

Student of nature

Photographic studies reveal the genius of choice and patience

By Suzanne Munich

ENTERPRISE ART CRITIC

"Go forth, under the open sky, and list

To Nature's teachings."

— William Cullen Bryant
(1794-1878)

Given nature's infinite possibilities, how does a master photographer choose a shot?

One answer is that he knows which ones *not* to take. He avoids the obvious, chooses the dynamic over the static, and permits the part to stand for the whole. He waits until conditions are exactly right for the desired picture, even if hours must pass before the correct features are illuminated.

The widely published Terry Nathan shares some of his nature and architectural photographs in this month's exhibit at Art Connections. To see through his eyes, is to see the familiar as you've never seen it before.

Many of us have visited San Francisco's much-photographed Palace of the Fine Arts, a classic-style edifice from the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition, preserved in a park setting. But instead of

focusing on the entire structure, Nathan chooses a soaring view between two of its massive exterior columns, looking almost straight up at the capitals, faintly blue in the light of late afternoon. Between them is the framed orange glow of an interior column, reflecting the color of the setting sun. Each line is a dynamic diagonal, which avoids the static look of verticals and horizontals.

Simple, yet grand.

"Carmel Mission, California" has had its quaint church facade photographed many times, but Nathan gives us a view of the patio surrounding the courtyard next to the church. Instead of shooting straight down its length, we get an asymmetrical view, which allows us to linger on the dark, heavy wooden bench in the foreground, against the adobe walls.

This gives a human scale to one of the state's oldest such structures. How many generations have walked there, through the centuries?

Nature, however, is Nathan's forté. "Monument Valley, Arizona" is a sweeping shot of the ancient buttes rising up from the valley floor, toward a layer of high cloud. The sun has not quite set, and the dark shapes of the landforms are silhouetted dramatically against a narrow band of light.

'Light and Form in Landscape and Architecture'

Where: Art Connections, 903 Third St., Davis; 753-5759

When: through April 8

Gallery hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday

Most photographers would have been content to present just that much. Yet a closer view reveals subtle detail and color still visible in the picture's darker areas, including a winding ribbon of river. This is artwork that rewards a lingering view.

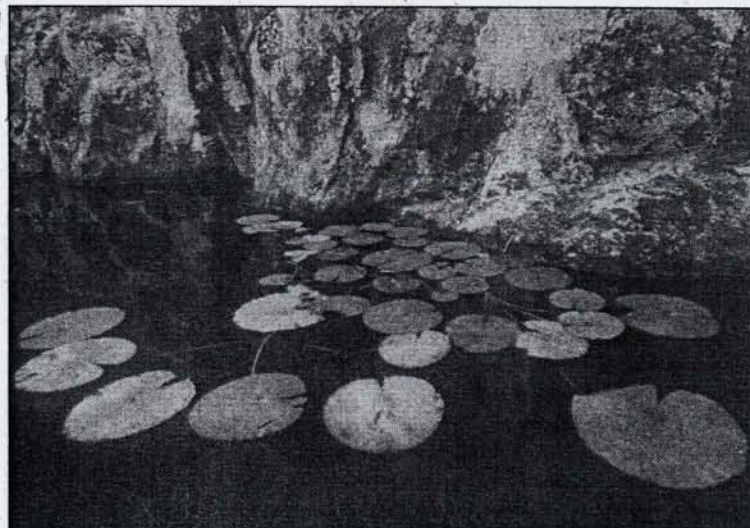
Even in black-and-white, Nathan finds much to intrigue the eye. "Davis Funnel Cloud, Davis, California" shows the pale needle of the funnel against the darker layers of raincloud that spawned it. The funnel's lower end hovers over a single house, white against the dark line of earth, looking tiny and vulnerable against nature's vast forces.

The spectacular is not, however, the entire story. Nature also has her quiet, intimate moments. "Wahkeena Falls, Columbia River Gorge, Oregon" features a small brook, tumbling down a green hillside past moss-covered rock. Only a patch of yellow shrub, and a single yellow leaf against the rock, reveal that autumn has come.

"Faces of the River" are lily pads floating in a dark backwater, hemmed by a granite wall.

Even a simple rain shower has the potential for beauty. "Water Dance" captures two patterns superimposed: the ripples radiating from a single drop in the water, and the abstract elliptical forms of reflected color.

This show includes many more photos, each with something special. Nathan's images range over many outdoor subjects, from famous locations to obscure corners, each a unique portrait.



ALISON PORTELLO/ENTERPRISE PHOTO

"Faces of the River," by Terry Nathan