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Vision To Visuals

Milestones To Recovery

Using new display technologies opens up the ability for photographers to show work in new and unlikely places

By Baldev Duggal



Susan Watts

On July 4th in Battery Park, an exhibit entitled “Milestones to Recovery” will open to the public.

It’s an exhibit of 40 photographs by Susan Watts, a New York-based photographer who works for *The New York Daily News*. Susan explained that the project was originally conceived and executed to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the September 11th attacks.

For this project, Susan documented the many ways in which the community in Lower Manhattan has healed and rejuvenated itself since 9/11. Her focus was on the themes of rebirth and revitalization. What she witnessed during the course of her project overwhelmed her. A one-week project quickly grew into a six-week project. When she was done, *The New York Daily News* published a special magazine insert the Sunday before the fifth anniversary.

“What better way for our city to see how far we’ve all traveled since 9/11,” says Susan. “It’s very important for the city to see these images. It’s without

doubt a very special experience, and I feel very proud of my work and very proud of the community.”

At Duggal, we’ve created a new imaging technology called VibraTrans. It’s a remarkable improvement over DuraTrans, which is normally lit from behind by an artificial light source. VibraTrans uses natural light, and its affect on the image we see and how we perceive it is very powerful. If the image is lit from behind, it behaves like a transparency. If it’s lit from the front, it looks more like a print.

Susan believes that the “community will embrace it in a way never seen before. Photography is usually not seen in a public space; it’s always in a closed, formal gallery environment that connotes an air of exclusivity.”

When we showed Susan the completed images, she was overwhelmed that they looked “more beautiful than I ever thought was possible.” She went on to describe the imagery as something “that I can’t classify as a print.

It’s a transparency, but when light passes through it, the imagery is taken to a new dimension.”

Susan’s 40 images will be spread throughout the park. In thinking about the exhibit, she can’t even imagine how it will look. The prints will be 6 feet wide by 4 feet tall and will be housed in aluminum metal frames attached to the fence already in the park. In that regard, they will blend right into the fence seamlessly.

When Susan initially proposed the project to me with a set of fiery prints, I knew instinctively that this project had to happen. I believed in the power of the story and I believed in her.

But this exhibit wouldn’t have been possible without the enthusiastic sponsorship and backing of the Alliance for Downtown New York. Once I proposed the project to Eric Deutsch and Valerie Lewis, they immediately were behind it.

Once I proposed the exhibit to Valerie and showed her Susan’s



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images, she also embraced it immediately. "This is an extremely exciting project, and it's happening because city, state and nonprofit groups, along with the creative efforts of both Susan and Mr. Duggal, have come together in Battery Park," says Valerie. "We've all come together to create something stunning and uplifting."

I also sincerely believe that in presenting artwork to the public in a public space, it allows them to respond to the message of the artwork. They can interact with as well as react to the art. On an abstract level, it will stimulate communication with the work and with each other.

I think it's very important to bring the artwork out of the formal gallery "glass house" and into the public forum. Artwork has to become a part of the public discourse. Artists, be they photographers or painters, have a new creative opportunity to communicate given this new piece of visual technology.

Traditional gallery environments often are populated by the same patrons who become numb to new images, ideas and concepts. As a result, the conversation between artist and patron becomes stale. However, with this new print technology and by removing the artwork from its formal home and placing it within the public, the dialogue changes and the meaning of setting an artist's work is amplified.

At Duggal, we strive to make artwork come alive and remain vibrant. I want artists and the public to connect, and we want to make our artists look good. My job is to take their ideas and concepts and raise them five notches beyond what they originally conceived. I don't take pleasure in merely translating their ideas and concepts.

It's more important that I do so today than ever before because we're living in a world of visual pollution. No matter where we are in the world, we see images on the sides of buildings, in windows, on the TV, in



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newsprint, on the computer, on our cell phones and on our iPods. Such proliferation of images can lead to a form of visual amnesia. It's our job to help the artist rise above and tell the story visually as clearly as possible. We're giving artists such as Susan greater possibilities to create their own signature work.

There are four things that destroy a print: oxygen, moisture, light and handling. Even a framed and mounted print will fade since oxygen and moisture will work their way into the frame. Frameless prints that are mounted from behind aren't exposed to the elements and will look as good 10 to 20 years later as they did when they were first printed.

I think that if you present fine pieces of art to the public, they will respect it. They will recognize that it's a fine piece of art and won't damage it. Given the materials, it also will survive the elements. The VibraTrans "prints" will be graffiti-proof because the picture is behind the VibraTrans and therefore protected. It can't be scratched or damaged because the material is polycarbonate, not a normal Plexiglas.

This event will prove to be a very special experience for the city. It will allow us to share our common story. Susan shared with me that "photography has to be publicly exhibited in order to have a more powerful effect."

I couldn't agree with her more. **DPP**

Baldev Duggal, president and founder of Duggal, has been innovating visual solutions for image-makers for more than 40 years. Credited with building and designing the industry's first dip-and-dunk processing machine, Duggal has maintained his status as a leader in the imaging business and is heralded for outstanding service by consumer and trade magazines alike. With digital capabilities reaching worldwide, his headquarters covers a block on West 23rd Street in New York City.