

What Do You See(k)?

By Perry Williams

Seeing the world in black and white is something that cannot be truly appreciated or experienced by the human eye which is distracted by vibrant, and the seemingly more enticing colors this world has to offer. Though many may refer to them as “bland” or “stagnant,” black, white, and the intermediate shades of grey that weave their way between them can be just as elegant and eye-catching as the other brilliant pigments that flood the retina. Armed with a camera and a deep passion for photography, Wynn Bullock has perfected capturing the unique beauty of these shades and provided his work to the de Saisset museum, centrally located on the campus of Santa Clara University. *Seeking Answers*, a new exhibit at this museum, is a satisfying look back on Bullock’s bold and elegant photography taken from the 1940s to the early 1970s. Open from April 12th to June 30th, this powerful compilation of images features Bullock’s pure black and white photography.

Upon entering the cube-like space lined with black and white photos that contrast with dark grey walls on which they are displayed, one can’t possibly avoid the aura of peace and structure that the exhibition poses. The angular space is again contrasted by the natural fluidity of each artwork and allows one to become fully immersed in the photographs and nearly unaware of one’s tangible surroundings. Bullock achieves his goal of making his camera “not only an extension of the eye, but of the brain,” as the barrier between picture taker and viewer is dissolved when viewing the elegance of water under a pier or the innocence of a little boy, back turned to the viewer, fishing off a deteriorated dock.

One of Bullock’s works, entitled “Burned Chair,” captures the detail of a space stricken by a natural disaster, and causes viewers to experience both charred surfaces that remain standing and the hardwood life they once held. The crisp photograph depicts the aftermath of a fire, showing only the remains of a small room whose centerpiece is a charred wooden chair leaning delicately against a wall. The cracks of blackened wood on every surface make the space seem dead, but the still-standing walls and chair remind the viewer of the fuller life that once was. The chair that possesses only two full legs could now crumble under a leaf, but once it served as a support system for those who needed rest. The walls that are covered with ash and would turn one’s hand black with a simple touch used to be structurally sound, colorful, and arrayed with pictures. The floor that flakes and cracks with every movement was once shielded from the elements and served all who sought a sturdy step. Every element of this photograph compliments Bullock’s ability to use the lens of his camera as an extension of the viewer’s mind by providing not only a captivating image, but also leaving room for the intricacies of one’s imagination to weave their way through each and every charred crevice.

Bullock continues his focus on the natural state of his subjects by delving into the small yet stunning complexities of the natural world. His aptly named photograph “Cactus” focuses in on the smooth curvature and fine lines of a single cactus needle. The softer whites that fill the curves of the base juxtapose the stark blacks that bring each finger-pricking needle to a point. The photograph is taken in such a way that it lures viewers into a comfortable state of focusing on the beauty of the cactus needle rather than its danger. Bullock makes this natural blade nearly touchable, as viewers feel the soft whites turn to more dangerous greys, and stop before carefully grazing their eyes across and around the sharp blacks. Making the

dangerous feel safe and the natural more beautiful, Bullock uses “Cactus” to engulf viewers in the medium of his art and intrigue more than just their eyes.

The many images that line two large rooms at the de Saisset provide a unique look into the world of Bullock’s photography. Delving deeper into the senses rather than just providing aesthetic pleasure, *Seeking Answers* has something for everyone to connect to and appreciate. Free to all who seek its lessons and pleasures, this exhibit explores the fine cracks of a charred room, the smooth curves of a cactus needle, and many other natural and constructed wonders to reveal the true beauty that lies within the shades of black and white.