

Technology

By Al Fasoldt

TECHNOFILE

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For many photographers, the photograph they're taking is finished the moment they snap the shutter. Others consider picture-taking as only the beginning. They sometimes work for hours on the digital image, tweaking it in their photo-editing software to get everything just right.

And then there is Ben Gest.

This Chicago-based photographer takes weeks to finish some of his photos. In these pictures, the mind's eye is as much of a camera as the lens itself.

Gest's photographs are on display through July 27 at the Light Work gallery at 316 Waverly Avenue in Syracuse. Gest will be present for a reception at the gallery this Thursday from 5 to 8 p.m. The free exhibit is open Sunday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

If you are an avid photographer and know even a little about photo editing on a computer, you should see these photos. You are likely to come away with a renewed respect for digital-editing talent -- and a new appreciation of the simple art of patience.

Gest's photos are children of the digital age. Unlike the pictures you and I take, Gest's prints are put together from as many as 20 individual photographs, taken from a variety of angles, many of them concentrating on details that a single photograph would miss.

Using Adobe Photoshop, the most powerful editing software available, Gest creates the modern-day photographic equivalent of a painting, without any outward sign of a painter's techniques. It is only in the inward composition, in the life of the photograph, as much as it would be in the life of a painting, that Gest achieves this kind of transformation.

The results have to be seen to be believed. The resulting photos are carefully composed and exquisitely assembled, then printed as large as possible on a wide-body Epson ink-jet printer. At first glance, these huge prints seem nothing more than carefully printed normal photos. But like Impressionist paintings, Gest's prints draw you into the scene and illuminate more than what seemed to be there a few moments ago. His painter's vision has carried the print -- and the viewer -- into a private world that seems to defy the laws of optics.

"What does it mean when a photo can do that?" Gest asked when I chatted with him before the exhibition. The answer, as you sense from the way his prints pull you into the private space of his photographs, is the rise of a new kind of photography, one that illuminates what is hidden in conventional picture-taking techniques.

You'll also be fascinated with the technology behind the print-making process. Like that three-year-old ink-jet printer stuck on the shelf behind your computer, Gest's printer uses a print head that sprays ink onto paper. But the Epson he uses is much larger,

printing on rolls of ultra-wide paper, and the ink contains metallic pigments that won't fade or shift color.

This process, which is now available even on smaller consumer printers from Epson and a few other manufacturers, guarantees that pigmented-ink prints made on archival-quality paper will last at least as long as conventional photographic prints. In many cases, they will survive without fading even longer, as long as 80 to 150 years if kept away from strong light and high humidity.

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