

Festival highlights diverse collection

By Elda Silva

Updated 1:34 p.m., Thursday, August 30, 2012

Lit carnival bright against pink and purple skies, the hydraulic, multimedia floats captured by Taiwanese photographer [Shen Chao-Liang](#) in “Stages,” an exhibit at Instituto [Cultural de México](#), look like elaborate children's playhouses grown large or portals into a fantasy realm.

Mobile venues used by traveling performance groups and politicians, the stages are “the absolute metaphor for wanting to be somewhere else — just completely somewhere else,” says curator [Michael Mehl](#).

“Stages” is one of seven signature exhibits that make up “Mixed Metaphors,” a show for Fotoseptiembre USA. The annual international photography festival organized by Mehl opens this weekend at venues throughout the city.

In addition to Shen's images, “Mixed Metaphors” includes work by Mexican photographer [Gabriel Figueroa Flores](#), American photographers Lori Nix and Susan Burnstine, Swiss photographer [Christian Lichtenberg](#) and Swiss photography duos [Ursula Sprecher](#) and Julian Salinas and Alex and Felix.

Though disparate on the surface, the images that compose each of the separate exhibitions “complement each other well in the context of the metaphor,” Mehl says.

“Mixed Metaphors” is the fifth installment of signature exhibits that Mehl has curated in collaboration with the Instituto Cultural de México.

“It's been pretty much two years in the making, so you're looking at a series of work and you start identifying patterns,” he says. “And I wasn't necessarily looking for something that was metaphorical. I started seeing it, and I'm thinking ‘That's what we're going to do.’”

An award-winning photographer, Shen worked on the “Stage” series for five years. He used a large format camera and color reversal film “to better capture the extensive range of tonalities of these marvelous machines, set in stark relief to the common realities of their mundane surroundings,” according to an artist statement.

Like Shen's images, the works in Burnstine's “Absence of Being,” a series of black-and-white photographs of city skylines and urban settings, also seem to allude to escape, but her destination is familiar: memory. Based in Chicago, Burnstine, a commercial and fine art photographer, creates her romantic, hazy visions with cameras and lenses she makes out of vintage parts and household items. Typically her prints are 10-by-10 inches, but Mehl wanted to see them bigger.

“I had to do a lot of convincing,” Mehl says. “I said, ‘I'd like to show them large.’ ‘Well, I can make them 16-by-16 (inches).’ ‘No, no I want to show them large.’”

At roughly 4 feet by 4 feet, Los Angeles looms in the distance like the Emerald City, a snaking highway subbing for the Yellow Brick Road.

Meanwhile, fellow American Nix takes a somewhat darker view of things in “The City,” a series of images of urban ruins. The photographer, who lives in Brooklyn, creates meticulously detailed models and photographs them. In this series, the interiors of an abandoned museum and library — among other cultural cornerstones — crumble and decay as nature moves back in.

“This is her dystopian metaphor,” Mehl says. “This is all when civilization comes to an end and what's left becomes decrepit, but in an organic way.”

In previous work, Alex and Felix also created environments — theirs elaborate sets they used as backdrops for models. In “13 Queens,” the duo has dispensed with backgrounds. Instead each model wears the elements of her scene, taking on the guise of androids constructed out of an eccentric array of props. “Queen Motorhead,” for example, bears a crown of gears, while “Queen Happy” — who looks anything but — is decked out in an array of toys, a spiky ball over her heart.

Mehl sees each “Queen” as a “little story.”

“Since I’ve done this kind of imagery before, I know what it takes to do this,” he says. “It’s so much work. At the same time, it’s quirky, it’s funny and it shows the fact that these two guys come together in this cohesive little storytelling unit.”

The other Swiss duo, Sprecher and Salinas, also employ humor in “Heimatland,” a series that pokes fun at their home country, described in an artist statement as “a white spot on the map of the world where nothing really happens.”

Using a large format camera, the pair photographed pristine landscapes and orderly, litter-free urban scenes with humans appearing as flies in the ointment. In one image, the majestic vista of a snow covered mountain is interrupted by a small figure stooping to pick up what looks like a sock or a shoe.

“So there’s always a sense of order, but then there’s something a little awkward going on,” Mehl says.

Lichtenberg, who rounds out the Swiss contingent, brings a touch of gravity tempered with surrealism in “Commedia Dell’Arte,” a series a photographs of Hungary and Croatia.

In his work, the cityscapes and landscapes serve as stages for the dramas he is creating, Lichtenberg says in an artist statement, “As a result, every photograph is a poetic, melancholic, bizarre and humorous rendering of the human condition.”

In one image, a figure wrapped in a shroud kneels on the floor of a grand cathedral, while a pair of curious tourists standing near the altar in the background look on.

While Lichtenberg uses Photoshop to create his visual constructs, Figueroa does it the old fashioned way. His images of fantastic architectural structures “are almost handmade,” Mehl says. “Meaning they’re not highly sophisticated, Photoshopped, layered images.”

Rather, the black-and-white photographs of fantastic architectural structures in “Lugares Prometidos” (“Promised Places”) “are constructs in the same way that things are mashed up in Mexico a lot — one kind of thing over another,” he says. “There’s a word in Spanish. It’s called ‘hechizo’ (that) means it’s roughly made. Even though he does have a mastery of digital technology, the images aren’t meant to be perfect. They’re meant to have a feel to them.

“There are a lot of people who look at a camera as a recording device,” Mehl adds. “For me ultimately it’s an expressive device. That’s important to me, and that kind of gets me going when I’m putting something like this together.”

lsilva@express-news.net

Large Abstract Paintings

FREE SHIPPING Canada & U.S.
direct from the artist.

www.tatianas-modern-art.com

A Fruit That Burns Fat?

Celebrity Doctor Exposes Fat
Blasting Fruit.

PureRaspberryKetone.com

ASCC New Issue Alert

First Opportunity to Buy This
Promising Stock - Invest Now

www.AristocratGroupCorp.com

Ads by Yahoo!