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Breaking new ground

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Photography veteran Al Rendon is making a statement during Fotoseptiembre 2009, and he is doing it with new blood ready to make this a 'carnival' to remember.



Work by Kat Brown (left) and Ray Seabaugh (right) (Photo/courtesy)

Al Rendon does not easily succumb to the butterflies of an artist's first gallery show. After 30 years of professional photography, it is difficult to find butterflies of any sort. Such is not the case for his up and coming talent.

With Fotoseptiembre 2009 rolling along with a gaggle of exhibitions, the national photo festival makes a stop at Rendon Photography and Fine Art with *A Carnival of Messages*—a three person show featuring Kat Brown, Ray Seabaugh and Bruce Shackelford that runs until October 25.

"We've been getting more and more calls for exhibits and the media to review those exhibits," said Rendon. "I've been with Fotoseptiembre for the 15 years it has been going on either by showing or bringing artists here from across the world. I think it has always been this big, but it's finally reaching a critical mass to where everyone is starting to take notice."

Despite the growing number of venues poised to display festival-accepted artists, simply deciding who gets wall space is only getting harder. Thus the coup of displaying three photographers who have had limited exposure on the professional stage. The strong paean coming from Rendon is reason enough to temper the usual cynicism of those looking for more seasoned talent.

Under conventional circumstances, Brown, Seabaugh and Shackelford are not usually artists displayed together. The barren and contemplative western landscape, the whimsy of something as profound as death itself and the collage-inspired surrealism of the group show is as jarring as it is fearless. In many ways, rewriting the rules of user-friendly art festivals has characterized Fotoseptiembre since its inception.

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"Ray Seabaugh is an artists that has never had an exhibit before," continued Rendon. "For his first exhibit, he has already sold well. It's gotten great response from the public since this is the great opportunity to get started in his art career. Second of all, we have Bruce Shackelford who has quite career and is an appraiser on the Antiques Road Show and a curator at the Witte Museum of Art."

Like most artists, Kat Brown's career started in earnest with similar intentions to grow into her own after maturing as a photographer. Yet making the rounds in San Antonio galleries was only the beginning for Rendon's former pupil.

"Kat Brown is a young artist that came to work for me as an intern and has worked to develop her craft," explained Rendon. "She has become a well-known and respected craft photo artist here in San Antonio. This is her third time exhibiting in my gallery. This is the first time that any of these artists have shown for Fotoseptiembre. I always want to make sure that I'm showing only work of high quality."

For all its collective milestones, consider Fotoseptiembre the brainchild of festival director Michael Mehl. Coordinating 230 artists is no easy tasks and it's made that much harder when that involves 62 venues across the country. Ambitious? Yes. Impossible? No. The dedicated staff that has been at the forefront of the annual festival only looks to grow. The only impossibility might have been imagining the international flavor it now encompasses.

"Michael Mehl was the first person to have this concept of a photo festival in San Antonio and he's been instrumental in bringing artists that have never shown in the city," contended Rendon. "He's really the glue that keeps it all together and keeps it running smoothly. He's helped me pick artists in the past and I can't understate his importance."

According to Rendon, decades of keeping his fingers on the pulse of artistic photography has yielded perennial excitement about the future profession. Similarly, digital photography has provided the paradigm shift only instant gratification can provide. Still, Rendon is convinced the personal, even therapeutic time spend in a darkroom will never be forgotten. Either for the nostalgia or the details only brought out by patience and tender, loving care, consider film in good hands.

"In the art world, there will always be a place for dark room photography," concluded Rendon.

A *Carnival of Messages* can be seen at Rendon Photography and Fine Art and more information is available at www.alrendon.com.

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