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A Photo Op Without the Tricks

National exhibit shuns digital, showcases traditional photography

BRANDON GRIGGS THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

At Photo Op '02, a national photography exhibition opening in Salt Lake City Thursday, you will find impressionistic landscapes, dream-like portraits and enigmatic abstract images. What you won't find are computer-enhanced digital photographs.

In organizing the juried show,

Salt Lake City artist Chris Lucas limited entries to traditional photography only -- eschewing a recent trend toward digital trickery. Some of the images push the limits of what an artist can do with a clever eye and a camera. But none were doctored.

"I wanted to create a level playing field," explains Lucas. "Digital is a neat medium. But it's a mixed medium. It's not even photography anymore. This is a chance to expose people to all the new directions in traditional photography. It's a beauty contest without any plastic surgery."

Opening on the eve of the Winter Olympics, Photo Op '02 showcases 43 images by as many photographers -- chosen from almost 500 entries from around the country. The show will remain through Feb. 25 in a renovated studio-gallery at 347 W. Pierpont Ave. in the city's visual-art district.

Lucas and partner Norm Klein, who donated the space, hope the show will attract some of the 80,000 visitors expected to descend on downtown Salt Lake City each night of the Games. The show will stay open until 10 p.m. nightly.

Aside from his no-digital policy, Lucas put no restrictions on style or subject matter in Photo Op '02. Almost every genre is here, from portraiture to landscapes to more experimental work.

"There isn't a theme," says Lucas of the exhibition's color and black-and-white images. "When people come to the show, they'll see this wonderful blend."

A frequent contributor to juried photo exhibitions, Lucas planned Photo Op'02 to help bring exposure to near-anonymous artists like himself, few of whom can earn a living solely through their photographic artwork. Funding for the show came from SceneMakers, a Salt Lake City event planning firm, and Caldera International, an Orem-based software company.

Lucas then advertised in national art and photo magazines for submissions, which were culled by three jurors: Bill Wooby, founder and director of the Millennium Art Center in Washington, D.C.; Abraham Lubelski, owner of NY ARTS magazine; and acclaimed Utah landscape photographer John Telford.

The jurors will give special cash awards to three of the show's photographs. Visitors to the exhibition also

can vote for a People's Choice Award, to be announced near the end of the show's run. The award-winning works will become part of the permanent collection at the Millennium Art Center, where Lucas plans to display Photo Op '02 this spring.

Eight Utah artists are represented in the show: Bill Crnkovich of South Jordan, Barbara Richards of Holladay, and Carl Oelerich, Christine Probosco, Lance Clayton, Greg Fischer, Teresa Flowers and Justin Hackworth of Salt Lake City.

"We're going to show some of the best stuff that's happening in contemporary photography," says Lucas, who hopes Photo Op'02 will help people to accept color photographs as fine art. "It's gonna be cool."

At Artspace

The Photo Op '02 national photography exhibition opens Thursday with a reception from 7 to 10 p.m. at 347 W. Pierpont Ave. in the Artspace district of Salt Lake City. It will remain there from 2 to 10 p.m. daily through Feb. 25.

Caption: "Rolled Hay," by Daniel Kantor.; "Self-Portrait With My Father After the House Fire," by Amy R. Boles.

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