

CUPERTINO UNION TO TEST OUT NEW SEX ED CURRICULUM IN THE NEXT SCHOOL YEAR

Will be for seventh- and eighth-graders

BY KRISTI MYLLENBECK

A new sexual health curriculum will be tested next spring for seventh- and eighth-grade students in the Cupertino Union School District.

The move comes a few months after the school board, in a 2-2 vote, failed to adopt sex education curriculum that conforms to new state standards. Parents in March told school officials the proposed curriculum was “too graphic” and “not age-appropriate,” while others suggested it did not align with their cultural values, and some complained that it explicitly described different types of sex.

On June 13 the school board chose to move forward with “Positive Prevention Plus” as a pilot curriculum after hearing from more than 10 public speakers, most of whom were in favor of adopting a new curriculum as soon as possible.

According to a presentation by interim superintendent Stacy McAfee, in July or August the district will hire a consultant to “provide education training to parents and staff.” Between August and October, parents will receive information about the new curriculum and have several opportunities to review it.

Curriculum, page 8

Creekside Park: New farmers market is now open an hour earlier page 6

In the Red: District passes a budget, but annual deficits expected to continue..... page 8

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PHOTOGRAPH BY PIETRO BREZZO

Scene Painter

San Jose photographer wants to draw viewers into his shots of national parks

page 14

Richard Bui, left, and Ed Yeh look over QT Luong's landscape photography at Art Ark Gallery in San Jose.

Iconic Images

Yosemite trip inspires Luong to photograph all 59 national parks

By KHALIDA SARWARI

Photographs by PIETRO BREZZO

If the walls of the Art Ark Gallery on San Jose's South Sixth Street could talk, they'd probably be speechless. They hold 59 images and each appears to be competing with each other in grandeur, scope and beauty.

The contrasts catch the eye immediately. Next to the serene waters and lush greenery of the Oheo Stream at Haleakala National Park is an image of red lava simmering through cracks on the ground under a pink-orange sky at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. Right next to that is a translucent iceberg washed over by an early morning violet glow in the tidewater glaciers of Glacier Bay National Park.

Each one was shot using a large-format camera and the trained eye of QT Luong. The Paris-born photographer got his start about 30 years ago after climbing Mont Blanc, in the Graian Alps flanked by Italy and France. Once the expedition was a memory, he found he couldn't leave behind what he'd seen. He wished he'd had a camera with him to capture the scenery.

"Here in California we have a lot of wilderness, but in Western Europe, it's quite different," he said, his heavy French accent belying the 24 years he's called the Bay Area home. "It was a new world for me. I wanted to bring that back to the folks who couldn't climb mountains...bring back a bit of awareness of the beauty of those lands to people."

Today, the 53-year-old San Jose resident is the only photographer who has captured all 59 national parks in large-format photographs.

Luong came to the Bay Area in the early 1990s after landing a job at UC-Berkeley as a researcher in artificial intelligence. He said he



QT Luong holds the handmade large-format camera he used to capture images of all 59 national parks. His photos are on display at Art Ark Gallery in San Jose through Monday.

stayed for the parks, starting with his very first trip to Yosemite in 1993, when he went cross-country skiing and camping in the snow with a group of colleagues from the university. It was there, he said, where he first learned how to use the large-format camera preferred by renowned photographers such as Richard Avedon and Ansel Adams. At the same time, he was falling in love with Yosemite, a site he'd return to hundreds of times over the next two decades.

"For me, it was love at first sight," he recalled. "It was wonderful, and the view that really impressed me was the view from

the Tunnel...the 3,000 feet (from the base to the summit) of El Capitan. I've never seen anything like that."

Later that year, he visited Denali National Park and Preserve in Alaska. "The mountains, they were so much bigger and covered in ice and glaciers than what I saw in the Alps," he remembered. "They were larger, bigger and colder, too. It was really a new experience."

In the fall of 1993, he found himself exploring yet another national park, this time the vast arid landscape of Death Valley.

"I began to realize in national parks, there was an incredible

diversity of experiences to be had," said Luong. "So that's when I began the idea to visit each one of them. Each of them was so unique and so different, and each one offered sights that I hadn't seen before."

