

Area Art News

Like many folks today I am no stranger to the recording potential of photography. I began taking pictures as a kid keeping track of family vacations and friends made at scout camp. Although priceless, that collection of images is nothing more than my personal memorabilia of foreheadless friends and cabins out of focus. Photography in the realm of fine art is or should be of a higher standard than family snap-shots.

Currently on display at the Fire Hall Gallery in Charles Town is a collection of photography by xxx. The title of this exhibition —*Monongahela: New Wilderness* indicates that these images document in some way the proposed and existing wilderness areas in the Monongahela National Forest of West Virginia. Beyond this statement little additional information is provided for neither the viewer nor any distinguishing characteristics within the photos themselves to confirm this. A list of works by title, plant name and physical location in the state is sitting on a table, while the works on the wall are numbered but not in the same sequence as the info sheet. Personal information about the artist or reasons for the images is not available. Is this collection merely to document what is there or showcase a wilderness area? Were the photo taken at dawn, dusk or throughout a day?

Beyond taking endless personal photos as a child, I spent every Saturday at the local YWCA waiting for my father to pick me up after swimming lessons. I sat each week in an overstuffed chair in the lobby just below an image that I found haunting yet captivating - a photograph like none I had ever seen before. Space was presented that one could travel into regardless of the eeriness of night and the depth of the shadows. This image filled my dreams both night and day. It awoke my senses. As a college student I put a name to the image: *Moon and Half Dome* by Ansel Adams and began a life-long career of investigating image making. Adams' understanding and use of composition and light has inspired many as well as set a standard to achieve. It is the understanding and usage of these two fundamentals that creates the nuances between pictures and photographs.

Mr. xxx's collection contains 22 pieces, 5 of which are black & white the remaining in color. All are what might be considered wilderness landscape photography. Of the five B&W images only *Red Spruce and Rhododendron* and *Hemlocks* include any highlighted areas offering visual interest to the viewer. The remaining three have an overall tone of medium gray resulting in a general dullness and lack of contrast. Compositionally, *Meadow* and *Meadow Detail* offer movement through line.

Among the color pieces, two are significant. The light in *Shavers Fork River Bottom* invites the viewer into the woods as far as the eye can see while depth and distance are presented in grays. The details brought out by the dark tones give an overall balance to this piece. In *American Beech*, the top two-thirds is engulfed in fog. Atmosphere can be very tricky to convey, and here it is done well. Detail and highlight on the front tree would greatly enhance the overall effect.

Many contemporary photographers excel in showcasing the types of visual themes Mr. xxx may be trying to investigate. Three such individuals are: **Barbara Bosworth** whose simple investigation of a tree can hold a viewer captive by her use of light and contrast. Her work can be viewed at the Smithsonian on line photo exhibit—*Home and Heaven*. Monumental vistas that capture the "grandiose" reminiscent of Ansel Adams seem like simple shots for

Clifford Ross. The subtle and captivating ethereal effects of fog are well documented in the photos of **Kerik Kouklis.**

Monongahela: New Wilderness will be on display through February 11. Beginning February 15 works by area students will be on display. The Fire Hall Gallery is located at 108 N. George Street.

View works by the above mentioned photographers at

Barbara Bosworth:

<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/results/?num=10&name=barbara+bosworth&title=&keywords=&type=&number=&btnG.x=0&btnG.y=0>

Clifford Ross:

<http://www.cliffordross.com/>

Kerik Kouklis:

<http://www.kerik.com/images.htm>