



MAD SCIENTIST
Liz Hickok's "Preternatural" captures alchemical crystal transformations over hours, days and weeks.



MIRROR ON THE WALL In "Unidentified #23" Johanna Warwick chemically alters an old photo to achieve an eerily artistic effect.

IN THE PICTURE

Top photographers get major exposure at Houston Center for Photography's annual membership exhibition.

By Tara Seetharam

The Houston Center for Photography presents its 34th annual membership exhibition this month, celebrating with an opening reception July 22 at 5:30p.m. Of countless submissions by more than 190 local and international artists, Minneapolis Institute of Art photography curator Yasufumi Nakamori—this year's

guest judge and former curator of photography at the Museum of Fine Arts—has selected 40 top works to show at the center for the remainder of the summer.

Just a year after the center opened its doors in 1981, its first curator, Anne Wilkes Tucker, hatched the idea to hold an inclusive competition as a means of uniting amateur and professional photographers from around the city. To apply, artists need only secure a membership and pay a modest entry fee. Over time, the competition has grown, and it now attracts submissions from budding talent worldwide. For competitors, it allows exposure in one of the country's best photography centers. For guest jurors, it allows the opportunity to find new talent and trends. "It's always fun to get to know

what artists are thinking. It's a discovery," says Nakamori.

This year's featured artists hail from across the nation—nine represent Texas—and around the globe, each with a vision that hooked Nakamori. Using three broad themes, he sought photos that tapped into the critical ways that artists absorb the physical world around them. For some, that meant reimagining their personal history, like Molly Shigemoto of Denton, who distorted a century-old black-and-white photo of her Japanese ancestors with blood-red drawings overlaid on their faces. "These artists are almost imagining what could have been," Nakamori explains. "It's this ambiguous space where they're intervening and creating their own identity, their own narrative. It's fascinating."

Other submissions intrigued Nakamori by exploring environmental issues and by commenting on the ever-evolving photography medium, thanks to the influence of technology. Johanna Warwick, of Baton Rouge, La., captured the eerily beautiful process of chemically altering a dated portrait, while David Wolf of San Francisco played with the effects of printing on expired photo paper to convey the ephemeral and time-sensitive nature of the medium.

Of the 40 selected artists, Petra Barth, Eli Durst and Stacy Platt received the top honor of this year's Beth Block Juried Membership Honoraria—which comes with a handsome \$1,000 prize. "I wasn't looking for work that's deeply beautiful," says Nakamori. "I looked for artists trying to bring something new in their own language—trying to articulate the world in a personal way." 1441 W. Alabama St., 713.529.4755, hconline.com