

Driven by method and beauty

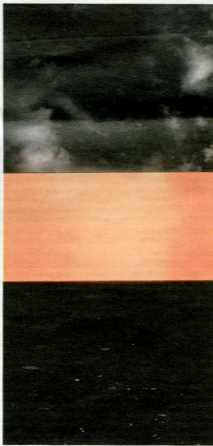
By D.K. ROW
THE OREGONIAN

Since the photographic boom of the '60s and '70s, the medium has evolved in ways beyond the documentary method favored by the period's most revered champions. The advent of film and video as serious artistic forms and the emergence of the Internet Age, for instance, have each helped to push photography's limits as a form, and to reinvent it as a medium that challenges its historic concerns of faithful visual reinvention.

LeAnne Hitchcock's exhibit at Chambers represents how entrenched some of those practices are and how beautiful and affecting they can be even to those whose familiarity and affection for photography were cemented by the classic documentary work of someone such as Robert Frank.

Hitchcock calls the eight prints on view at this downtown space minimalist landscapes, not photographs. She takes pictures of city skylines, bodies of water and the sky in cities and areas mostly in North America and Europe. A professional printer in New York before recently moving to Portland, Hitchcock turns her photos into colored abstract fragments that are subsequently assembled into split-level images. England's Thames River, for example, becomes a triptych of red, green and blue that recalls the mid-century painting of Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman. New York's South Manhattan skyline becomes a two-part German Romantic landscape — a barely visible web of shadowy buildings, spooky clouds and flickering sunlight juxtaposed with a separate image of complete blackness.

Landscape photography's representative qualities and its social commentary lineage — stretching as far back to Carleton Watkins' late 19th-century photos of the evolving West to Robert Adams' mournful pictures of the past few decades — don't interest Hitchcock. Like many artistic practitioners who have absorbed art history and think that tradition and convention have been exhausted, Hitchcock's instead tinkering with photography's technical boundaries. Excited by digital and other technology and also emboldened by the current culture's post-historical outlook toward art, Hitchcock is



LeAnne Hitchcock's photos, such as "Sunrise, San Francisco," challenge photography's tradition of pure visual reinvention and bear close resemblance to paintings.

driven by method — albeit methods that many other photographers have been experimenting with.

She's driven by beauty, too. These prints have the feel of silent-era cinema, their stark, dreamy sequence of colors and vaguely delineated buildings and watery forms unfolding

one layer of wordless meaning after another. This is simply gorgeous-looking work, and the latest stellar exhibition by this downtown gallery that specializes in exhibiting some of the art scene's respected and talked-about — yet under-represented — artists who are simply hungry for exposure.

Chambers, 207 S.W. Pine St. #102. Hours: Noon-6 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday. Closes Feb. 28.

For the love of observation

There's a preamble to Ted Katz's wonderful show at Guestroom Gallery: "Learning to draw is really a matter of learning to see," writes Kimon Nicolaïdes. What's striking about the drawings and other works on paper by this Portland artist best known for his abstract paintings at Butters Gallery is how Katz observes and interprets the world around him. Sure, the gestural and partially geometric way the Philadelphia-born artist renders the show's bounty of self-portraits, landscapes, nude figures, dogs and family friends reveals an artist of the old school: This is someone who actually possesses drawing skills.

But the Harvard-educated artist isn't merely an expert technician sitting at a cafe with a drawing pad, though looking at the show he's surely spent some time scribbling over a cup of coffee. Katz takes true, simple fascination with the world. He doesn't simply look. As he said in a 1989 interview with *The Oregonian*, he sees, watches and forms a relationship with what's in front of him. Then he interprets. Several slips and movements of the hand become luxurious beds of sloping space and line — sleeping sunbathers. Alternately harsh and lyrical gestures create an abstract embodiment of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

At a moment when so much art (and culture and politics) has been reduced to personality and self-idolatry, Katz's show, which is the second one by this little salon type space at the Wonder Ballroom, is a modest reminder that it's OK for artists to look outside themselves.

Guestroom Gallery, 128 N.E. Russell St. Hours: 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. Closes Feb. 24.