He set out to shoot every national park, counting on his outdoor experience to help him explore the back country, hike in trail-less terrain while wearing a 70-pound backpack and paddle kayaks and canoes during extended expeditions—all for that perfect shot.

In 1995, Luong bought his first large-format camera from an artisan in Arizona who assembled

the device by hand. It would be the camera that he'd end up using for the remainder of his park visits. Though he's added other cameras to his arsenal over the years, he still occasionally reaches for his large-format camera, mostly to shoot landscapes. He plans to dust it off and use it to photograph National Park No. 60, whenever it's established. Based on the rumors he's heard from others in the landscape photography community, Luong predicted the 60th national park could be Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve in Idaho or Chiricahua National Monument in Arizona.

At first photography was only a hobby for Luong, who was working at UC-Berkeley on a Caltrans-funded project to explore the development of self-driving cars. He then worked for SRI International in Menlo Park as a computer scientist for 12 years, before leaving the field altogether in 2007 to pursue photography full time.

"I don't have regrets. At that point I had done enough work in AI," he said about making the transition, although he added, "Market conditions have changed quite a bit now so it's quite difficult to make a living as a photographer than it was 10 years ago for me."

By 2007, he'd already visited every national park—at least, all the ones designated as such by that point. Pinnacles National Park in Central California didn't get its designation until 2013.

Luong has visited every park alone with the exception of about a handful in Alaska, he said. That's because Alaska is so wild and remote that traveling alone can be not only expensive but

Landscape, page 15

Landscape

Continued from page 14

dangerous. On his most recent voyage to the 49th state, he took along Tommy Eng, a friend who considers himself “a classic Silicon Valley computer geek” who also dabbles in photography. The two met through a mutual friend a few years ago, said Eng, and ended up going on a two-week backpacking expedition last year at four national parks in Alaska.

“It was pretty incredible,” Eng said. “For me, it was fun. For him, it was a very successful trip, and... it was kind of difficult. It was very physically demanding.”

It rained 12 of the 14 days they were there, and they got very little sleep and ate sparsely.

“We were constantly cold, wet, hungry and exhausted,” Eng remembered. “It was hard, but it was fun. The scenery was truly spectacular.”

Eng had emphatic praise for Luong, not only for his work but for his strength, stamina, determination and level of dedication and sacrifice. “You can see the passion through the pictures, through the stories that he tells... and that’s important,” he said.

“Obviously, we both love the outdoors, so at the end, the reward is you get to see something that is truly unique; you get to see magical moments that will never be repeated: a spectacular sunrise, a spectacular sunset,” said Eng. “Those are the rewards.”

Luong has a couple of different approaches to his shoots. When he sets out to find his iconic shots, he makes it a point to visit the different corners of each park to see its full scope. He also explores various themes, such as focusing on the park’s ground, trees or off-the-beaten-path locations, or getting nighttime shots, although like most photographers, he generally prefers “the golden hour,” a period shortly after sunrise or before sunset.

“The thing I’m trying to do,” he said, “is invite the viewer into the image...so when you look at the image, you can explore every corner of the image and try to place themselves into the scene. So that’s a big part of the project. That’s why it was important for me to use a large-format camera, because it allows me to use images laden with details for an im-

mersive experience.”

Oliver Klink, who has been friends with Luong almost 18 years, calls him “a source of inspiration.” Klink, a travel and wildlife photographer who lives in Los Gatos, said the two of them led a photography workshop in 2014. He called Luong’s work “exceptional” and “a work of love.”

“I believe...when you look at someone’s work, you have to look deep into their soul. And I think Tuan’s soul is depicted through his images,” Klink said. “You see not just a love for photography, but there’s a love for nature, a love for something beyond what we can comprehend by ourselves.”

Public reaction to his work has been positive, Luong said. In 2009, Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan featured him in the documentary, “The National Parks: America’s Best Idea.” Lauding Luong’s dedication to his work, New York Times reviewer Dominique Browning stated that “no one has captured the vast beauty of America’s landscape as comprehensively” as Luong does in his book.

People often tell him they’re inspired to visit the parks after seeing his photos, said Luong. That has been his goal from the start, he added.

