

ENTERTAINMENT

Falls Native Discovers Nature Through Photographic Tapestry

By ANTHONY BANNON

News Critic

Jim Wallace's photography is an old-fashioned art that cares about craft, finds beauty in nature and expresses both with intelligence and detail.

His pictures, a discovery of detail, spill over with ripe colors and collect extravagance of forms that exclude from the frame any hint — even the slightest whisper — of boredom.

He calls his series an Environmental Tapestry, and he could have done with the better title it is true, because he has no need to borrow upon the experience of another art to justify this one. As with tapestry, though, it is dense, often without the space between objects to allow the relief of an arbitrary design or the orientation of figure-ground considerations.

The installation of 26 Wallace photographs in the Burchfield Center — a long-overdue one-person examination — selects images of the Northeastern woodlands and the Western mountains, and unexpectedly bridges between the two with Wallace's simplified compositional style.

The motifs of horizontal and vertical banding, with an occasional pull into a three-dimensional space, are the building blocks of his compositions, though textural pleasures in his renditions of nature express the deepest measure of the artist's approach.

A Niagara Falls native, the 39-year-old Wallace jumped from the world of environmental biology

seven years ago to the world of art. But it wasn't, he says, so much of a leap. "These pictures I saw long before I picked up a camera," he reveals looking around the gallery. "Naming the things in nature was a drag for me anyway. My interest was in comparative studies, how they are similar and how different, and I was thinking then in terms of an aesthetic."

His work in the Northeast, some of it around Lewiston, engages nature on its edge, where water meets shore, rock meets plant, life succeeds death, or water becomes spring. They are ripe, therefore, with the connotative meanings romantics have long enjoyed.

Wallace's pictures succeed because while acknowledging the associative pleasures of the scene, they never exploit it, seeking instead to pull in to play more formal balances.

Sometimes anchored by a rock or a tree found within a tightly restricted space, the Northeastern images establish an expectancy of

the microcosmic examination, stripped of horizon line as well as any reference to mankind.

In the Western images, the soft details of branch and blades of grass give way to the toughness of rocks and the sweep of a stretch of sand, though the banding and receding compositional strategies remain constant.

Thus, this presumed macrocosm implies discrepancy with the eastern images, though ironically it is sometimes difficult to tell a mountain face from a boulder in Wallace's work. And the selection by Dr. Edna Lindemann, Burchfield Center director, plays this hand through to the last card.

The exhibition is cosponsored by the center and the Sierra Club Niagara branch and supported in part by the Arts Council of Buffalo and Erie County with funds from the state Arts Council and Erie County government.

A reception for the artist is scheduled for 5 p.m. tomorrow. The show will continue through Oct. 28.