

Art from the Sun



"Slash Pine," a 50-by-50-inch photogram, will be part of an exhibit called "Understory" next year at the Southeast Museum of Photography.



News-Journal photos/PETER BAUER

California photographer Jerry Burchfield, center, oversees placement of a pine log by Jason Boldt, left, and Tyson Robertson on light-sensitive paper Friday at Bicentennial Youth Park, east of DeLand.

Artist creates 'lumens' with nature

By **LAURA STEWART**
FINE ARTS WRITER

DELAND — Jerry Burchfield couldn't have planned a better way to celebrate the summer solstice in Florida on Friday than by turning it into a work of art.

The California photographer and his 10-member team met in Bicentennial Youth Park soon after dawn on the solstice, the longest day of the year and the first day of summer.

Joined by local ecologist Don Spence and Kevin Miller, director of the Southeast Museum of Photography at Daytona State College, they arranged slash-pine boughs, maple branches, palmetto fronds, ferns and other foliage on tarps laid out to form a roughly 10- by-30-foot workspace on the forest floor.

Then, as sunlight erased the last shadows from the

tarp, the team members turned to their leader.

"Wait for the sun, when all the exciting things will happen," said Burchfield, best known for the photograms he began making in the Amazon 10 years ago — prints he calls "lumens" for the natural light that creates their random, one-of-a-kind impressions and colors.

"Ready? I think we can make this work," said Burchfield, who began the "Understory" project two years ago with a commission from the photography museum. Friday's piece, designed to cover an entire gallery wall when his solo show opens early next year at the museum, is its final stage.

He took one long, last look

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Burchfield places cut foliage during a visual test of materials for a huge photogram.

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at detailed sketches that indicated the piece's appearance and gave a final pep talk.

"What's going to happen is that once we get everything down, we have to wait for the sun to expose it — I'll be watching for visual exposure.

"We'll have to get the paper out of the box really fast," said Burchfield, and assigned tasks.

The team members took their places and Miller paused to orient himself.

"It's like we're all just hanging around, and then suddenly it's like the pit stop around here, with everyone rushing around to change the tires."

For a breathless moment, the only sounds in the clearing were the chirping of birds and frogs, roars from the distant highway and whirring from dragonflies beginning to buzz the site. Stifling humidity dropped slightly, a breeze drifted past and warm sunlight flooded the tarps.

"We're ready; it is what it's got to be," said Burchfield, slicing open the tape on an enormous box of light-sensitive paper and sliding out the first of 18 unwieldy sheets. "OK, put the big pine log right here, then the log with the vines on it there."

As each white sheet slid into place, workers moved plants selected by Spence onto it, sweeping debris off to keep the sheets clean. And, as if by magic, the paper changed color: pink, lavender, and, gradually, purple. Three sheets high and six wide, the piece took shape smoothly.

Did You Know?

Eadweard Muybridge, a 19th-century British-American, pioneered the time-lapse photography technique that laid the foundation for Hollywood movies — and settled a wager made by one of his employers.

■ In 1872, Muybridge was hired by railroad baron Leland Stanford to prove that a racehorse lifted all of its hoofs off the ground at once. The series of photos showed the galloping horses briefly airborne, winning Stanford the bet.

■ Time-lapse photography was first used in a motion

picture by Georges Méliés in his 1897 film, "Carrefour De La Opera." However, it was Dr. John Ott, who popularized the technique in the 20th century and further developed the technology.

■ Ott's time-lapse sequences of flowers opening and fruits ripening were used in several Walt Disney nature documentaries and led to him hosting the popular Chicago gardening show, "How Does Your Garden Grow?"

SOURCE: Compiled by News Researcher Janice Cahill from News-Journal research.

Until the 15th sheet, when a massive log gouged the paper and fat drops of sweat rolled from Burchfield's forehead onto it.

"OK, OK, we're blowing it — move it out. Get a new piece in here — this was good practice. OK, let's go. Pick up the log and put it here. Perfect," he said.

As suddenly as it started, the work stopped. Like a window onto the park's native plants, blocks of purpling paper darkened around logs, fronds, even weeds.

"OK," Burchfield said. "There's a big photograph."

Miller laughed. "A big Jerry-gram," he said.

Burchfield plans to return to his Irvine, Calif., home-studio Sunday and wait for Miller to ship the raw paper in a

light-tight box. Next he will "fix" each sheet in the darkroom and wash it thoroughly.

Finally, he will assemble the mural like a jigsaw puzzle, to match his sketches. And if the accidents of humidity and exposure that can result in flaring colors, delicate veining, surprising visual epiphanies come together as he hopes, Burchfield will ship it to the museum, with the rest of "Understory."

"I'm real happy with the effort we made today, but I won't know for probably about a month if I'll be happy with the final image," he said. "There is a certain 'busy-ness' to this pattern, but that's because there is a certain chaotic quality to nature here that we wanted — when you look around Florida, that's what you see."

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