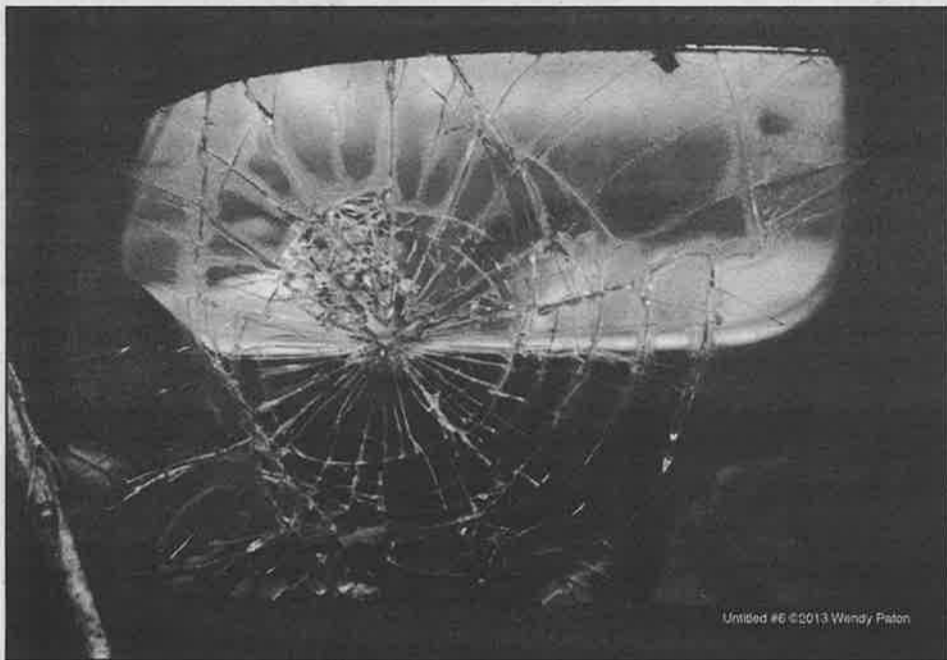


PREVIEW

Regional Photographer on International Scene at Michener



Untitled #6 ©2013 Wendy Paton



Look At Me ©2008 Wendy Paton

by Aubrey J. Kauffman

Black & White: Photographer Wendy Paton, right, and her works 'Untitled,' top left, and 'Look at Me.'

Internationally known Lambertville-based photographer Wendy Paton is currently exhibiting closer to her studio, at the Michener Museum in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, through Sunday, December 7.

The exhibition curated by museum director Lisa Hanover pulls from two distinct bodies of work to demonstrate Paton's range. One is "Visages De Nuit," a collection of 51 black-and-white candid night portraits that she created between 2006 and 2012. The title means white or sleepless night and comes from Xavier Canonne, the director of the Musee de la Photographie de Chatleroi (Belgium), who used the phrase in an essay for the book that features Paton's photography and accompanies the exhibition. The other body of work is "Reclaiming Dignity," a series of the faces and bodies of neglected cars that Paton describes as "abstract portraits."

The exhibition that mixes sleepless nights and abandoned cars is an interesting departure for a woman who as a young girl dreamed of being a jockey.

Paton learned to ride at five or six years old, and describes herself as "horse crazy." She later discovered harness racing and says that she found the life "completely and totally enthralling" and wanted to go "fast and furious."

The choice is an unusual one and certainly outside her family's general interest. Her father, Bert Knapp, was a well-known radio broadcaster on WMCA in New York City for 40 years. Her mother was a homemaker. Her brother followed a communications track and became a TV news anchor for Channel 8 in New Haven, Connecticut. Paton, who is married to the Doylestown-based Golden Blossom Honey Company owner Jon Paton, has one daughter. She also follows the communications track and owns Orchard Strategies, a public relations agency in New York City.

Before she became a photographer, Wendy Paton had a successful 18-year career as a trainer and

driver of standardbred horses. She raced in the greater New York Metropolitan area, including races at Roosevelt and Goshen raceways, and in 1983 became the only woman to ever win the year-end training title at Roosevelt.

