

LANDSCAPES, PERU AND SALT PILES

NATURE'S MYSTICAL FEATURES POWER HYATT PHOTOGRAPHS

Carl Austin Hyatt is calling us “Westerners” to a paradigm shift.

Some might call it a dramatic point of departure for our culture. Others would call it an “it’s about time” movement. Whatever you choose to call it, Hyatt lives by it, feels it in his bones, believes in it. What is “it?” The connection to nature — that nature is alive, conscious, playful. But it’s more than that. Hyatt says nature speaks to him. Rocks speak to him. Even salt.

Hyatt recalled that when he was still in his teens, he began having “mystical” experiences in nature. These experiences came with a sense of deep conviction about certain realities/presences, Hyatt said. This was also the beginning of seeing the blind spots, indeed errors, he says, of our dominant technological, modern Western culture.

A longtime admirer of Thoreau, he longed for connection to place. He eventually found that on the seacoast of New Hampshire in the mid-1980s, when the coast was less developed and easily accessible. The magnificent, ledgy coastline beckoned.

Hyatt has had an impressive career with a long list of exhibitions and noteworthy venues that host his work in their permanent collections, including the Smithsonian Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the Currier Museum of Art. Even Steven Spielberg has one in his private collection. And then there are the awards, featuring a MacDowell Fellowship, Piscataqua Region Artist Advancement Grant (from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation) and New Hampshire State Council on the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship.

And yet there was more calling to him. His love of the rocks and ledges of the coast became more prevalent. A mission. Indeed, a calling. And serendipitously, one day on the streets of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Hyatt happened upon a friend whose excitement over her visit to Peru refocused his direction.

He knew he had to go to Peru to understand what the rocks, stones, mountains, the shamans and the culture had to teach him. He didn’t go there so much to photograph as to absorb. The love affair with that culture continues after 35 visits over many years. The visits have become an essential aspect of his art and his life, and of course, his world view.

And — 16,000 feet up in the Andes, in an ancient village — he built friendships. Friendships that still endure today through meaningful relationships, and the embracing of a culture dramatically different than his, and yet, he was “home” where traditions were thousands of years old.

Over these many years, his work developed its own personality. Its own nuance. Its own beauty. He’s done three basic themes over his 50-year career as a photographer: landscapes (rocks/ledges), Peru and salt piles.

Salt piles? Yes. For those of you who’ve not visited Portsmouth, New Hampshire, there are salt piles along the waterfront of the Piscataqua River. HUGE piles that get replenished every

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WHEN THE WORLD LOOKS BACK: THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF CARL AUSTIN HYATT

VAN WARD GALLERY AT THE CLIFF HOUSE MAINE

591 SHORE ROAD

CAPE NEDDICK,
OGUNQUIT, MAINE

JANUARY 11 THROUGH MARCH 15

Carl Austin Hyatt, *Bald Head Cliff*.





Carl Austin Hyatt, *Salmon Falls River*, archival pigment inks on watercolor paper, 30" x 40".

year by large ocean liners that bring the precious commodity that is used to cover the roadways of New Hampshire during the winter.

And his art? Hyatt starts with film, and from there he may segue to digital if the fine details he desires are needed in a larger print. He was slow to embrace digital technology, but now explains it with a musical metaphor. "Different mediums offer different opportunities for expression," he said. "The same piece of music (image) can be played on a violin, a cello, a piano... I print the larger images in digital because they are better than what could be created in the darkroom — for technical reasons."

He works in large format — 11"x 14". With film. And only in black-and-white. Yes, he knew Ansel Adams. Hyatt took a two-week workshop with him when he was a 21-year-old young man. But Hyatt's work does not take an understudy position to Adams.

His piece, "Salmon Falls River," makes you want

to weep drinking in the beauty. A gnarled tree branch stretches across the print horizontally, exhibiting spring growth above a lake with a forested peninsula across the way and reflected in the water.

"Bald Head Cliff #7" is taken from a somewhat elevated perspective in which you look down on the flatter section of ledge that has water pooled in the crevasses as it extends out with a soft, foggy water presentation. Balancing off the photo on the left is a powerful, vertical cliff backdropped against a cloudy sky.

Bordering on abstract — by virtue of its beautifully selected point of focus — is "Salt Pile, Portsmouth Harbor." It is masterfully positioned so that the ship is masked somewhat by the salt piles — one on the left and one on the right — that is reflecting on a pool on this side of the salt piles, creating an amazing geometric design. One wants to stand up and cheer, for it's a perfect shot.

A more recent obsession is Hyatt's love affair with photographing rocks. "Igneous Luminous" is an egg-shaped stone caught in a netting and hanging down into an abyss with granite-like structures on both sides of the netting. The contrast, the netting, the perfection is enthralling.

And that's just a taste of what you'll experience at the show. A huge bonus will be a scheduled mid-February installation of a triptych of a tall ledge reflecting the water below. A glorious undertaking, "Bald Head Cliff #1," stands eight feet tall.

"When the World Looks Back: The Photographs of Carl Austin Hyatt" exhibition opens January 11 until March 15 at the Van Ward Gallery at The Cliff House in Cape Neddick (Ogunquit), Maine, with an artist reception on January 12 from 5-8 p.m.

This show will be a standout that is not to be missed.

Linda Sutherland