

Mark Stephenson - Nature-Infused Art

Photographs Made With Silver and Gold

By Jackie Devereaux

SKY VALLEY, CA – How can an artist be so technically based in his process and yet produce works that are so simple and pure? That's the question I asked myself and other art aficionados in the Desert about Mark Stephenson's work.

When you first gaze at his grasses, plants and cattails series of photographs, you immediately realize that anything resembling a photograph has long disappeared and what has evolved is an entirely new form of art. One also gets a sense of his poetic genius in the simplicity and purity in each of his works of art.

After getting to know him it came as no surprise that his background in poetry, Eastern philosophies and meditation, along with his technical training in photography have all merged to create a unique art form coveted by collectors nationwide.

Stephenson, 55, lives in Sky Valley with his newly adopted, brindle-colored, mix breed puppy, Foshi, which means lion/dog or the lion that guards the Buddha in the Chinese language. He designed, built and decorated his Spanish-style home on six acres of desert land with spectacular views of the San Jacinto and San Geronimo mountains.

Stephenson was born on an Air Force base in Del Rio, Texas but was spared the typical military brat lifestyle of constant uprooting because his father, an Air Force fighter pilot, was killed when he was 18 months old. After his father's death, he was



"Golden Joshua Tree"

raised by his mother, Elizabeth Stephenson, an artist in her own right, in Arizona, Santa Fe, New Mexico and Los Angeles before he settled and built a home in Sky Valley in 1993.

"I never thought of myself as an artist. I wrote a lot when young and had an enlightened principal at Echo Park Elementary School in Elysian Heights, a gang-banging, mixed culture part of L.A. She put me in a gifted program where kids in the 5th and 6th grade got to write speeches and poetry instead of doing math. We'd go

to city hall and the Kiwanis club and were encouraged to think out of the box and express ourselves creatively," Stephenson said during a recent interview at his studio/home.

Stephenson said he worked a variety of jobs before becoming a photographer.



"Grasses"



He worked at a coal mine and at an oil company. During these formative years he took an aptitude test that said he'd be a good physiological psychologist, a petroleum engineer or a TV/Film director.

"Writing, drama and creative arts sparked my enthusiasm more than anything since I was little. I was blessed with a wonderful Liberal Arts education at Colorado College (Colorado Springs, CO), receiving a BA in English with an emphasis on poetry and modern American Literature in 1979," he said.

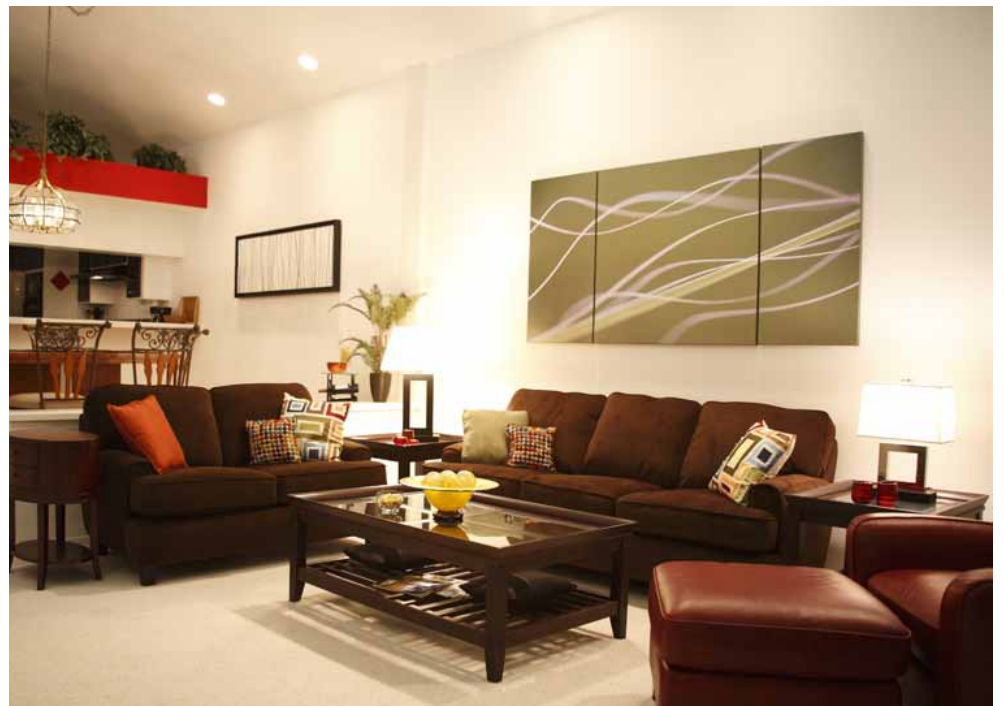
Then, while working towards a MA in film at the University of Texas at Austin, he fell in love with still photography, enrolled at Brooks Institute of Photographic Arts and Sciences, the rigorous technical school located in Santa Barbara, receiving a second BA in Photography in 1984, and found his

calling.

