

"Torn from the pages of *National Geographic*..." Allison Hersh

'The Other Savannah'

By Allison Hersh
For the Savannah Morning News
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Numerous tourists visit Savannah each year, but most see only a tiny fraction of what the city has to offer. In "The Other Savannah," Savannah College of Art and Design computer art professor Kirt Witte shares the city's hidden details in color and black and white photography.

"The Other Savannah," at the Starland Center for Contemporary Art through the end of November, features chromogenic prints as well as non-traditional photographic methods like 360-degree panoramas, infrared film and time exposures that present Savannah in a fresh light, providing a deeper, more satisfying understanding of the city.

"My project aims to show that Savannah is so much more than the Historic District, and so much more than what people perceive in John Berendt's 'Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil,'" explains Witte. "My goal is to show visitors and Savannahians alike what they may have been missing or what they do not realize is right in front of them."

"The Other Savannah" offers a wide variety of close-ups, details and reflections which collectively provide a fresh perspective on the Georgia coast. In color prints that seem torn from the pages of "National Geographic," Witte focuses upon sandpipers in geometric arrangements on the beach and brown pelicans sunning themselves along the marsh. He draws the viewer's eye to the rough ridges of an alligator's back, rippling through silver liquid, and to desolate sandy beaches populated only by stands of ancient pine trees.

By shooting Savannah landmarks from unexpected angles, Witte offers unique perspectives on familiar structures. He draws the eye to the underside of the eaves at First Presbyterian Church, with their distinctive architectural details laid bare beneath a dappled azure sky.

In an ethereal portrait of the Talmadge Bridge, he focuses upon the spectral nature of the span's white spindles as they fade into a pale grey fog. In a shot of the Tybee Lighthouse, he cleverly incorporates the structure's dark shadow into the heart of the composition.

Witte shot the interior of St. John the Baptist Cathedral using a 360-degree panoramic format, mounting the vivid cruciform print in an elaborate gold gilt frame. Witte captures the quiet sanctity of the cathedral before portions of the interior were damaged by arson last month.

"The Other Savannah" marks Witte's first solo exhibit, which follows his participation in SCAD's "Southern Exposure" group photography show earlier this year. He is also exhibiting his recent photography at the Telfair Art Fair this weekend.

Born in Beaconsfield, England, Witte grew up in Dallas, Texas., where he spent many years working as a 3D animator and graphic artist. Over the past 10 years, he has developed 3D graphics for the "Spy Hunter" video game for Sony Playstation2 and has designed computer animation for major corporate clients including Coca-Cola, Pepsi and Lockheed-Martin.

IF YOU GO

What: "The Other Savannah," photography by Kirt Witte

When: through Nov. 30

Where: Starland Center for Contemporary Art, 2424 Bull St.

For more information:
(912) 447-0011 or
www.theothersavannah.com

Witte moved to Savannah in December of 1991 to teach 3D computer art at the SCAD.

"Savannah has really changed me," he says. "It's a quirky place."

Although he has a bachelor of science degree in photography from Sam Houston State University, Witte hadn't picked up his camera for 10 years before starting "The Other Savannah" project.

Moving to Savannah inspired him to pick up his camera, after a decade spent working long hours behind a keyboard and a computer screen. He quickly found material to photograph nearly everywhere he looked.

"All I have to do is compose it and be at the right place at the right time," he says. "This project has been a breath of fresh air."

For Witte, "The Other Savannah" exhibit is stepping stone towards his final goal of publishing a book devoted to the city which has captured his imagination.

"I don't want it to be another pretty picture book," he says. "I'm trying to show the real Savannah."