

# Art Review: Brett Weston inspires exhibition of contemporary photography at Albright

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Viewing now through Feb. 10 at the Freedman Gallery of Albright College Center for the Arts is "Contemporary Photography Inspired by Brett Weston." Presenting some 20 images by Weston, they are counterbalanced and accompanied with photographs surprisingly done by students who are taking the introductory course to photography, and not professionals as I had first thought.

The presentation is intended to be as much a learning experience as it is an art exhibition. Albright College is the caretaker of a gift of 200 photos to the Freedman Gallery from Christian Keese (bestowed in 2006), the owner of the Brett Weston Archive in Oklahoma City. Every few years Albright holds a show featuring Weston's work, this time using his work as a teaching tool.

Under the direction of instructor Amy Stevens, students were assigned to review the Weston photos, select a photograph that appeals to them and learn from it while taking their own photo, utilizing what they see within Weston's work as their guide.

Weston (1911 – 1993) was born in Los Angeles and is the son of equally famed photographer Edward Weston. Many of his photos focus, pardon the pun, on close-up interpretations of cracked paint, decayed wood, trees, plants and other examples of anything real that can be seen as abstract, their perspective removed, their realism reduced to areas of flattened grayish space. A serious shooter, he wanted his photos to be seen as art.

The works are installed in clusters or side-by-side with the original Weston always to the left and the student's work to the right. Entirely black-and-white and relatively small, the exhibition encircled the inner perimeter of the spacious gallery. A pair of benches were placed in the room's center for visitors to rest.

I have to say that the students did well, regardless that some concentrated more on clarity than composition, which is more of an art issue than photographic. However, there was a piece or two that were impressive.

"Untitled (Building Reflection)," a silver gelatin print by Weston hangs close to "Untitled," an archival inkjet print by Kristen DePalma. Light and shadow play cat and mouse in both of these pictures as it argues with perception in the former and in the latter non-objectifies what we might see every day, a railing shadow on brick paving in this case.

Another pairing, "Untitled (Botanical)," offers us hanging ferns by Weston, and "Botanical," a sharply detailed plant leaf by Chabria Meyers. Yet another duet depicts two sunsets, a moody "Skyscape" by Weston and "Untitled" by Kristen DePalma. In these two photos, ambient light from the low sun illuminates the clouds and horizon from behind for two dramatic shots.

Aside from the obvious comparisons, it is interesting to see what the students chose and what they may have learned or already know, making the entire exhibition as much a conceptual artwork in itself with Brett Weston a mere means to an end.

Nonetheless, these students are being displayed next to a world famous photographer with excellent photographs of their own; that's got to mean something.

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