

# Answering the call of the wild

Patient photographer captures nature's gorgeous richness in breathtaking exhibit

By Suzanne Munich

ENTERPRISE ART CRITIC

To court nature, to reveal her secret and sublime beauty, an artist must be patient beyond the normal scope of humankind.

This rule applies to photographers just as much as to other disciplines in the art field. While anyone with a camera can make a recognizable image, few individuals see the potential for capturing stunning moments, when the angle and the light are exactly right and the elements are cooperating.

Obtaining such a moment may take hours of waiting, for something as fleeting as a rainbow in a rainstorm.

Terry Nathan's work shows that those transcendent moments with nature are quite real. This month's exhibit at Design House features a trove of color prints from some of our country's most remarkable wilderness locations. Each one, from desert canyon to pine-covered mountain, is produced from an unenhanced transparency or digital image. What you see actually was there.

Unlike an earlier generation of color photography, these prints are made on archival paper with permanent inks, not dyes that will fade with exposure to light. The new technology has been a shot in the arm for the field,

which now can offer collectors the kind of permanence once the sole property of painters and printmakers.

The American West, in particular, has many natural wonders to inspire a photographer. The first nature photographers of the 1800s had to haul large glass plates in saddlebags up and down steep wilderness trails, and position bulky box cameras in order to capture black-and-white images. By the 1930s, when Ansel Adams started making his photographs of the West's soaring mountains and wide vistas, images could be captured on film, with smaller cameras mounted on light-weight tripods.

Nathan takes his pictures in glorious color, but instead of submitting film to vats of chemicals to develop the images, he and other photographers now can transfer the image digitally. From a digital camera, the information is downloaded into a computer, which instructs a color printer to reproduce the picture in the desired size and shape.

A modern photographer can take an image from the camera all the way to a finished print, without ever leaving his office.

The Design House exhibit begins with a triptych of images based on carved sandstone formations in Arizona. Lower Antelope Canyon offers strange and wonderful views of tall and narrow passages sculpted into living rock by the actions of sand-bearing floodwaters over the centuries. "Sculptured Sandstone #2," "Sculptured Sandstone and Tumbleweed" and "Forces of Na-

ture" document the canyon's exotic beauty when illuminated by the sun overhead.

The first of the series evokes the appearance of a swath of saffron silk in its view of a rippling, sunlit wall. In the second, an oval of dry tumbleweed in the upper left seems incandescent, as sun pours through it to illuminate the narrow cavity below. In the third, the eye follows a diagonal shaft of sunlight to a spot on the sand, so bright as to appear molten.

"Mirror Lake, Yosemite" also offers striking beauty in a natural setting, in one of our country's foremost national parks. With a tall, snow-covered peak in the background, the smooth lake surface is broken by a large boulder in the foreground, looking like a miniature version of the mountain behind it. This arrangement doesn't happen on its own; the photographer chooses to repeat shapes, in different scales, to tie the elements in a picture together in a memorable way.

"Into the Mystery" returns the viewer to Antelope Canyon, this time to a new area in its upper regions. The canyon appears rather dark in this shot, except for two spots of golden light that illuminate the vein-like shapes of tumbleweed: one close, the other in the distance.

Nature also has its quiet, contemplative moments. "Columnar Basalt, Yellowstone" was formed at the same time as the park's more dramatic volcanic features of geysers and hot springs. A very old lava flow left behind polygonal sections of tumbled, moss-covered rock, in Nathan's

## Terry Nathan

Where: Design House, 1015 Olive Drive, Davis; 758-4610

When: through July 29

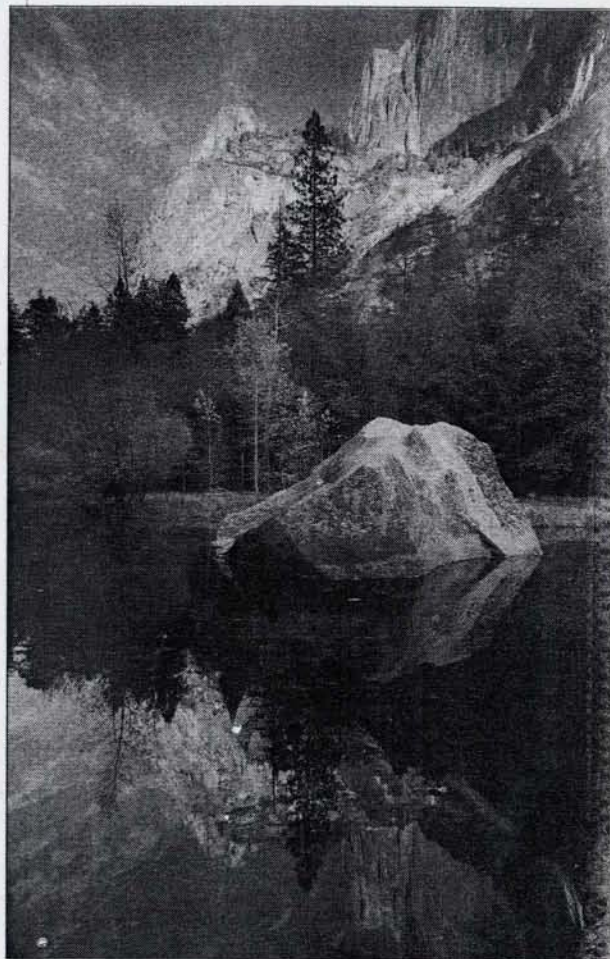
Gallery hours: 9:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday

shot looking very much like the remains of some ancient temple.

"Ancient Bristlecone Pines, White Mountains, California" shows some of our planet's oldest lifeforms. Their grooved trunks lean at odd angles over rocky ground, perhaps a reminder of struggles against the natural forces of wind and snow over millennia. These trees have stood sentinel in these mountains for a duration that represents so many multiples of the human life span, that we can hardly comprehend just how old they are.

Nature also has abstract patterns that are much more transient, as in "Light Pattern on Mono Lake." One of water's beauties is the manner in which sun reflects on its surface, shifting from minute to minute in slightly choppy water. Here the surface of the water is shot at a diagonal, to make it more exciting. Rings of light appear in yellow and blue against the dark surface, a soothing moment in time captured and preserved forever.

Nathan is particularly good at finding unifying elements in his shots, which make us contemplate something new about the



GREG RIEHL/ENTERPRISE PHOTO

"Mirror Lake, Yosemite," by Terry Nathan

subject. Pictures of loons floating in water have been taken before, but Nathan captures the bird against water that is choppy enough to show white reflections nearly the size of the black bird's white-spotted wings (possibly an adaptation that make it harder for predators to spot).

Some of us, at rare moments, are privileged enough to see Nature's best for ourselves, just as a master photographer would... but such opportunities are few and far between. Nathan may be, as once was said of Claude Monet, "only an Eye."

"But what an Eye!"