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Fotoseptiembre: It's all about the artists

Photography might be the most prevalent art form. At least that's what Michael Mehl saw 15 years ago when he started the international photography festival Fotoseptiembre USA.

"Back when I started the festival, I wrote that photography was the most pervasive art form of society. It was nothing surprising because you could see the moment coming," Mehl, Fotoseptiembre director and founder, said. "Electronics have made us a visual society."

Now people can take pictures with camera phones, upload images to Facebook and share them on Flickr. Anyone can take and share a photograph.

Mehl's Fotoseptiembre also is prolific and democratic. Seeping into late August and early November, the festival features works of roughly 65 photographers and 50 different venues. If people can meet the deadline requirements, they can be involved.

"One of the important things about our festival is that we really pride ourselves in being inclusive and eclectic," Mehl said. "It was really important that if we were a festival, we would be artist-driven."

That involves including as many exhibits as possible not making judgments of who can participate; and giving the public free access to exhibits. It's what Mehl calls a "plug-and-play" festival.

Exhibits also aren't in traditional galleries. Photos will hang in restaurants and offices, the city's airport and the Episcopal Church of Reconciliation. There are even exhibits in New Braunfels and Boerne.

The photos can be documentary-style or creative endeavors. Ramin Samandari has a Fotoseptiembre event at his Blue Star studio space, Magical Realism, and a non-Fotoseptiembre exhibit at the Joan Grona Gallery.

Samandari's works at Magical Realism are large black-and-white digital prints of clouds. The ones at Joan Grona depict local and Austin demonstrations after the presidential election in Iran, in which incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad emerged as the victor under a cloud of international suspicion.

Clouds were something Samandari noticed during his childhood in Iran. He left Iran at 17, a year before the country's monarchy was overthrown.

"We used to sleep outside in the summertime and look up at the sky," Samandari said.

Rebecca Dietz's "Closer," a series of solarized black-and-white prints, will be on display at the High Wire Arts Gallery. In a world of digital proliferation, Dietz works primarily in film, which she said offers ample opportunities.

"I think you start to have a lot of range to experiment with," Dietz said. "Digital does really well, but it does one slice of the pie."

The Instituto Cultural de México in HemisFair Park features one of the signature exhibits, "The Way I Sí It." The exhibit consists of the work of older students and recent alumni of Say Sí, who range in age from 17 to 21. The students have worked with photography for at least a year.

"The students are definitely looking through the camera in so many different ways," said Guillermina Zabala, media arts director of SAY Sí and curator of the SAY Sí photography exhibit. "A lot of the students are very creative. We try to encourage them to not just be technically prepared but explore and be creative."

The festival stretches into the realm of film. Cambridge independent filmmaker Allie Humenuk will present her documentary "Shadow of the House," which follows the Cuban-born, now-American photographer Abelardo Morell.

The Southwest School of Art & Craft will preview the film, with Humenuk and Morell present at the opening.

"The Universe Next Door," an exhibit of Morell's works, will open Sept. 17 at the school.

To Humenuk, the two fields have stark differences.

"The nature of moving images is that you see time. You see 24 frames per second. You're moving through space," Humenuk said.

But the two aren't all different. Morell is renowned for using slow shutter speeds, sometimes allowing light to leak onto the frame for seven or eight hours.

"That's where I feel like his process mirrors mine," Humenuk said. "In that sense, he's playing with time."

FOTOSEPTIEMBRE LISTINGS

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 2

'8 X 10 ARCHITECTURE & ENGINEERING VIEWS OF THE BUILT WORLD'S.A. architect and photographer, John J. Speegle curates this exhibit by local photographers David Beicker, Tony Hargrove Art Koening and others. 5-7:30 p.m. Schiebel-Richardson Gallery, 626 Avenue E. Free. (210) 228-9921

'FAR PLACES CLOSE: PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAYS OF SOUTH ASIA'Visit far off lands like Myanmar, China, Japan and India with the help of photographers Branda Davidson-Shaddox, Thomas Neff and Luisa Wheeler. 6-9 p.m. UTSA Art Gallery, Main Campus, 1 UTSA Circle. Free. (210) 458-4011; utsa.edu

'TEXAS SEABEES: DEEP IN THE HEART OF IRAQ'San Antonio artist Leslie Shively documents the lives of Seabees, or Navy engineers and their time spent in Iraq. 4-5:30 p.m. Louis J. Blume Library Gallery, St. Mary's. University, 1 Camino Santa Maria. Free. (210) 436-3011; stmarytx.edu

