

Win

WHAT'S HAPPENING

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER JANUARY 10 - 16, 2003

THROUGH

VIRGINIA WOOLF IS THE TIE
THAT BINDS THREE WOMEN FROM DIFFERENT TIMES IN 'THE HOURS' / PAGE 3

SPACE

MUSIC:
AFTER A
BREATHING
HARD-
TOURING
PAPA ROACH
IS ROLLING
AGAIN
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THEATER:
PLAYWRIGHT
'MOLESTED
IBSEN' TO
CREATE
'STRANGE
ATTRACTORS'
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AND

TIME

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Andy Reynolds' partial portrait of a farmworker is part of a group exhibit at Photographic Center Northwest, 900 12th St., through Jan. 30.

BELLEVUE ART MUSEUM: 510 Bellevue Way N.E. "The Way Things Go," a 100-foot-long structure by Peter Fischli and David Weiss made from common household items cataloging physical interactions, chemical reactions and crafted chaos. Through Jan. 26. Admission: \$6; \$4 seniors/students; ages 5 and younger free. Third Thursdays and last Saturdays are free. Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thursday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sunday, noon-5 p.m. 425-519-0770; www.bellevueart.org.

FRYE ART MUSEUM: 704 Terry Ave. Opens Jan. 15. "Contemporary Northwest Women Photographers Juried Exhibition," featuring lectures, discussions, workshops and a special exhibition of works by contemporary Northwest women photographers. Through Feb. 23. "To See It All," an in-process mural in the museum central stairwell by conceptual artist Kori Newkirk is being built by the artist through Jan. 15. The exhibit runs through Dec. 28. "Pioneer Women Photographers," works by Imogen Cunningham, Ella McBride, Myra Wiggins and Adelaide Hanscom Leeson. Through March 2. "Undercurrents of the Commonplace," Seattle artist Jim Phalen's simple and commonplace works (paintings, drawings and sculptures) are on display with subjects ranging from still lifes to portraits and figures. Through Feb. 9. "The Day a Bomber Fell on the Frye," photographs, documents and memorabilia from a Feb. 18, 1945, incident when a top-secret B-29 bomber crashed into the Frye meatpacking plant in Seattle. Through Jan. 12. "Fairfield Porter: A Life in Art 1907-1975," an exhibition bringing together the artist's visual works (paintings, sketchbooks and watercolors) as well as his writings (poetry, critical writings and correspondence). Through Jan. 19. Admission: Free. Hours: Tuesday-Wednesday and Friday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thursday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sunday, noon-5 p.m. 206-622-9250; www.fryeart.org.

HENRY ART GALLERY: 15th Ave. N.E. and N.E. 41st St. "The Dream of

Amir Zaki's photos of everyday scenes invite double takes

BY REGINA HACKETT
P-I art critic

All the clouds that Alfred Stieglitz photographed were in the sky.

Amir Zaki's clouds pop up anywhere. They hide behind the drapes, waiting till you're gone. They crawl through the grass or hug the pavement, turning it into a whipped, gray cream. Almost never do they show up where they're expected. When they do, they're too remote to matter. Having lost interest in getting their picture taken, they appear to be drifting, with intent, out of the frame.

Zaki, 28, has spent his brief but brilliant career considering the fate of diminished things. His photos begin with the premise that we've seen them before. Certainly we have, countless times. Clouds aren't new to photography, and neither are empty parking lots, front yards, weeds, houses and piles of dirt.

Because all of us are experts at sorting through the contemporary image glut, we no sooner see his photos than we prepare to ignore them. Just as we're turning away, however, they hit us with their oddity and wit. If we stick around, we'll notice their technical polish and subversive charm. Claustrophobia and alienation are rarely this much fun.

Zaki has plenty to be alienated from. He lives and finds his images in what is unflatteringly known in Los Angeles as "The Valley." To call it mundane is to do it a favor. Like the Boston matron who never travels because she's already there, snobs in Los Angeles like to say they never visit the valley.

Zaki's valley is another matter. His is bursting with personality. If the real valley is like a dead spot on a basketball court, a place where the ball won't bounce, Zaki's valley has bounce enough to keep the world in motion.

In an exhibit now showing at the James Harris Gallery, Zaki's current focus is houses. Loony as they look, he didn't invent them. Nor did he stroll around the neighborhood with a camera and click the shutter on a whim. These aren't casual shots.

Each is meticulously crafted, with God in the details. Colored lights and burnished darks live it up in the strange vertical spaces Zaki allows them. Even before editing exaggerates the effect, he manages to achieve a kind of distance-in-layers associated with 19th-century Japanese prints, instead of the traditional Western "vanishing point" perspective that a good camera can deliver automatically.

His photos begin as elegantly dry and meticulously crafted, and then they go off the rails. To get his singular effects, he subjects

ON EXHIBIT

AMIR ZAKI'S PHOTOGRAPHS

WHERE: James Harris Gallery, 309-A Third Ave. S., 206-903-6220

WHEN: Through Feb. 1. Hours: Tuesdays-Saturdays, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

them to nothing less than the fun-house mirror of computer-generated tricks.

The houses that come out the other end are holding their breath, squeezed like fat ladies by strong girdles into an unnatural verticality.

His abortive space divides understanding from experience. With believable yards and decorative touches, his houses assert their reality while their shapes simultaneously deny it. Instead of cramped, however, these narrow or impossibly slanted houses look vital, as if they're brimming over with insider information. They've tricked their way into high society and have no intention of turning back into suburban bores.

"Family Califa" (74 inches high by 23 inches wide) turns the street into an ocean. Its wide waters are choppy and overcast, which is strange, considering the fair cast of the day. Moving past the liquid-like asphalt, we come to dry land in the form of a driveway, which curves into the sidewalk. Above it is a fat clump of well-tended grass, and above that a cypress tree, rising out of the frame.

Who lives here? Nobody could. It's a white coffin with a red roof, standing on end. None of these houses can be entered. They are more like figures we might stand beside, fictions with real addresses.

At his own real address, Zaki mows the lawn and pulls the weeds. As proof of his suburban bona fides, he offers the photo titled, "Pretty Weed Just Pulled, Same Weed Quite Dead" (22 inches high by 33 inches wide).

That same weed shows up both when freshly pulled and 24 hours later, living and dying in the same print. Although he cropped most of their tops off, the space is normal.

Time instead is bent out of shape. Both plants hang, roots in the air, against a baby blue, all-is-well sky. It isn't a lie, it's what David Mamet would call a "gift for fiction," a blend of the real and imaginary that startles an old subject into an exciting but untrustworthy new life.

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"Family Califa," 2002, an archival pigmental photograph by Amir Zaki