

Art Behind The Photo



Written by Dagmar Fors Karppi editorial@antonnews.com Friday, 29 March 2013 00:00

Xiomáro shares the secrets of his photographs at Sagamore Hill

Photographer Xiomáro proved himself to be very generous with his art and his knowledge of photography, as he talked about the core focus of his exhibit, How I Love Sagamore Hill, at the Koenig Center on March 16. The title is taken from the last words the 26th President of the United States. Theodore Roosevelt said to his wife Edith, “You don’t know how much I love Sagamore Hill.”

Xiomáro told of his history with the National Park Service and said he began his assignment at Sagamore Hill by taking snapshots throughout the house and then returning with his professional equipment: lights, tripod, and light reflecting devices to set up the digital photographs that he then worked on to finally present to the Sagamore Hill National Historic Site. He presented Superintendent Thomas Ross with 144 prints, to use to their benefit. Ross was responsible for his taking on the project.

The slide show opened with a take on the history of photography, using pictures of the women in TR’s life: his mother Mittie, Martha Bullock Roosevelt; TR’s first wife Alice Lee Roosevelt; and his second wife Edith Carow Roosevelt. It was a chance to talk about the history of photography. Mittie’s was a painting; Alice’s was taken when the sitter had to remain still for a long time with an iron clamp holding their head in place. The result was that the natural blinking of the eye causes its blurring in the rather stiff pose. The warm lively photo of Edith was made with a modern camera for which the speed of the speed of the film allows the sitter/subject to look natural and relaxed.

• Walk Through

Xiomáro also explained the bones of the exhibit. It takes you through the family in the house, from the exhibit entrance with a print of TR's very masculine North Room, to intimate rooms in the house such as the dining room; and to Edith's room, a sudden shock of color with the fireplace of red tile surrounded with blue painted woodwork; to three photographs representing the servants: the cook's room, the entrance to two small rooms for servants to the sewing room. His aim in photographing the house was to reveal not only TR, but his family and the servants who together inhabited the house.

• The Process

Xiomáro opened up about the process behind one of his photographs. It was of the dining room, but from an angle that no visitor could ever have seen, from the pantry door at the end of the room. People taking the ranger guided tour walk down the hall and can only peer into the dining room that in a recent presentation had small beaded Victorian lamps set out on the table.

In Xiomáro's photo of the mahogany paneled room he includes a view of the window of the room opposite: across the hall. The photograph defies the capabilities of a camera, but which you accept as you look at the framed picture on the wall at the Koenig Center, but which Xiomáro explained was the result of photo shopping the digital picture.

Using a tripod, Xiomáro took a sequence of shots of the room, some focused inside the room, and some focused across the hall to the next room. He enlarged the photos to its pixel heart, he was able to alter them carefully to insert the view of the far room into the view of the dining room.

He took the best of both to create the image.

The result is the sky, reflected on the floor, is a brilliant blue and you can see the February landscape outside the window.

• **Photographic History**

Xiomáro explained the history in back of the process of altering the photograph.

A hot issue in the art world in the 1960s was whether photography was an art or not. Xiomáro, having proven it was an art with his demonstration of his work at Sagamore Hill, added that manipulating a photograph has a history.

Xiomáro showed three slides of work by the man often considered the Father of Photography, Edward Muybridge. Most known for his use of the camera to discover if horses “fly” — travel with their feet off the ground, he was able to prove that they did. Through a series of photographs he was able to show that in one position, of many during a horse’s gallop, all four feet are tucked under its body and then — in the air — they do fly.

Interestingly, Xiomáro said Muybridge is also known for his photographs of the American west and he demonstrated how he pioneered “improving photographs through manipulation.”

He said Muybridge collected photographs of skies to alter landscape images where the exposure time of the canyons wiped out the details of the sky.

• **Next Event**

This was the first of three gallery talks Xiomáro is offering as he curaes his exhibit. The next two are on: Saturday, April 14 and Saturday, May 18.

At each of his events, he raffles off a free print. You can see this talk on his website Xiomaro.com. He promises that each of his lectures will be different. This writer plans to be sitting in the front row, on the left at the April and May lectures from 2 to 3 p.m. at the Koenig Center, 20 Summit Street, Oyster Bay. For information call 922-5032.