Arts & Galleries

review: "then and now" photographs by chris foster

Many "aficionados" look down their noses at photography as an art form which requires no real talent. *It's just point and shoot. Simple.* But photography is anything but the simple act of pointing and shooting. It isn't even about being in the right place at the right time, though all these things come into play. Photography, when done well, as Chris Foster does in his current exhibit at Bravura Art and Objects, is about capturing moments of power and grace, displaying depth and action in a two-dimensional still.

Then and Now, Foster's first show in the United States, captures that intensity. His shots of rock icons Tina Turner, Chuck Berry, and Elton John during the 70s are like loaded guns; cocked with their ever-present weight, ready to fire. On the adjacent wall, and on the odd space here and there, Foster's contemporary work is shown, taking that intensity and shifting subject matter to the sea and fishing. Beachscapes are nothing new on the East End, but the eye that captured Elton John chugging a bottle of champagne now turns its gaze to seining, fly fishing, and the overall power of the ocean. These are not the cliché shots you generally see while bopping in souvenir shops, they are not pretty sunsets and solitary bathers. Here we have churning tides and old salts.

"Tall Tina Turner"

"Tuna Iridescence," a tight shot of the head of a tuna shimming with the colors of mother of pearl, catches the viewers attention, first because if its delicate swirl of colors, but as the eye is drawn closer, you notice scars, perforations in the skin and contours of the mouth that separate the sheen of iridescence from the textural qualities. In "Bonaparte Wave," a flock of Bonaparte's gulls sweep across a backdrop of a cresting wave, their white feathers blending into the background of the crashing water, but as the mind absorbs the image, the crispness of the birds' outlines becomes prevalent. Their presence becomes the primary focus of the photograph for a minute before the viewer's eye returns to the wave in the background.

"Fresh Pond Reflection"

At quick glance, one could look at these two sets of photographs and see nothing similar; rock stars on one side, nature on the other. But the display of the show and the positioning of the pieces allows the viewer to draw connections between the two. The most outstanding and possibly beautiful of these correlations is between "Tall Tina Turner" and "Fresh Pond Reflection." The first image, a black and white, is shot at an upward angle, capturing a magnificent, powerful Turner on stage in a white flowing dress. The second, a swan and its reflection on a still pond, displayed vertically with the plumes of the swan on the bottom, mimics the white dress of Turner, creating parallels through the 35-year age gap between the collections.

Perspective plays a strong role in Foster's work. It is evident in the "Tall Tina Turner" piece (where the upward shot makes her appear to be colossal), but truly makes a difference when dealing with the contemporary works.

The strength in "Haul Seiners: The Lesters" lies in the fact that it was shot with the camera very low to the ground, aiming upward, following a fish-packed seining net from its outer-lengths toward the men hauling it in. The focus of the shot lies in the foreground – the fish – and leaves the fishermen blurred. It offers a startling image of the haul – the essence and goal of fishing.

The individual sides of *Then and Now* stand alone as photographic exhibitions. The rock photography carries history, youth and counter-culture, whereas the contemporary works seem to hold a timeless quality, edging closer to the side of fine art than the documentary style of the 1970s work. Together, though, the works show the change in tastes and subject matter, as well as an evolution of style of Chris Foster. A chronology of his life through the images he shoots.

–Christian McLean