

Samy's Camera

The Renaissance Collection

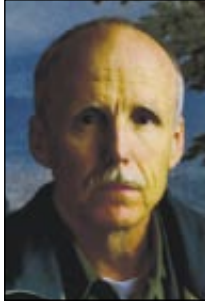
By TAYLOR ROSS / CASA

THE PLAY OF LIGHT, subjects, and settings in the work of artist Charlie Mitchell are so true to the Renaissance paintings of the old masters that it is a surprise to find that the images are, in fact, photographs.

"I try to create an experience to make people feel like they're going back in time," said Mitchell. Mitchell designs sets, props, and costumes to invoke the time period. He takes photographs and uses digital compositing to create images reminiscent of the Renaissance. His current show, on display at the Samy's Camera Gallery on Chapala through August 31st, is his first in 40 years.

When Mitchell was ten, he began taking photographs with a Brownie camera at summer camp. He attended a photography workshop with Ansel Adams after high school and later started a gallery in Los Angeles. Then Mitchell spent 30 years driving an electrical service truck. Three years ago, Mitchell rediscovered his passion when he began taking photography classes at Santa Barbara City College.

"Lighting maintenance has been a way



Charlie Mitchell

to make a living," said Mitchell, "I spent a lot of time driving the L.A. freeways, and the show was kind of a result of sitting in the truck and dreaming."

In a City College class with Liz Amidon, Mitchell conceptualized "The Renaissance Collection." He had always been fascinated with the Renaissance and had a deep respect for the artists of that era.

"I love the way the artists of that period dealt with the light that was available," said Mitchell, "and the play of light on subjects. I found fascinating the serious nature of people in the portraits, the way they kind of stare out into the distance."

The gallery, located at the far end of the camera store, is a single spacious room. Mitchell's framed images cover the



The Day Begins by Charlie Mitchell

walls, ranging in size from a few inches to a few feet in width. Mitchell has reproduced certain images several times in different sizes, so walking through the show becomes an experience similar to listening to a song; images reappear the way a chorus repeats.

Living in Santa Barbara has been a challenge and an inspiration for the photographer. "My focus," said Mitchell, "was on a result that would be viewed and measured by this town. My friends, teachers, and models live here. The community was my prospective audience. That kept me on my toes trying to do my absolute best."

Mitchell's next goal is to incorporate the style of John Singer Sargent in his photography.

Sargent was not from the Renaissance but his work contains a similar exploration of light and dark. "I love the moodiness of the images," Mitchell said. "The people are distant, and elegant. Now that I've done the Renaissance project, I want to do his style, which is softer, more friendly."

The most rewarding part of being a photographer, according to Mitchell, is "creating an image after you first



Mother and Child by Charlie Mitchell

visualize it as an idea in your mind." Mitchell designed 60 scenes for his project and then set out to find people with a certain look. One model was the salesman behind the counter at a wig shop. The young man who posed as Jesus works the early morning shift at Trader Joe's. "There were a number of ideas that failed miserably," Mitchell said, "and there were just a number of lucky surprises. When something came out exactly as I wanted, that was a thrill."

Samy's Camera is located at 614 Chapala St. For more information call 963-4100.