

ARTSCENE™

The Monthly Digest to Art in Southern California



LUCINDA LUVAAS
“WE’RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER”

**PABLO PICASSO • GEORGE HERMS • RICHARD BAKER • RUFUS
SNODDY • 100 YEARS OF NATIONAL PARKS • AND MUCH MORE**

as Renoir visited the shaded paths of tamed forests, Baker's tourists get away from it all and hike "Into the Chocolate Mountains."

Baker also admires the light of Edward Hopper, combining the artist's interest in architecture with his own interest in structure in the "Caucus House," with its blanked out windows and its sharp guardian rocks in the front yard. There are always hints of a large narrative contained in these concise paintings, but Baker offers no obvious clues. He keeps us at a remove, his attention alerted by a moment in time that seems quite ordinary and yet, like Hopper, suggests some mystery to be solved. In "2 Points of View" we are left wondering: Why is there a man in yellow pants standing in an empty road and why is he pointing outside the painting? On the other side of the road, a black and white dog faces to the right, staring into a desert distance. The road darts through the middle and plunges sharply down a hill and out of sight. The only witness to the odd arrangement is a slightly tilted telephone pole on the horizon.

The same dog reappears in "Dog Noir," featuring the animal accompanied by an array of long shadows — his own and that of his owner. The reference to film noir is an insider's homage to the use of chiaroscuro in the crime movies of the 1940s. In selecting his scenes, Baker seeks to see something that would be overlooked by the casual viewer and, in some paintings, the lack of event and the ordinariness of the situation seems almost willfully perverse. But Baker seeks to mirror the tiny pauses of everyday life as originally caught by the Impressionists.

Using figures in the manner of Eric Fischl, the artist allows postures and attitudes to sketch a character. It is noteworthy that many of his subjects are viewed from the back. In "On Closer Examination," set in an art gallery, a woman leans over to view one of the artist's paintings of a church in Cayuses. In "Contemporary Art" a man in a plaid shirt views a Brice Marden abstract painting. While we are not exactly invading the privacy of these subjects, through the artist we are encountering a se-

ries of figures seen from behind in ordinary settings made interesting by someone who has an eye for such things.

Jeanne Willette

100 YEARS OF NATIONAL PARKS: THE WEST

(G2 Gallery, Venice) Every year millions of people from all over the world visit America's national parks to view grand landscapes and unspoiled nature. Resources provided by the National Park Service inform the curious about America's history, values and culture. The diversity of the flora and fauna, the peaceful and breathtaking views and solitude one finds in them offer an escape from the normal cacophony and distractions of modern life. One's mind gets replenished; one's spirit rejuvenated. President Theodore Roosevelt promoted nature's positive effect on the human soul years after he temporarily left New York and politics in 1884 to join cattle raisers in North Dakota as a way to deal with the deaths of his wife and mother.

For creative minds America's national parks have served as a continuing source of inspiration, whether it be artists or writers, photographers or composers. It's a deep and diverse group that includes the likes of John Muir, Rudyard Kipling, Nevada Barr, Olivier Messiaen, Stephen Lias, Ferde Grofé, Ansel Adams and Hudson River School painters Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt.

"100 Years of National Parks" is a four-part series of exhibitions that honor the efforts of the National Park Service, the Federal agency that manages all U.S. national parks and many American national monuments. This show is the fourth and final installment celebrating the Service's 100th birthday, here emphasizing the parks located in the eleven western states, as seen through the eyes of more than 30 photographers.

Among the color photographs, Art Wolfe's "Thunderstorm," depicting a gale force wind approaching at



Art Wolfe, "Thunderstorm," color photograph.

the Grand Sand Dunes in Colorado, beautifully conveys the outsized power of nature. The rabbit grass of the foreground serves as a metaphor for the resiliency of human nature; people with strong support systems will weather the storms of life. Then, there is an image by Madrid-based photographer Felix Gil de la Casa that shows a single American bison shot from a distant elevated position wandering along Yellowstone's Upper Geyser Basin. This image catches one's eye because of its delightful color combination — turquoise, earth colors, yellow and orange. The bison is shown on atypical ground, away from its usual grassland habitat. La Casa's image has political relevance, because in May 2016 President Obama announced the bison to be the country's first national mammal, one which almost faced extinction in the late 1800s.

A photo by Kevin Ebi captures the motion of the clouds above the Devils Tower in Wyoming. The silhouetted image provides a strong contrast to the bright blue that's almost swallowed up by the dramatic overcast sky that appears like an open hand fan. This produces the impression of being the disruptive force in an otherwise peaceful setting. The Devil's Tower is of importance in conservation history, because it was the first declared U.S. National Monument.

There are many folklores as to how the Devils Tower was formed. The one of the Kiowa and Lakota Indians is that there once was a group of girls who were chased by giant bears. To save themselves they climbed on top of a rock and prayed to the Great Spirit. Their prayers were heard, the Great Spirit made the rock rise from the ground towards the heavens so as

to protect the girls from the bears.

Among the black-and-white images are the works of Rich Greene and John Fisanotti. Green's well-composed "Chaco Kivas" records the remarkable complex of stone and earth dwellings of the ancestral Pueblo Peoples, located at the Chaco Culture National Historical Park in New Mexico, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Fisanotti's "Afternoon at Yellowstone Lake" attracts the eye through its stunning atmosphere, produced by a spectacular cloudy skyline that converges towards some gnarly random driftwood in the foreground. This image was taken at Yellowstone — designated the first National Park of the U.S. in 1872 by President Ulysses S. Grant.

Simone Kussatz

GEORGE HERMS

(OCCCA, Orange County) An exhibition of recent work by seminal assemblagist George Herms is, among other things, an opportunity to reflect on what ties assemblage to modernity and what relevance it might retain for a contemporary audience. Herms' practice suggests that it has something to do with affirming memory and connection in a world that grows ever more atomized and amnesiac despite (or perhaps, because of) its technological interconnectedness.

From its origins in pre-World War I cubism, assemblage has been fodder for both formalists and socially engaged artists. Some of the earliest and most acerbic assemblage was produced by Berlin Dadaists. But there was also Kurt Schwitters, who found in assemblage a lyrical medium with which to apotheosize everyday life.

Others discovered in assemblage a means to create uncanny objects charged with illicit unconscious desires. Following in the footsteps of Freud, who at the turn of the 20th century proposed that dreams are themselves assemblages of "day residues"