

Local Architect Opens New Art Gallery in Center City

AxD Gallery opens on January 19, 2007, with a reception from 5 to 9 pm. The new Center City Philadelphia gallery is housed in a recently renovated space at 265 South 10th Street (between Locust and Spruce Streets). The gallery will host innovative visual art works by contemporary artists. Proprietor Ed Barnhart, a Philadelphia architect, has created the gallery as an expression of his lifelong love of the arts. His primary involvement in the arts to date has been in shaping cultural and educational buildings. In the early 1990's, he served as project architect during the \$11 million renovation of the Barnes Foundation. Since founding his own architectural firm, Always by Design, in 2005, he has worked on projects for the American Philosophical Society, Chemical Heritage Foundation, and Bard College.

Opening Exhibition



Among Cenotaphs and Angels: Otherworldly Photographs by Chuck van Zyl is the opening exhibition of AxD Gallery. Mr. van Zyl transposes his sensibilities for a visual audience using infrared sensitive film. The show includes formal gardens, seashores, cemeteries and various types of seemingly "abandoned" landscapes.

It was the historic sites from the 19th century rural cemetery movement that really captured Mr. van Zyl's imagination – taking him to most of the significant sites around Philadelphia, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, St. Louis, New York and

Chicago. The significance of the photographs transcends the often magnificent landscaping, statuary and architecture that they encompass. Central to all of the work is a sense of duality – beauty versus neglect, durability versus fragility. Time is experienced very unevenly – sometimes acutely felt as with the ravages of weather and overgrown vegetation and sometimes nullified by enduring expressions of love frozen in stone.

Black and white photography readily evokes mood and atmosphere. Foliage, open sky, clouds, ponds, stonework, all reflect or absorb infrared light differently and therefore appear on the negative in somewhat unpredictable ways. The chemistry of the medium often bestows an evanescent atmosphere on the scenes. This, coupled with the already surreal landscape of these old cemeteries, makes the photos outright otherworldly.

Artist Premiere

Chuck van Zyl, a native of the Philadelphia area, came to the medium and subject matter of this show intuitively. Chuck is best known for hosting WXPN radio's "Star's End" show for over a quarter century, coordinating "The Gatherings" concert series, and performing his own electronic music. With a healthy curiosity towards all things otherworldly and timeless, it's no wonder he's attracted to the odd realm of infrared photography. Seeing his photos for the first time one is struck with the synchronicity or parallelism of presence and absence – belief and suspension of belief. Chuck's work isn't scripted. It speaks to a more fundamental sense of emotions – wonder and an open-ended world of possibilities.

Artist's Statement

"I've been interested in photography on and off since childhood. In 2004 I began exploring the use of infrared film and seeking landscapes and subjects to photograph. I was drawn to places and things abandoned by modern society -- old rural settings and garden cemeteries. I started at historic Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia, near to where I live. The varied textures and make-up of the landscapes seemed so rich with atmosphere – presence and absence, beauty and sorrow."

"The strange effect of the film and the extremely wide angle lens captured the landscape but also somehow transformed it into something else. As I travel, visiting and re-visiting cemeteries, I gain more insight into my own motivations. It's been a fascinating and enriching, if solitary, activity for me. At some point I realized that this photography aligns perfectly with the music I am involved with, as both media mean to provide the beholder with a transportive experience."

"I also receive comfort from the mourning art present in these older cemeteries. The many representations of grief are somehow cathartic as I still ponder the passing of my own parents. Along with several self-defining moments, as I reflect on this time I remember a beloved intimacy with each of my parents, earned by being with them through these difficult times, and an awareness of my own life and existence that I have never felt before or since. In some way, going to these cemeteries is part of my own process of grieving, and the photos are just an expression of these feelings. They do look like printouts of memories (or dreams). They look like an actual place, but not exactly."

Technical Notes

Black and white infrared film is sensitive to wavelengths of ordinary light that are invisible to the naked eye, and gives some subjects an unusual appearance. By using a special filter, the images made with this film have unusual properties such as halation or a halo effect, as well as false shadings - that which absorbs infrared light (sky, water) appears dark or black and that which reflects it (leaves, foliage, people, clouds) appears lighter or white. The use of an extremely wide-angle lens adds a great deal of depth and breadth to the photos. Due to the unusual characteristics of the film, only after processing can the true work be known or discovered.

All of the images of this show were photographed by Chuck van Zyl between 2004 and 2006. While digital methods of infrared photography exist, all of the images were taken on film stock. Kodak black & white HIE infrared 35mm film was exposed using either a red #25 gel and Sigma 14mm f3.5 lens or opaque #92 filter and Voigtlander 12mm f4.5 lens. The photographs have been professionally photo-finished in the darkroom. The only enlarger manipulation made during processing was a general burning-in of the central area of each print. This was meant to yield a print with dramatic contrast, less vignetting and an even density. Prints were made on silver gelatin resin coated Ilford multi-contrast paper, signed by the artist, dated, numbered and archivally mounted with acid-free museum board matting.

Gallery Hours

The opening reception will be Friday, January 19 from 5 to 9 pm. The show continues through March 4, 2007. A gallery talk with the artist will be held at 6:30 pm on Thursday, February 15. During exhibitions the Gallery will be open Wednesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6 pm. Special appointments may be requested via email to: gallery@a-x-d.com or by calling us at: 215-627-6252.

Ed Barnhart
Owner, **AxD Gallery**