She says she decided to move on when she had achieved all of her goals as a trainer and driver. While leaving at the top of her game, she says she wanted something that was more "emotional and mentally stimulating from an artistic standpoint."

In 1985, after being given a camera some years earlier, Paton decided to return to college and attended C.W. Post College in Long Island, where she received a degree in communications and arts management. Her experiments with her camera led her to want to do something more artistic, so in the 1990s she began study at the International Center for Photography in New York City.

"When I segued with photography I was shooting daytime, and then, in 2003, I decided to go really in and photograph at night; it was much more exciting. It reminded me of my racing days because things (on the track) are so different at night." She notes that being in a remote area or city and going down a quiet street and encountering a lone person or an activity at night creates a type of spell. "If I go back to that same place in the day time it doesn't have that same emotional pull or the same excitement."

Her background in racing also taught her to not be afraid to take chances. "I think risk taking is something when you're photographing people candidly. It's a little risky, sort of an adrenaline type thing — just being able to step out and try some new things in the darkroom to create the work."

Paton belongs to an ever-exclusive class of photographers who work with black and white film and who print their own photographs in the darkroom. She does not have any interest in shooting digitally and works exclusively with a

35mm Leica M, which is indicative of the work of some of the great masters that she admires and counts as influences on her own work. Among them is Henri Cartier-Bresson, considered to be the father of photojournalism and an early adopter of the 35mm format. "He really believed in that decisive moment, and that is really how I take my pictures. Because some of the photographs, no really all of them, 10 seconds later, 30 seconds later, two seconds later, you don't have that photograph."

E'douard Boubat is another French photojournalist she admires. After he witnessed the horrors of World War II, he wanted to portray something other than death and destruction. His quote "Don't try to explain the photograph, let it keep its mystery," has become her mantra. "Once I create it, then I'm presenting it, then it belongs to others to decide how they feel," she says. And then there's Lillian Bassman, a fashion illustrator and photographer who — in addition to her groundbreaking career and creating post-war era images for Harper's Bazaar — began to use dark room techniques to turn her images into fine art.

Paton fine-tuned her work between 2003 and 2005, when she studied with photographer Michael Kenna. One of the foremost night photographers, Kenna also specialized in landscape and architecture. Through that association Paton gained the confidence she needed photograph at night.

An exhibition at ICP led to an opportunity for a solo show in New York at the Sous Les Etoiles Gallery in 2010. Then "Visages de Nuit" debuted in Europe in 2011. She has maintained a hectic pace both nationally and internationally with her work and book. In addition to the Sous Les Etoiles Gallery, she is represented by In Focus Galerie in Koln, Germany, and Lumiere Gallery in Moscow, Russia.

In the Michener Museum show's



"Nuit Blanche" street portraits, Paton plays with focus and contrast, light and shadow, framing her subjects just so, showing the influence of Bresson's "decisive moment" at play. The photographs range in size from 11"x14" to the large mural prints that measure 35"x40". She works with master printer Chuck Kelton on the mural-sized images.

"Reclaiming Dignity," on the other hand, consists of portraits or studies of automobiles that had once been valued for their style, beauty, and grace but are now discarded. The images are only a sample of the 1,800 such images that she shot over a three-day period. She plans to edit the work down to about 40 to 50 photographs to publish in an upcoming book.

The two work together to a common goal: to create fascination within the viewer and perhaps even herself. "I've always said that I

never want to tell somebody else what to think or feel when their looking at my work as long as they think and feel something when they walk away. And I'm fascinated sometimes to find someplace at a gallery or museum where people don't know that I'm standing there and hear what they have to say."

Wendy Paton, "Nuit Blanche" and "Reclaiming Dignity," James A. Michener Art Museum, 138 South Pine Street, Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday noon to 5 p.m. Through Sunday, December 7. \$8 to \$18. www.michener-artmuseum.org or 215-340-9800.

Additional showing: Wendy Paton, "Keep It Moving," Hoehne Clark Gallery, 50 East State Street, Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Through December 31. 215-262-7240 or www.hoehneclark.com.