

Arts

Getting the Picture

Contemporary photo show is Kowal's next venture in art

BY DOUG TRAPP

Long before Photoshop software, there was Jerry Uelsmann. He created many of his impeccably-realistic photographic blends in the darkroom years before computers made similar prints a matter of pointing and clicking instead of dodging and burning.

A solid example of his beautiful trickery is an untitled work joining a wall of empty picture frames with a few people walking along a beach. It perfectly aligns two seemingly unrelated pictures into a third image that's obviously impossible but at the same time completely natural. Uelsmann, now 68 and living in Gainesville, Fla., has the imagination of M.C. Escher and the photographic eye of Ansel Adams.

Five of his prints are at the Carl Solway Gallery in Over-the-Rhine (424 Findlay St.) as part of *The Photographic Edge*, an impressive show of contemporary American photographers from a variety of disciplines. Most of the prints are black-and-white, but there are also tapestry-like works on cloth and other more abstract pieces.

Uelsmann's prints alone are enough reason to plan a visit, but they're just the beginning of the 71-piece show on display through Jan. 17.

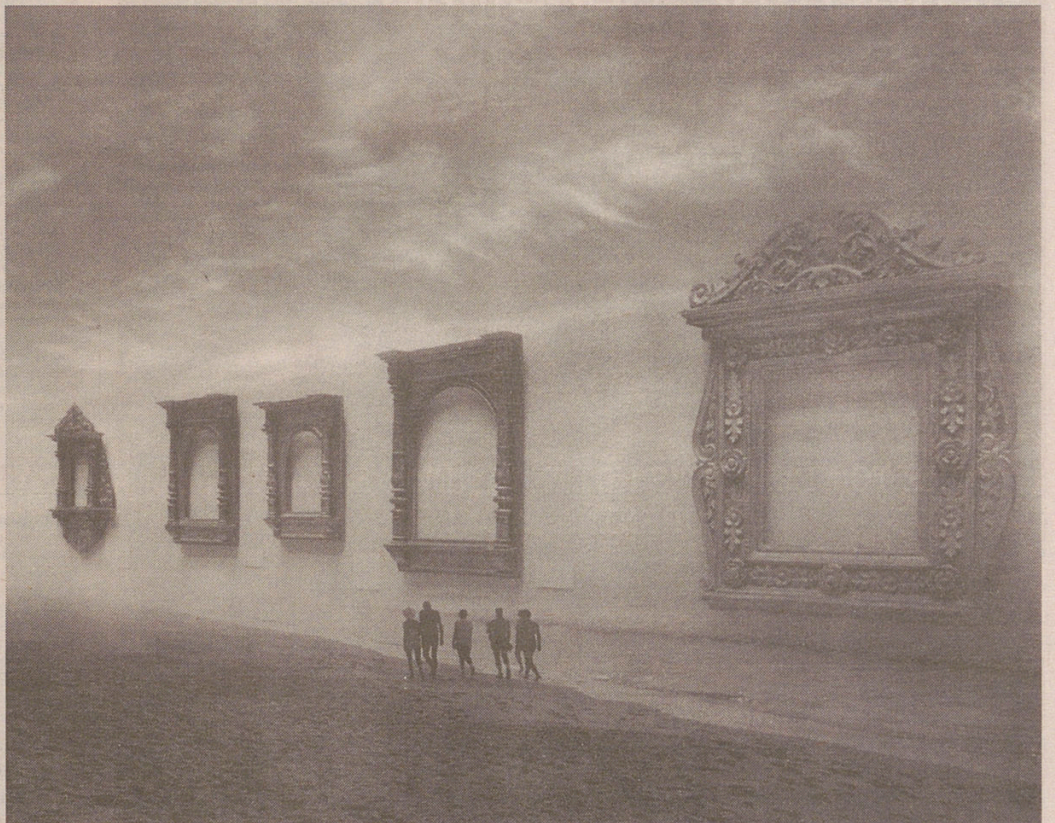
Also imaginative is the work of photographer Suzanne Mitchell. The University of Louisville professor emerita has sculpted and sewn pieces of clothing from prints on heavy-weight paper, plus wood, canvas and other materials. The most impressive of her three pieces in the show is "Este," a turn-of-the-century blouse stitched together from lace and dozens of the same small, dark, difficult-to-read architectural photos. Her work artfully connects clothing, sculpture and photography into pieces that draw the viewer into the Victorian era on a couple of visual levels.

Adding a touch of whimsy is photographer Cynthia Greg. She contributes four large, close-up shots of dollhouse-sized white bowls, broken sunglasses, a magnifying glass and a deck of cards being handled by regular-sized fingers.

Also included are two examples of the documentary work of Eastern Kentucky photographer Shelby Lee Adams; four of Jock Sturges' intimate, sometimes controversial photos of nudists in California and Europe; three of Jack Leigh's elegant landscapes of soupy swamps near Savannah, Ga.; and two of Kenneth Josephson's studies of books.

(Josephson will speak March 27 at 7 p.m. at the Cincinnati Art Museum as part of the Lightborne Contemporary Photography Lecture Series. Some of the artists represented in *The Photographic Edge* have previously spoken in earlier free lectures. That's how show curator Cal Kowal got to know some of the work.)

The Photographic Edge is a debut of sorts



This untitled photo by Jerry Uelsmann is part of *The Photographic Edge*, an impressive collection of contemporary American photography currently on display at Carl Solway Gallery.

for Kowal, recently retired from the Art Academy of Cincinnati. After 31 years of teaching, he's set his sights on a new career as a fine art photography dealer.

"There hasn't been much in Cincinnati with contemporary photography in the gallery scene," Kowal said. "So in a sense I'm trying to bring good things to Cincinnati that most people don't get to see."

One of the bigger names included is Yasuhiro Ishimoto, a graduate of the Chicago School of Design and Kowal's favorite. Three of Ishimoto's 1950s Chicago documentary photographs hang just to the right of the gallery's front door, leading the show.

This show is also designed to provide Kowal a chance to get some dealing experience and give Carl Solway Gallery some new momentum.

Solway — the international art dealer and Kowal's longtime friend — bought the 40,000-square foot, four-story building in 1987 as an office, artists' fabrication studio and gallery. Solway recently sold the building but continues to rent office and storage space.

Internationally-known video artist Nam June Paik and other visiting artists used the Solway fabrication space for years. A stroke six years ago has kept Paik in New York full time.

Solway will probably keep dealing art as long as his body lets him, but with his three sons living outside of Cincinnati, there's doubt surrounding the first-floor gallery.

"We're thinking about keeping this space going," said Kowal, who's put a lot of effort toward attracting photography fans to the show. Opening night went well, but since then getting people to come to the gallery has been a bit of a challenge.

"For many people totally unaware of this area, it's difficult," Kowal said.

Visitors must buzz their way into the building, which is located just west of Central Parkway in a mostly industrial zone. The entrance, however, stands out because it's marked with non-slip stainless steel plates.

With Kowal's work, perhaps the Solway Gallery will fill the gap between smaller, local shows of varying quality and the huge, high-end Cincinnati Art Museum exhibits of photographers such as Weegee and Ansel Adams. I'm rooting for him.

Next on Kowal's agenda for the Solway Gallery is a show of folk art.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC EDGE is on view through Jan. 17 at Carl Solway Gallery in Over-the-Rhine.

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