

ARTS & THEATRE

Discovering creative vision through photography

BY MICHELLE GENZ
Staff Writer

In his work as a teacher of photography, few students have made Aric Attas happier than a woman whose pictures kept revealing elaborate patterns. No matter what assignment he gave the class, she would return with photos of distinct and intricate patterns.

"So I asked her what else she did. And she said, 'Well, I'm a quilter.' I said, 'How about taking one of these patterns and creating a quilt?' And she's just taken off making these patterns for her quilts. It's taken her on a path and, boom, she's just exploded."

That connection is exactly his goal in teaching "Discovering Your Creative Vision," offered currently at the Center for Spiritual Care and later this fall at the Vero Museum of Art. Attas aims to teach budding photographers to use personal interests to chart a direction for photos.

"The camera is objective. We are subjective. I'm looking at you, but with all the other stuff going on that the brain is filtering out," he says, speaking last week over the lunchtime din at Panera Bread. "The camera isn't filtering anything. That's when you need to frame what's attracting you to that scene and what you're really perceiving."

The class is the next step after "Photo 1" – the course he calls "What Button Do I Push?" – and is designed for a stage when students are proficient at the controls of the camera but want to take better pictures.

Not all of his students are interested in making contemporary art of their photography as he is.

"I have students who are interested in taking pictures of their grandkids or their vacations, and you most definitely can apply these techniques to those pictures. It's about capturing moments. You



Photographer Aric Attas leads the discussion about students' work during his photography class *Discovering your Creative Vision*. Photo by Tom McCarthy Jr.

have to pause, then realizing what's really of interest to you and why you're being drawn in, you look, you see, and then you press the shutter."

Through exercises that he says force his students to discard preconceived notions of what would make a "nice picture," he steers his students toward their individualized artistic potential.

In his "Vision" class, Attas emphasizes theme over content. "There's the subject matter, and there's 'Subject' with a capital 'S,'" he says. "If you take a photo of a room, the subject matter may be the arrangement of the tables. But the 'Subject' is the play of light, or the interaction of the different shapes or colors."

With a camera as close as his Iphone, Attas doesn't have to look far for his own material. A fan since childhood of quantum physics and relativity, subjects he taught himself, he says, he began to notice that his photos tended to present things as rudimentary physical forms.

"My images had a cosmic nature.

They looked like constellations or nebulae or the inside of an atom. You get interested in something like that and it suggests a path to follow."

Attas, who grew up in Connecticut, first discovered photography around the seventh grade, when he took a summer school class. It was in the days of dark rooms, and the experience was transformative not only for the image in the tub of chemicals, but for him. "One of the most amazing things happened there. You expose your image on a piece of paper and in the lab, you see that image emerge on the paper. That was a magical moment for me.

"That's sort of where I try to be now, seeing the image for the first time, and seeing what you didn't see when you took the picture."

Attas went on to earn a master of fine arts degree in photography after earning his undergraduate degree in psychology. In the mid-'90s, he decided he wanted to teach at the college level and went back

to Hartford Art School for his graduate degree – to then teach at Trinity College, and the University of Hartford.

But as he and his then-wife began having children, they decided to move to Vero Beach to be near family. That was in 2003.

Today, at 45, Attas's children are 14 and 10. In October, he plans to marry Anabelle Robertson, an attorney and mediator with two children of her own. Meanwhile, he keeps a day job with a computer firm, Mainsail Data, focusing on another fascination of his: web design.

"I've been working with computers since the late '90s. I've always had a love of photography and the written word as well as video and audio. The Web for me was a way of merging all those areas."

Indeed, the Web has allowed him to teach privately on line. "I have students who e-mail me their photos and I critique them," he says.

Attas, who had been looking to expand his teaching venues, happened upon the Center for Spiritual Care through a student who works there. The center, located in downtown Vero three blocks north of the public library, hosts an eclectic offering of classes in areas including meditation, Buddhism, and emotional self-help techniques.

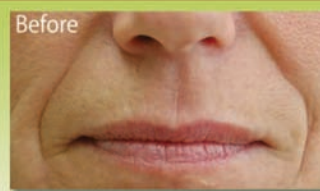
"It's a different audience" from the museum classes, he says, "and I'm interested in the wider aspects of photography as a tool to get somewhere else. Most of my students aren't looking to be New York gallery artists. They're people that want to see differently, and lead richer and fuller lives."

This fall, he will pursue an even more dramatic change of venue. He will be working with a group of teenagers from Youth Guidance, taking them to McKee Botanical Garden and handing them 35 mm cameras. ■

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