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ACCIDENTAL GENIUS

American Photographer shares French Connection in PFAC exhibit

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A simple mistake led to six years of work and 67 final prints for Gary Zuercher.

The 30-year photographer was shooting a bridge along the Seine River in Paris, when he overexposed the shot. To correct his mistake, Zuercher underdeveloped the photograph, resulting in a luminous negative that launched his latest project called "The Glow of Paris."

Zuercher said he spent five years trying to produce the same result he accidentally wound up with six years ago. During five winters, he moved down the Seine River, photographing bridges at night and spending his days scouting new locations.

"I would only shoot in the winter because in the summer it doesn't get dark in Paris until around 11 o'clock, 11:30, and they turn the lights on the bridges off at 12," Zuercher said. "In the winter, it gets dark around 4:30 p.m."

The 67 final photographs will hang on the walls of Peninsula Fine Arts Center through Sept. 30. The entire collection features black and white prints of 35 bridges over the Seine at night during the winter.

All of the photographs were shot on film



Gary Zuercher sifts through crates of prints July 3 while his exhibition, which features the bridges of Paris photographed at night, is hung at Peninsula Fine Arts Center. The show, featuring 67 photographs, opens at the Newport News museum July 13 and runs through Sept. 30. ROB OSTERMAIER/DAILY PRESS

and developed in dark rooms in Paris and Washington D.C. Zuercher and his wife — who is French — split their time between the two cities six months of the year.

He produced the final prints in Washington.

Barely any of the photographs featured in "The Glow of Paris" include pedestrians. This is partially because of the exposure method and the late nights he spent shooting.

"In some of these photos people have walked through but they don't appear," he said.

Zuercher said he eventually thought the images would make a good book, which prompted the photographer of 30 years to spend one more year gathering prints and researching the history of the bridges, including in military archives.

"The Glow of Paris: The Bridges of Paris at Night" was published in 2015.

He turned the book into an exhibit with the help of curator Scott Ruby. "The Glow of Paris" debuted as a photography exhibit in Ohio last year.

"The photographs are just so visually splendid and then I think the fact that it's almost like you've pre-staged artwork because it's lit by the city of Paris, not by Gary," Ruby said. "It's just so breathtakingly dramatic."

The photographs are organized throughout the museum based on the bridge's placement along the Seine. The exhibit contains multiple shots of certain bridges, text panels and a dial-in audio tour that allows visitors to listen to a narrative about the bridges.

Zuercher's photographs will be accompanied by the works of Mark Chagall to complete PFAC's "French Connections" exhibition. There also will be an interactive children's exhibit exploring Chagall's work.

The Chagall pieces are on loan from collections across Virginia and North Carolina.

"French Connections" will showcase avant-garde styles in 20th century Paris, according to museum representatives.