Diverse mix shown in photo exhibit

By Elizabeth Dougherty

If you want to think of photography, you automatically conjure the image of a sleek 8-by-10 glossy, "Photo-Works," the current exhibit at the Fine Arts Gallery, will definitely challenge you to expand your perspective on this medium.

The exhibit is a delightfully diverse mix of works done with non-traditional photographic processes. It features five artists who explore photography in several ways—ranging from new twists on the time-honored craft of sewing, quilting and making paper to the contemporary techniques utilized in electrostatic and "quik" printing.

Non-traditional processes

The curator of the show, the Rev. Michael Flecky, S.J., assistant professor of visual arts, selected the artists based on their usage of non-traditional processes. He said the exhibit is intended to be a contrasting view to a show two years ago titled "Sensitive to the Tradition," which featured contemporary photographers using techniques from the 19th century.

The show includes some recent work of Andrea Schwalm, who received a bachelor of fine arts degree with a concentration in photography from Creighton in December 1985. Schwalm described her quik prints as essentially "fantasy pieces. However, she said that while she doesn't start out with any special theme in mind, the individual pieces somehow connect when she's finished.

The quik-print process was originally developed as a graphic arts proofing process. Quik print emulsion requires contact-size negatives, a synthetic surface and a bright light source. Because each layer is a different color, it allows the artist the option of doing overlays.

Schwalm's work, "My Head Is in the Stars," features two angelic figures set against the hue of blue found in a clear night's sky; hand-colored pink, white and a dull metallic silver add accents. Interestingly, this celestial work has much the same emotional ambiance as the set-in-the sea "Do You Know?"

.Link to nature

The artist's recurring link to nature is evident in the work of Betsy Stiratt of Bloomington, Ind. The show includes 20 selections from her "Quarry, Bromeliad, Philodendron, Iron Plant, Palms and Elephant Ears Series" and three of her handmade books. Stiratt's incredibly beautiful book, "Plant Manner," is one of the highlights of the show.

Her depictions of plants are matched by her use of plants: all of her work is on handmade paper. The paper's texture allows the emulsion to integrate itself into the surface. Stiratt's use of platinum, instead of silver, emulsion further softens the pictures; visual impact and strengthen their tactile appeal.

Yvonne Kolek, from Columbus, Mo., also has a soft approach to her work. Using Enkacolor film and sponges to hand-develop her prints, she shows her dye coupler prints as stretched on large sheets of paper. The effect of the almost surreal pastel coloring is an ethereal look at commonplace settings.

"Exterior-Rainbow Beach" shows three images: the overlapping of water and sand in the foreground of beach, a fuzzy, intimate view of one of the chairs; and footprints in the white sand behind the chair.

The three segments illustrate one's conscious ability to process and neglect information that exists within the environment." Klosek wrote. "The focus, or lack of it, and fluctuating composition establish transitional energy. In each grouping, I've sought to expand upon a flood of visual ideas that may exist for only seconds."

Excerpts from her "Buttons and Bows" series use silk-screened layers of matted coloring to show, through the textures of her clothes, the narrative of a woman who lived in the 1800s.

"Magician, wizard"

From the State University of New York's Rockport campus, Jill Gussow wrote that her art makes her feel like a "magician or wizard." Among other things, she said she likes "turning people into lizards."

Much of Gussow's work deals with phototyping prints and their plates, often with the brass plates superimposing the prints as the art objects.

Through collage and clari verse, Gussow's work depicts hauntingly strong images. In "Phoenix," a neon green nude woman confronts us. With hands for feet and backed by "flames of fire, in an odd representation, she is transformed into this mythical bird.

Compelling work

Or is it on the funeral pyre? Are those limbs from dismembered mannequins—or from people? Gussow's work has a certain quality that galves you pause and compels you to look again.

The only man in the show, Ron Rallott of Harrisburg, Pa., uses the Haloid camera—the prototype of today's office copy machine—in making his one-dimensional electrostatic prints. His work is supported in part by Xerox.

With this technique, it is possible to make composite prints. In some of his works, Talbot layers images in contained spaces such as in "Flight" from the Erotica series. In other instances, he uses layering to effect an integrated image, like in "Satin Torso Multiple Transfers" also from the Erotica series.

Different backgrounds

Like his use of black toner with its gray undertones, he concentrates on the human figure with its psychological underpinnings.

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