



Dune, Hanna, gelatin-silver print by Bob Sanov

A Classicist at DIVA

Fine arts photographer Bob Sanov

Until he retired a couple of years ago and moved to Florence, Bob Sanov was a classical violinist by profession. He now devotes himself full-time to fine-art photography, another life-long passion, which began with his viewing of an Ansel Adams exhibition. As may be seen in “A Sensuous Nature,” his exhibition of gelatin-silver prints at DIVA, Sanov has remained true to this initial encounter with Adams, and his photography is classic both in terms of subject-matter and technique.

Sand dunes, rock formations, canyon walls, streams, trees, craggy bark, leafy plants, calla lilies and kelp were already the timeless subject-matter of Edward and Brett Weston, Paul Caponigro, Don Worth, And later of John Sexton, Adam’s assistant who was one of Sanov’s teachers.

Sanov continues in their rich vein, transforming his subject matter into almost abstract compositions that celebrate form, texture, and above all, light. For it is light that sculpts form and reveals texture. Sanov uses a large-format view camera, hence the exquisite crispness of detail in his nature photography.

Looking at Sanov’s prints, you may delve into the beauty of purely formal relationships independently from what is repre-

sented. Or you may choose to rediscover the natural world through his lens — the delicate intricacy of leaf veins, the striations of sandstone, the abstract patterns of a tunnel wall where leaching minerals created drawings of waterfalls, the deep lines of bark, the sensuous and frilly diversity of kelp, the opposite sides of cresting dunes, one smooth, one textured.



Kelp Orgy, gelatin-silver print by Bob Sanov

Sanov approaches the nude in much the same way as landscape, even blurring the distinction between the two, as in *Dune, Hanna*. Here he emphasizes abstract form in the human body and reciprocally in his dune photographs by revealing the sensuous molds of the landscape. In terms of printing, however, his treatment is quite different. To offset the mercilessness of a large-format camera on the human epider-

mis, he has developed a printing method that softens edges, lowers contrasts and provides the model with a smooth, grain-free skin.

As a fine-art photographer, Sanov emphasizes the importance of darkroom work. “Making the negative is part one of a 12-step process,” he said. “You have to start with a good negative, but that’s only the beginning.” Out of 300 to 400 negatives per year, Sanov keeps only three or four. It may then take him months of labor in the darkroom to be satisfied with a print.

Interestingly, Sanov has found that his formation as a classical musician benefits his photography. “A lot of great photographers were fine musicians, such as Ansel Adams, Paul Caponigro,” he said. “Quite a few photographers have a connection with music, and everything I’ve learned in music has been useful for photography. It’s methodical; it requires discipline, calmly thinking, and working through things. There are certain basic rules you need to learn and at some point need to break away from.”

Don’t miss this exhibit, “A Sensuous Nature: Gelatin-silver photographs by Bob Sanov,” which closes Feb. 26 at DIVA. And while you’re there, enjoy a tour of the other galleries in the building. **EW**

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