolved pretty much from being a local event with some international links to being a full-fledged international festival," Mehl said.

Those international links are an obvious part of the festival's signature exhibits at the Instituto Cultural de Mexico, which include work by artists from Russia, Japan, Spain and beyond.

One such artist, the Canadian-born Nathalie Daoust, will exhibit a series of photos called "Frozen In Time," taken in the Swiss Alps. Her dreamlike images portray human forms crumpled or positioned askew in mountainous settings. She created the photographs using medium format pinhole cameras. She then printed and hand-colored the black-and-white photos.

Daoust said the photographs represent her memories.

"Last year, I was dealing with some past issues," Daoust wrote in an e-mail. "While I was dealing with this problem, old memories and feelings came up, almost the same feeling as when you look at your old photos. But I didn't have old photos to look at. And these memories are so old, that I am not sure what is accurate anymore. I remember only small parts of the moment or what I was told.

You plant the seed...

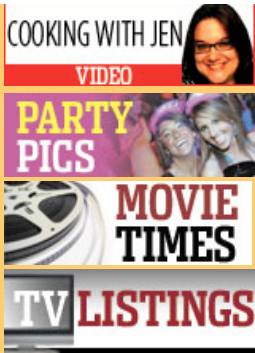
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With my photos, I was slowly creating my own memories of what had happened, in a way a bit of art therapy. It's almost as if I needed to have a visual memory of this." Part of the draw for international photogs may be the exposure they receive, not just in exhibition, but also on the Web site. The Fotoseptiembre USA site gets several hundred thousand unique page views per month, "which is not like YouTube million stuff, but in photography festivals, it's a lot," Mehl said.

But work by local artists isn't getting left behind in the darkroom. Mehl said the exhibition schedule is loaded with experienced and budding photogs from the area, such as Jennifer Khoshbin, Leonard Ziegler and Marianna Urrutia.

Ziegler has spent 28 years as the photographer for San Antonio College, but has transitioned into more experimental work recently.

"Ever since we went digital, I discovered that I have more freedom, and I'm not tied down with cost as far as creating illusions with my photography," Ziegler said.

Through his work, Ziegler also gets down to the essence of what it means to be a photographer in San Antonio.

"A lot of it is collage of people and places I've been to around San Antonio," said Ziegler of his upcoming show at Louis J. Blume Academic Library gallery at St. Mary's University. "It's about photographs that portray my vision of San Antonio growing up. It's not tourist-brochure correct. I just included the places I had fun as a kid that my parents used to take me. It's also a labor of love, honoring my parents and my environment ..... everything here that has influenced me."

Come September, Ziegler will be in good company as SA is transformed into shutterbug city.

Jennifer Lloyd | 210SA

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