“I’m very pleased with that reaction because my goal is to inspire people to get out there and see the places for themselves,” he said. “Because we have all those national parks as a country, and they’re just tremendous places, but many people don’t know about them or don’t know how diverse they are

“With the parks, they need to have a constituency,” said Luong. “If people, they don’t care about the parks, they are not going to get the protections they deserve.”

He denounced President Donald Trump’s decision in April to review previous monument designations and proposal to make deep cuts to the Department of the Interior, which includes the Park Service.

“It is horrible that we have to fight our government to protect the environment,” he said, paraphrasing Ansel Adams.

Through his travels to different states, Luong has had a chance to take his own pulse of the disparate communities in America. Some of these discoveries has

caught him by surprise, he said, like seeing Indian reservations that resemble Third World countries. Seeing the disparity firsthand opened his eyes to things and people he said he’d never see if he’d chosen to spend his whole life in the Bay Area.

With misty eyes, he relayed a story about traveling on a budget years ago, when he had become weary of camping because of bad weather. On one cold night, he ducked into a restaurant in South Dakota and encountered a woman with whom he shared his troubles. She responded by inviting him to spend the night with her family, he said.

“In the Bay Area people, they think of red states (as having) different political views, but I think it’s important to have personal contact with those people and see where they come from,” he said. “They’re very nice people; they just live in a very different way than we do.”

These days, Luong still visits national parks; he counts Yosemite as his personal favorite. He has plans to visit Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming to see the total eclipse in August. At the same time, he’s scoping out national monuments for his next project.

“They’re much less known to the public” than national parks, he said, adding that many people might not know that most of the parks started as national monuments.

As for his other hobbies, mountaineering and rock climbing, he’s still dabbling in both, although he admits that nowadays “I don’t climb the hard stuff.”

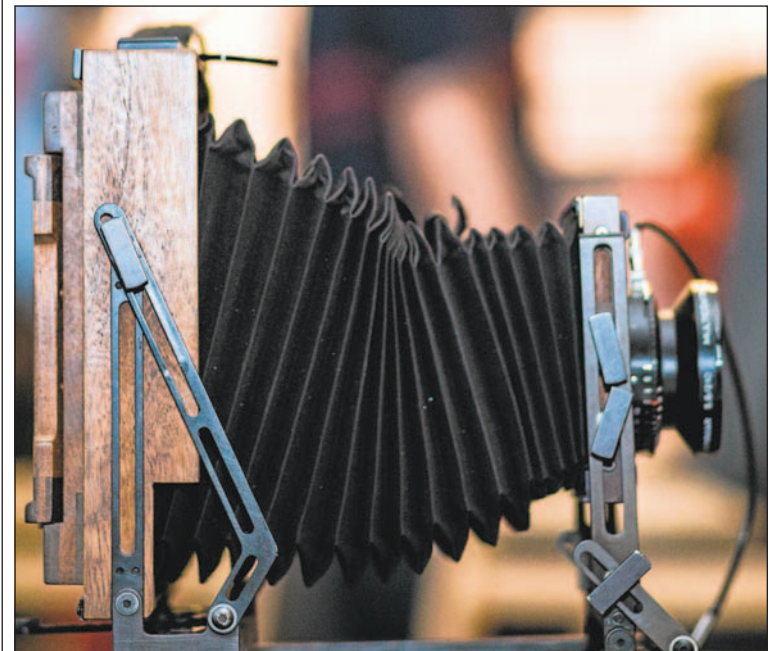
The Art Ark Gallery at 1035 S. Sixth St. in San Jose is displaying Luong’s photos through Monday in a traveling exhibit titled “Treasured Lands,” which features one shot from each of the 59 parks. Luong published a book by the same name that contains a myriad of photos from a range of viewpoints at each park, which he visited on average five times in different conditions and seasons.

To view Luong’s work or learn more about him, visit his website at terrageria.com.

Contact Khalida Sarwari at 408-200-1055.



QT Luong gives a presentation about his exhibit at Art Ark Gallery in San Jose, which features shots he took at each of 59 national parks.



QT Luong used this handmade large-format camera to shoot photos at all 59 national parks.