THURSDAY, SEPT. 3

'BLACK SITES 1'UTSA professor and photographer Ron Binks exhibits a new collection dedicated to people who have been abused, tortured or murdered by 20th and 21st century governments. The exhibit runs through Nov. 13. 6-9 p.m. Blue Star Contemporary Art Center, Gallery 4, 116 Blue Star. Free. (210) 227-6960; bluestarart.org

'BUILDING VERNACULAR IMAGINATIONS'Photographers Paho Mann and Libby Rowe will share the UTSA Satellite Space for their latest work. Mann's "Re-inhabited Circle K's" and Rowe's "Dwellings" will feature their take on the contemporary American built environment. 6-9 p.m. UTSA Satellite Space, 115 Blue Star. Free. (210) 212-7146

'EXTENSIONS'Jason Willome explores the concept of proprioception, the sense of spatial self in relation to the ourselves and the world. 6-9 p.m. Blue Star Contemporary Art Center, 116 Blue Star. Free. (210) 227-6960;

bluestarart.org

'FOTO-FIBER-FABULOUS'Fiber Artspace presents this 22-artist collection of photographs including Maureen Brown, Daryl Lancaster and Kari Scott. 6-9 p.m. Fiber Artspace, 1414 S. Alamo, Suite 103. Free. (210) 633-6959; fiberartspace.com

'THE HISTORY OF THE FUTURE'Artists Nancy Sutor, Michael Berman and Julian Cardona exhibit a collection of collaborations from the last seven years with a focus on border life and places. 6-9 p.m. Blue Star Contemporary Art Center, Main Gallery, 116 Blue Star. Free. (210) 227-6960; bluestarart.org

'IMPLIED METAPHOR'Brianna M. Burnett will exhibit her latest photographs that revolve around storytelling and the mythology/folklore around food. 6-9 p.m. Studio 60b, Blue Star. Free. (806) 544-5723; briannaburnett.com

'PHOTOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS: HUMANITY IN NATURE'Six artist from San Antonio, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Argentina and Costa Rica exhibit their latest collections. Included in the gallery will be Puerto Rican-born artist Carlos Betancourt and his new collection of rich hues in nature using digital photography and computer manipulation. 6-8 p.m. City of San Antonio International Center, 203 S. St. Mary's. Free. (210) 804-2219; ruizhealyart.com

'SOMETHING UNEXPECTED'Missouri photographer Deborah Riley uses darkroom photography along with printmaking to convey the balance between value and tone. 6-9 p.m. StoneMetal Press Printmaking Center, 1420 S. Alamo. Free. (210) 227-0312; stonemetalpress.com

FRIDAY, SEPT. 4

'A CARNIVAL OF MESSAGES'San Antonio artists Kat Brown, Ray Seabaugh and Bruce Shakelford exhibit a collection of collages using Polaroids and abstract layers. The exhibit runs through Oct. 25. 6-10:30 p.m. Rendon Photography & Fine Art, 733 S. Alamo. Free. (210) 225-2287; alrendon.com

'CHRISTMAS IN NEW YORK'New York, New York! See the Big Apple through the eyes of artist Ruben Cordova. The collection was shot during the 2008 Christmas season and features N.Y staples like Rockefeller Center, Fifth Avenue and the edgy East Village. 6-10 p.m. ArteReyes Art Studio Gallery, 1420 S. Alamo. Free. (210) 215-7746

'CLOUD COMPOSITIONS: WORK IN PROGRESS'Get a sneak peek at the upcoming exhibit that will be displayed at the South West School of Art and Craft in September 2010 by artist Ramin Samandari. 6:30-9:30 p.m. Magic Realism Studio, 1420 S. Alamo. Free. (9210) 861-4325; magicalrealismstudio.com

'CONJUNTO: ACORDEON Y BAJO SEXTO'Mario Perez, Conjunto Heritage Taller Studio student and freelance photographer exhibits his collection of conjunto events. 6:30-9 p.m. Conjunto Heritage Taller Studio, 725 S. Presa. Free. (210) 212-8560

'MEMORIES: PROJECTED AND INVENTED'The students of SAY Sí exhibit a collection of experimental photography using mixed-media formats. The exhibit runs through Sept. 26. 6-9 p.m. Say Sí Central, 1518 S. Alamo. Free. (210) 212-8666; saysi.org

