

EROS, DEATH SEEN IN SOFTLY FOCUSED IMAGERY

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For The Dispatch

Will Shively is a painter who took up photography several years ago. The results of his photographic odyssey are on display in the Mile Zero Gallery.

Shively, one of the city's talented but unheralded artists, is a member of the Milo School artist's colony, a motley collection of live-in studios in a huge old school building where 30 painters, sculptors, photographers, playwrights, actors and other creative people have banded together to nurture artistic community. His photographs are on display in a nicely refurbished gallery.

All of the images are female nudes posed against a white wall in the natural light of his many-widowed studio. Shively's themes are the classic ones of eros and death, handled with taste and integrity that give his work a distinction beyond its well-traveled subject matter.

Using a mixture of techniques, including motion blur from slow-shutter speeds, double exposure, intentional soft focus, and the addition of a single color to his black-and-white images in the printing process, he creates pictures with a clearly personal sensibility.

"I'm wild about Polaroid products," Shively said. He uses Polagraph (high contrast) and Polapan (continuous tone) instant slide film, as well as infrared film, to achieve an aesthetic distancing from the relentless literalness of photography. Flesh merges with background, and an exquisitely erotic mood is exuded by means of blur, the middle grays he favors and the appealing grain from the 35mm Polaroid slides.

His minimalist composition, effective use of symmetry and a carefully observed negative space sufficient to let his few pictorial elements breathe provide the architecture from which his often light and airy images arise.

Several photographs - a slightly blurred Venus di Milo-like torso comes to mind - are

sweetly poetic representations of the transparency and transitory quality of life, like wispy white sheets blowing in the wind on a sunny day.

But not all is pleasant in his world. Death appears in several guises - a skull mask; a doll wrapped in black winding sheets; a nude model with eyes closed, swathed in gauzy fabric.

Some of the imagery is not sufficiently internalized and digested. The nuts and bolts of a heavily theatrical symbolism are apparent in the pictures that juxtapose a crucifix with the nude model, and the color seems arbitrary.

But the best work is beautiful indeed, and Shively has worked long enough at his craft to express a vision with feeling and style.

Mile Zero Gallery

Photographs by Will Shiveley are on display through July 23 at the Mile Zero Gallery, corner of Starr and Milo streets. Call 464-0330.