NUMU debuts new exhibit

by Jordan Chan
Editorial Editor

The New Museum of Los Gatos (NUMU) debuted its exhibition “In the Company of Trees” by Monterey Bay Area photographer Jane Olin on Jan. 14. The exhibit contains photographs from Olin’s series “Intimate Conversation,” which focuses on trees and Olin’s relationship with them during a time in which climate change and deforestation pose a threat to our ecosystem.

Olin has felt connected to trees since her childhood. She recalls playing amongst Douglas Fir trees as a kid and walks through forests on a regular basis as an adult. Olin explained, “the world as we know it would not exist without them, and I want to convey this sense of kinship in my work.” She also added that Peter Wohlleben’s book “The Hidden Life of Trees,” which delves into the complexity of trees and how humans should treat them, helped inspire the series. Helaine Glick, an independent curator who worked on “Intimate Conversation,” wrote that Olin’s “photographs reveal the trees as she sees and experiences them — their stately wildness, their expressive diversity, and especially the atmospheric mystery of this presence.”

Drawing upon her experience training with West Coast photographers, Olin created her images using a traditional gelatin silver printing process altered by chemical manipulation. She applied these chemicals over several hours with brushes and spray bottles, preferring this hands-on approach to computer-enhanced images. Glick stated, “the wet dark room is where she thrives... [digital enlargement and printing are] her sole nod to the digital revolution.” The results of Olin’s work in the dark room are unique, detailed photographs with little to no color that lends inexplicable depth to the exhibit. The dreamlike quality of the photos starkly contrasts the feeling of urgency to protect their subject: trees.

Executive Director of NUMU Amy Davis said that it took one or two years of conversation and planning to bring “In the Company of Trees” to Los Gatos. Davis explained that NUMU likes “showing things that make people think” and “exploring, through art and through history, a variety of topics really important to our society right now.” Olin’s work hits all of these marks, as it compels the audience to think about something they might take for granted in a new light, alluding to the climate crisis.

Over the past 30 years of her career, Olin has won countless awards for her unique and thought-provoking photography. You can view Olin’s work, including photographs from “Intimate Conversation,” at janeolin.com or see the exhibit in-person in the Spotlight Gallery at NUMU in the Los Gatos Civic Center Plaza. The exhibit will close on Jun. 5. Davis encourages youth and Los Gatos residents, who have free entry into the museum, to stop by: “Whether you just want to look at a pretty picture or think about topics that are a little more challenging, there’s something here for everybody.”

(Sources: NUMU, janeolin.com)

TREE HUGGER: Olin focused her exhibit around nature.