'PHOTO-DESIGN: WHERE IMAGE & DESIGN MEET'Artists Kevin Rayhons, Stephanie Rubiano and Andrew Watson exhibit their latest work that uses photography as a foundation and incorporates graphic elements. 7-9 p.m. Robot Art Gallery, 1114 S. St. Mary's. Free. (210) 476-8801; robotartgallery.com

'PHOTOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS'Stop by for a guided tour of this exhibit by Graciela Kartofel. 5:30 p.m. City of San Antonio International Center, 203 S. St. Mary's. Free. (210) 804-2219; ruizhealyart.com

'SUENOS' California's Roxanne R. Haynes uses her lens to connect with people around her. Haynes work has included Manu Chao, Santana and The Rolling Stones. See her latest photographic experiences with music by Sabor Caribe. 6-9 p.m. El Sol Studios, 936 S. Alamo. Free. (210) 226-9700; elsolstudios.com

SATURDAY, SEPT. 5

'ELEFANTECIDADESERPENTE' Brazilian artist Fernanda Chemale invites the audience to decipher human interactions that blend boundaries between reality and imagination. 4-8 p.m. Siqueiros Gallery, Instituto Cultural De Mexico, 600 HemisFair Park. Free. (210) 227-0123; saculturamexico.org

'GHOST TOWNS' Who left who behind? Did people leave places and objects, or did they leave us? Find out when you stop by this exhibit by German photographer, Berthold Steinhilber. 4-8 p.m. Siqueiros Gallery, Instituto Cultural De Mexico, 600 HemisFair Park. Free. (210) 227-0123; saculturamexico.org

'HAUTES COUTURES' Michael Mehl curates this exhibit by French photographer Alastair Magnaldo, that focuses on collecting images into a photographic rhapsody. 4-8 p.m. Siqueiros Gallery, Instituto Cultural De Mexico, 600 HemisFair Park. Free. (210) 227-0123; saculturamexico.org

'JAINA' French photographer Tom Drahos has spent much of his career capturing religious themes based of Eastern religions. His latest work focuses on the Jain philosophy, and is part of the Mini Series II. 4-8 p.m. Siqueiros Gallery, Instituto Cultural De Mexico, 600 HemisFair Park. Free. (210) 227-0123; saculturamexico.org

'LIGHT DRAWINGS' Californian photographer Philipp Scholz Ritterman takes a flash light and pairs it with long exposure to create his "Light Drawings." 4-8 p.m. Siqueiros Gallery, Instituto Cultural De Mexico, 600 HemisFair Park. Free. (210) 227-0123; saculturamexico.org

'THE MEXICO OF LEO MATIZ' This exhibit features photographs of Colombian Leo Matiz's stay in Mexico, curated by Luis Martin Lozano. 4-8 p.m. Orozco Gallery, Instituto Cultural de Mexico, 600 HemisFair Park. (210) 227-0123; saculturamexico.org

'NUEVO LEON-IMAGENES DE NUESTRA MEMORIA' Presented by the Fototeca de Nuevo Leon and CONARTE Nuevo Leon, this collection of archive images are curated by Michael Mehl. 4-8 p.m. Rivera Gallery, Instituto Cultural de Mexico, 600 HemisFair Park.

'PASSAGES' Erwin Staeheli illustrates a traveler's story through juxtaposed photos of the the traveler's surroundings The photographs are from France, Slovakia, Russia and his native, Switzerland. 4-8 p.m. Siqueiros Gallery, Instituto Cultural de Mexico, 600 HemisFair Park. Free. (210) 227-0123; saculturamexico.org

'THE WAY I SI IT'SAY Sí students and alumni exhibit photographs in a new venue. The exhibit runs through Oct. 25. 4-8 p.m. Instituto Cultural De Mexico, 600 HemisFair Park. Free. (210) 212-8666; saysi.org

SUNDAY, SEPT. 6

'THE MEXICO OF LEO MATIZ' BOOK PRESENTATION You've seen the art, now own the book by Luis Martin Lozano. 5 p.m. Auditorium, Instituto Cultural de Mexico, 600 HemisFair Park. Free. (210) 227-0123; saculturamexico.org

Compiled by Jessica Elizarraras/210SA co1ntributor

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