

## Ashby Village Juried Photo Exhibition

*By Karin Evans*

The first Ashby Village Juried Photo Exhibit is drawing to a close at the LightRoom Gallery, 2263 Fifth Street in Berkeley, and Tomate Café next door. The photographs, all by Village members, are engaging and diverse: Paris at dusk, a koi pond in China, a solitary older woman huddled in a corner in Spain, a young boy basking in the sun at the seashore. There are 37 images in all, including one by Beth Burnside that the judges selected as the exhibit “signature photo,” a pair of empty chairs framed by a tree exploding in lush pink blossoms.

The show, aimed at building a sense of connection, community and creative engagement among Village members, was the brainchild of charter member Russ Ellis and was a long time in the making. A retired professor of sociology in the Department of Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, as well as former Vice Chancellor, Ellis has over the years been passionately engaged in numerous civic activities. In 2011, he and his wife, Julie Gordon Shearer, were honored by the Berkeley City Council for their many contributions to the arts and youth. In retirement, Ellis has concentrated on his own artwork as —a painter and sculptor as well as photographer. He has had several previous gallery exhibits, in Marin and the East Bay.

For years, Ellis has talked with other villagers about ways to showcase the creativity of Village members. A series of authors’ readings? An exhibit of paintings and sculpture? Ellis had already secured the venue. “I really loved the LightRoom Gallery and the location, near Tomate Café,” said Ellis. “It is a lovely little scene. What’s particularly interesting about the place is Rob Reiter, the proprietor,” who specializes in fine art printing for photographers and other artists. “He is full good ideas. It occurred to me that maybe I could do something for Ashby Village by having some sort of exhibit there. I felt some responsibility for the organization that I was going to benefit from.” Years of work in administration had taught him you can never start too early, he says.

Eventually, after much consultation, the idea was narrowed to a juried group photography show. A call went out for volunteers to help organize the exhibit. Ultimately the committee consisted of Ellis and Village members Peter Sussman, Walter Park, Eric Schroeder and Beth Burnside (another former professor and Vice Chancellor at Cal). Ellis knew famed photographer Judy Dater, and approached her about becoming a judge for the show. “She’d been reading about the Village and said it sounded really interesting,” Ellis says. “She said yes” and served as the judging chair. Ellis recruited Reiter and Berkeley photographer Russel Kiehn to complete the judges panel. “So all of a sudden I had this great jury before we had any photographs.”

The organizing committee established entry and judging protocols, and the call for submissions went out to all Village members. After the judges selected the entries for hanging in the exhibit, Reiter printed the selected photographs and committee members framed and hung them -- 30 in the gallery and the other seven in the adjacent café. Other entries are exhibited in a photo slide show at the gallery.

“It was fun to see all of the serious and personally expressive work coming from essentially amateur photographers responding to the world around them,” Dater said afterwards. “The camera is a wonderful device that can connect people to their environment and enable them to see things more intensely.”

When all the details had been handled, the show was up, and Ellis himself could step back and take a long look. “I liked the outcome,” he said. “I am 80, and I stumbled into this. It’s been good for me to have been part of it. It shows who we are as a village. The overarching thing that strikes me is that the exhibit can allow people to look in the mirror and see not just an aging self, but a vigorously aging self.”

**The Ashby Village Juried Photo Exhibit is open through October 10 at the Light Room Gallery, 2263 Fifth Street, Berkeley, California, and Tomate Café, immediately next door. Gallery hours are Weekdays, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tomate Café is open weekdays from 8 a.m. to 3:30p.m. Weekends, it closes at 3.**