

Images examine passage of time

By Steve Bennett - Express-News
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San Antonio artist Ansen Seale's "River of Light" was shot with "slitscan photography" technology. COURTESY ANSEN SEALE

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Ansen Seale has been fiddling around with panoramic cameras for nearly 20 years.

"I pull them apart and rebuild them," he says.

Over the past decade, the San Antonio artist has concentrated on a little-known technology called "slitscan photography," which, he says, "examines the passage of time, rather than suspending a single moment."

Where pioneering San Antonio panoramic photographer Eugene Goldbeck mounted his Cirkut camera on a tripod and produced long, narrow images as the camera and film rotated simultaneously, Seale has invented a camera — "it's like a laptop and camera combined, but it looks like a toaster, a video camera on steroids" — that stays in place and catches — through a small slit in the lens cap — the world as it goes by, line by line.

"I have found slitscan photography to be an excellent vehicle for ideas central to my work — ideas about time and our place in its continuum," Seale says. "Instead of mirroring the world as we know it, I believe this camera records a hidden reality."

Seale, one of San Antonio's foremost photography artists, is showing recent slitscan work in an exhibition titled "Luminous Flux" through Oct. 13 at Bismarck Studios. It's part of the 2010 Fotoseptiembre USA citywide celebration.

Dominating "Flux" is a translucent 50-foot-by-4-foot strip called "River of Light," luminously back-lighted by banks of fluorescent tubes. Shot in Brackenridge Park, at the water crossing by the Brackenridge Eagle tracks, the image captures the flowing water in colorful, abstract detail, resembling an electrocardiogram of the river's heartbeat.

Seale calls this "photography in the purist sense, but a form of photography where abstraction is the norm, not the exception."

Water, he says, seems to be the most universally appealing subject for the technology. It is constantly moving, and it is such a "relevant resource today," but also, he says, "because we live in this place because the water was here."

Seale emphasizes that he is not capturing the water itself — "that would be like photographing air" — but its reflection, what's on the surface, the vegetation on its banks and what's underneath.

"A single sliver of space is imaged over an extended period of time, yielding the surprising result that unmoving objects are blurred and moving bodies are rendered clearly," he says. "Every once in a while, an oak leaf will float by at just the right speed, and it comes out as a leaf in the final image."

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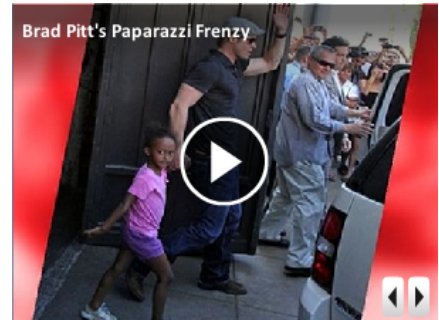
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real in the final image.

Electric and kinetic, the images — and Seale has adapted the technology to a circular format, in large-scale works such as "Vortex" and "Sea Oats" — ripple and flex and swirl like surrealistic color-field paintings. If you squint your eyes just right, those might really be sea oats rustling in a gentle Port Aransas breeze in that beautiful print.

"I tease out this unusual reality lurking just beneath the surface of our everyday visual experience," Seale says, "in the same way cubist painters created dynamic tension by exploiting the interplay between what the viewer expects and what she gets."

According to Bismarck Studios owner Christa Brothers, Seale "makes it possible to extend our reality into the unseen world of time .??. to render the ever-changing appearance of our world in a constant state of flux."

"Bringing new materials and technologies to the age-old question of reality and perception allows him to delve deeper into the world of what we perceive as reality," she adds.

"Luminous Flux" remains on view at Bismarck Studios, 930 Proton, off Loop 1604, through Oct. 13. Call (210) 314-7747 or visit www.bismarckstudios.com for more information.

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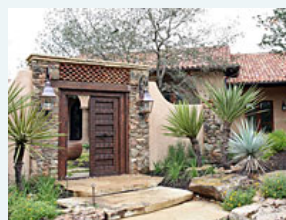
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