

Time frozen in hot imagery

Artist Charles Morgan captures images of Caesars Palace statues with glimpses of tourists at the Tropicana Hotel and Casino all within the same photograph by using multiple exposures.

by Deborah Perlman

If you don't like the thought of combining science fiction with a sensuous, 2,100-year-old Venus de Milo and glimpses of partying tourists on the Vegas strip, don't read this.

But if you do, you'll find there is photographic imagery that captures all of the above through multiple exposures and is powerfully packed with everything that is so—Las Vegas!

UNLV adjunct faculty member and artist Charles Morgan, explains the key element exemplified in his work and used in teaching his Drawing 101 students is the power to see and observe. Morgan adds, "The world is filled with alternative realities. Reality shifts all the time."

When asked who or what influenced his work, Morgan picks up a paperback copy of "I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon" by science fiction author Philip K. Dick. He leafs through the first couple of pages and reads scattered excerpts of things like what is reality and perception, and how humans perceive

things.

In his writings, Dick also explores the concepts of circular time and frozen time. Morgan does this by capturing the image of a classical statue from Caesars Palace and juxtaposing it against newly developed images of partying tourists.

On his piece, "Venus in the Sun," Morgan says, "The image of Venus de Milo has been around for 2,100 years, never changing. This image exists through time. Yet, tourist images exist for barely 1/125th of a second and are always changing."

Morgan elaborates, "It would appear then, that the photographs are a case of frozen time versus time frozen; which is more lasting?"

While looking at "Venus in the Sun," Morgan talks about red and yellow filters used to depict the summer heat in Las Vegas. He explains, "The imagery in this photograph and all of the photos in his statue series are meant to illustrate how the heat and light of the summer affects people's perceptions and realities of Las Vegas."

Clearly, Morgan's photographic imagery is irrefutably about Las Vegas. "Las Vegas has so much visual information," he says. Morgan explains the amusing incongruity in finding icons of world art in a place supposedly dedicated to hedonism. "Or is it?" asks Morgan.

"It seems to me that the statues represent the lasting, higher virtues of human existence, while the tourist scenes denote the less praised, but equally important aspects of life. The two are not far apart," he adds.



'David at the Trop' by Charles Morgan

Pasha Rafat, UNLV professor of photography has seen Morgan's work develop over the past 10 years. Rafat says Morgan's work reflects the continuously changing images of the city. According to Rafat, "Charles has found a method of connecting to the visual properties of the city in all its eccentricities."

In another multiple exposure piece, "David at the Trop," Morgan points out how the formal elements of the photograph pulled together, some happening by chance.

He explains the way the trees are balanced, the way the whites of the David and the child compliment each other and the way the contrasting musculature of the tourist and the statue seem to pull your eye from one figure to the other.

In Morgan's work, as on the strip, chance plays an

important role. The monochromatic areas containing tourists are the most involved with chance. "I simply walk around the tourist-occupied areas of Las Vegas and fire the shutter randomly," explains Morgan.

The pictorial irony and substance included in Morgan's photographic imagery is provocative, well-executed and keenly connected to its surroundings and to its time.

Morgan's imagery goes beyond the science fiction question of what factors change our perception of reality to the question of how will it be perceived? The image of Venus and David will probably still exist 2,100 years from now. But what about Las Vegas and those partying tourists

on the strip?

Morgan's work has been included in exhibitions throughout the United States. He recently exhibited in UNLV's "Las Vegas Photographers" exhibition and in a one-person show at McCarran International Airport.

Some of his work is now on display at the Las Vegas and Green Valley Libraries.

The recipient of four years of art honors and awards, Morgan earned both a Masters of Fine Arts in 1991 and a Bachelor of Arts in anthropology in 1983 from UNLV. He has also received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1981 from the University of Arizona.



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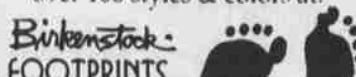


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