

Exhibit "Outside Influences" traces the history of photography in Colorado



PROVIDED BY VICKI MYHREN GALLERY

Joel Dallenbach's "Graduation at Currigan Hall, Denver."

Mountains *and* migration

By Ray Mark Rinaldi
Special to The Denver Post

The exhibit "Outside Influences" presents the history of photography in Colorado, but with a profound understanding of the two forces that have shaped this state into the place it is today: mountains and migration.

The narrative here has always been driven by nomads and newcomers, people who rolled — or later, flew — across plains and settled into place with open minds and fresh perspectives, inspiring new chapters in the story. That has been especially true over the last century as the population grew, and as photography emerged as an important practice within fine art.

And geography has always been the great, irrepressible motivator of our actions. Our connections to the region's exaggerated landscape have inspired everything from how our economy developed to how we spend our leisure time. Photographers, endlessly searching for great scenery, have been animated by that backdrop, as well.

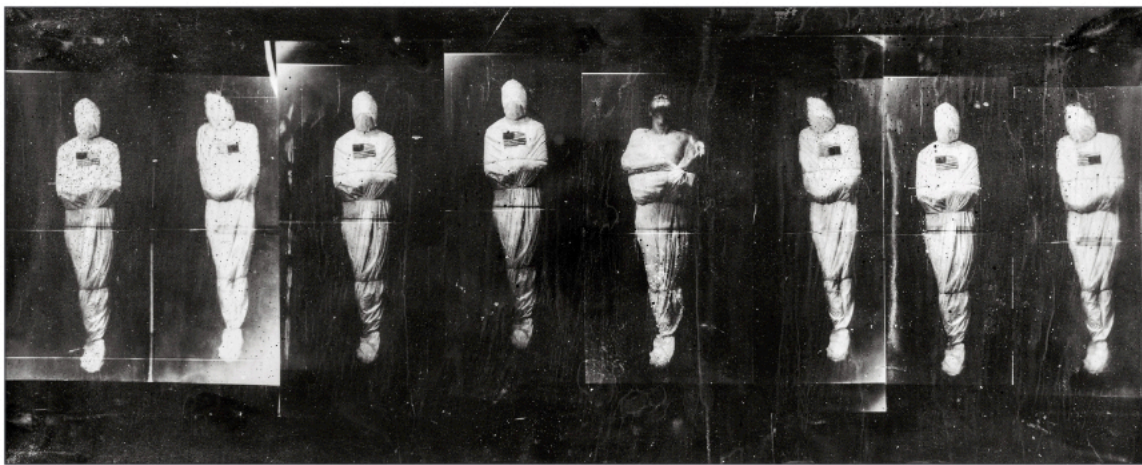
"Outside Influences" weaves these ideas together into a show with dozens of photos created from 1945 to 1995 — five crucial decades in American art history — by what can fairly be called Colorado's most "important" lens-based artists. It is built on exhaustive research undertaken by curator Rupert Jenkins, who will soon publish a book on the same topic.

The show, at DU's Vicki Myhren Gallery, is an academic lesson, for sure, and one that has never been executed so cohesively. But it is also an adventure, an art star-studded journey through both the local terrain and the minds of people who pushed the discipline forward.

The show's strength comes from its material, which is organized in a mix of chronology, style and movement. Rather than going year-to-year, Jenkins takes us from interesting moment to interesting moment, letting the dates of each photo fall where they fit best.



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Wes Kennedy's "Preamble," from 1990.

Rinaldi

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That said, it does start in a specific time and place with a section titled "Mid-Century: 1940s-1960s." Here, visitors are introduced to the pioneers of regional photography, such as Herbert Bayer, Hal Gould and James O. (Jim) Milmo.

Bayer's piece, in particular, sets the exhibition's tone. Titled "in search of times past," the 1959 work is an example of Bayer's photomontage process, for which he cut up existing photos, pieced them back together in provocative ways, and then made a final photo of the reassembled parts.

But what is interesting in the context of this exhibit is the imagery itself, which features the trunks of aspens — the state's signature tree — integrated with disembodied human eyes. The photo is surreal, no doubt, and not at all logical, but it serves as a swell example of how photographers have used Colorado's landscape as a starting point but then let their imaginations run wild.

From there, Jenkins tells the tale of this golden age of Colorado photography in groupings of photos connected to themes or to the relationships between photographers themselves.

For example, one section groups together work by Eric Havelock-Bailie, Ruth Thorne-Thomsen and Wes Kennedy, who, Jenkins writes in the accompanying text, made "some of the most resonant, emotionally gripping artwork ever produced by a photographer in Colorado."

That point is well-made by the dark, death-themed photo collages on display by Kennedy, who made them in 1990 while suffering from HIV complications. They are powerful works, but so are the four portraits of Kennedy hanging right next to them in the show that were taken by Havelock-Bailie just days before Kennedy succumbed to the disease. Death and drama define these works as well.

Meanwhile, Thorne-Thomsen fits into the group because she was a teacher of Kennedy's at the Uni-



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The exhibition is arranged around themes and important moments, rather than strict chronology.



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Shaun Gothwaite's "Birds in Flight."



BIG RED WRENCH

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IF YOU GO

"Outside Influence: Photography in Colorado 1945-1995," continues through April 27 at the Vicki Myhren Gallery on the DU campus. It's free. Info: 303-871-3716 or vicki-myhren-gallery.du.edu.

Sink's own set of "Five Autographed Polaroid Portraits" that he made in the 1980s and through work by Reed Weimer, Eileen Mullin, Joel W. Dallenbach and Jeff Hersch.

"Outside Influences" focuses on the history of photography but it also provides glimpses into the broader narrative of the state and how it has changed over the years, and that will be of great interest to fans of local history.

There are images that cross the line between doc-

umentary photography and art. For example, two black-and-white images by Dalenbach — "Graduation at Currihan Hall, Denver" and "Young Woman at Demonstration" — nostalgically take viewers back to a time when people still used pay phones and public protests meant something, while at the same time capturing both interesting visual geometry and some rich aspects of human experience.

Those photos appear in a section of the exhibition titled "The Social Landscape," which features photographers whose specialty was freezing moments of upheaval in the Colorado social order, including por-



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Daniel Salazar's "El Mandilon," a photo collage from 1995.



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trait and street photographers such as Dona Laurita, Mark Kiryuk, Susan R. Goldstein and Gary Isaacs.

There are also a few celebrity-driven moments in the overall exhibition, including John Bonath's 1981 portrait of Andy Warhol in Fort Collins, and John Schoenwaller's shot of Allen Ginsberg performing at Denver's Mercury Cafe in 1982.

As Jenkins points out repeatedly in his text, many of these photographers were not born in Colorado. They moved here to study or teach, or because it was a place of opportunity and renewal. But they mingled,

unavoidably, with both the social and creative scene they found here, and with the always-imposing natural environment that surrounded them.

And they made pictures. "Outside Influences" builds a solid argument that there exists a thread that sews the best of their efforts together into a common identity, a shared history. Fortunately, for viewers, it does that job with scores of images that deserve to be looked at well into the future.

Ray Mark Rinaldi is a Denver-based freelance writer who specializes in fine arts.