He is a photographer by profession, but didn't focus on the fine art aspect until 2004. Before that, he shot scenes for the Santa Barbara News Press as an intern from Brooks where he had "all the film he could shoot" at his disposal plus a state-of-the-art dark room.

After the internship at the newspaper, and while still at Brooks, destiny and fate entered his life when he found his mentor in Craig Arness, a critically-acclaimed National Geographic photographer, and the adopted son of James Arness. After Stephenson graduated from Brooks, Arness made him an offer he couldn't refuse and he joined West Light, a small stock photography company based in West Los Angeles.

After those professional years in





agency work, he became inspired by the Orotone work of a late 19th and early 20th century photographer, Edward Sheriff Curtis, that he discovered in a Sante Fe, New Mexico art gallery. That innovative process consists of multiple layers which Stephenson has modernized and perfected.

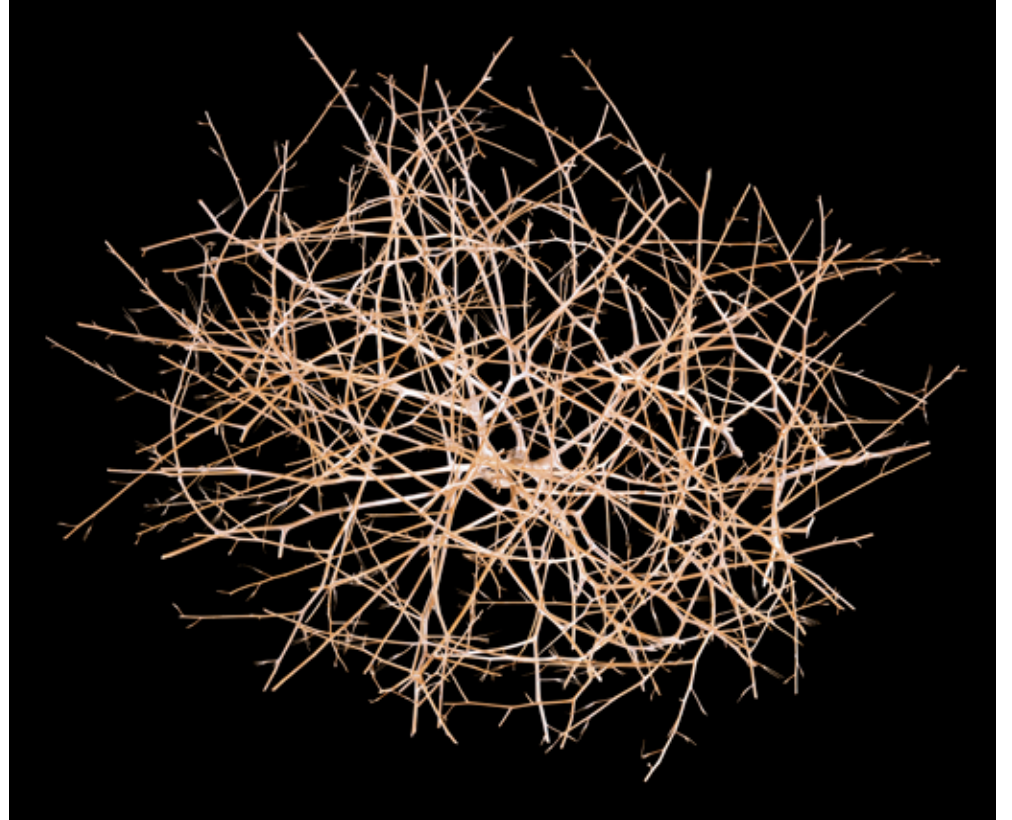
“When I first saw Curtis’ Orotone process, I was struck by its stunning beauty and a seed was planted. After much experimenting, I managed to achieve a similar aesthetic but using contemporary media and technology, I am able to realize them in a much larger scale that Curtis ever could.

“The images in my Orotone series are captured as black and white negatives on modern film cameras of small, medium and large formats. I scan the negatives with a high-resolution drum, scanner, edit the images with Photoshop and print them with state-of-the-art wide format pigmented inkjet printers over metallic leaf on a hand-textured cradled wood panel, finished with a thick coat of resin. I do all this work myself without the use of labs or assistants,” he said.

Stephenson has won 38 photography awards over that past four decades beginning in 1983 and continuing through 2012 with the Chicago Botanic Garden Art

Fair and Gold Coast Art Fair wins. He’s won, placed and been given high honors at the Southwest Art Festival, the Indian Wells Arts Festival, the La Quinta Art Festival, the Rancho Mirage Art Affaire and other shows too numerous to name.

“Simply put, Mark’s work is incredible. It’s simple and pure. He is the most accomplished artist in the Desert, if not the entire West Coast,” said art aficionado Rick Pantele of IncredibleArtist.com.



Silver Orotone

To see more of Stephenson’s art visit www.markstephensonart.info or www.IncredibleArtist.com. He accepts commissioned art assignments and can be reached at 760-218-1184.



Photographer Mark Stephenson



“Golden Grasses”



“Sunset”