



## Time Pieces

Photographer Ansen Seale's digital prints record an ever-moving, unseen world.

BY JON GILLESPIE



**T**here's another reality that exists below the surface or possibly between the molecules of what we see, Ansen Seale captures it in his slitscan photography recording images such as a dancer, distorted so that her figure floats up like a puff of smoke, or a landscape in in Germany where two miles of travel through an urban center have been compressed into one image.

One part artist one part inventor, Seale grew up in the Rio Grande Valley and came to San Antonio in 1979 to study art and journalism at Trinity University. Before moving here, he practiced still photography and movie-making as a high school hobby, particularly with a group of like-minded friends. Even during these early years. Seale preferred the real over the invented, nonfiction over fiction.

In 26 years, he has become known locally as an artist who likes to tinker, to explore visual and aesthetic boundaries using homegrown technology. One particular technique is now bringing him international attention: digital slitscan photography that captures movement overtime in a single, panoramic picture.

Seale's interest in panoramic photography took root decades ago, inspired by the work of San Antonian E.O. Goldbeck.

Seale built his own panoramic cameras for business reasons. As digital photography and the World Wide Web developed, he realized the cameras could be used for virtual tours by businesses, architects, universities, and other concerns that want to show their space to prospective customers. But then he began to notice how the movement and speed of photographic subjects could cause distortion in a unique way.

"The panoramic camera I invented is ideal for doing a virtual tour and that was its original purpose," he says. "But now I'm subverting its purpose to make art."

Seale discovered that by turning off the motor of the normally spinning camera so that it remains stationary while photographing moving subjects - a dancer, a landscape from a train window, Fiesta partygoers - results in capturing another reality. Rather than suspending a single moment, his digital photos show the continuous flow of time.



**LEFT** Ansen Seale, seen here in his studio, is part artist and part inventor. His slitscan images examine the continuous flow of time, providing a counterpoint to classical photography.

**ABOVE** In *Unfolding No. 5*, petals seem to drip surreally off the edge of the print.





### *Europe by Train*

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**"Seale's 'chronoscope' makes us into time-travelers, at least for a moment."**

— Chris Dickie, Ag35, *the International Journal for Photographic Art and Practice*

Although slitscan photography has been done on film in the past, (Seale mentions the 1960s work of William Larson and George Silk), "it's never really caught on as a genre because the equipment is so arcane," he observes.

Seale is patenting his digital slitscan camera, which takes upward of 100 vertical photo "slices" per second then digitally laces them back together. Counter to classic photography, for the subject to be clear in the resulting print, it has to be in motion.

"If nothing changes in the picture, then you'd just get a bunch of horizontal stripes. Seale says. Even seemingly stationary subjects can be recorded, however. A photo from his new series, *Unfolding No.10*, shows the smooth, intricate

details of flower petals when multiplied through time and movement. In *Unfolding No. 5* petals in the foreground appear to surrealistically drip off the edge of the image. Out of the camera's field of focus, the pigments soften and melt into each other like luscious watercolors.

This technique creates mind-bending, yet fully representational images that recall the work of the Cubist and Surrealist painters such as Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dali. What astonishes about Seale's photos is that out-of-camera manipulation never occurs. Photoshop is not a part of this technique, where the flow of time is constant from one side of the photo to the other. The camera records the "hidden reality" of movement through time.



### *Unfolding No. 10*

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Seale has been exploring this method for about five years now. “My work has always split the difference between photography and painting I wanted my photography to be much more about the medium than the subject,” he says. “There’s a reality that we’re not privileged to see. We can only view it through this camera.

Articles in national and international art journals concur; Seales work has been discussed in *Voices of Art* (March 2005) and the British journal *Ag35*, the *International Journal for Photographic Art and Practice*, 2004, among others. The opening paragraph of the *Ag35* article by Chris Dickie states:

There is no doubt that this is photog-

raphy of the real world - beaches and parades, junkyards and creeks. But in the same way that telescopes and microscopes allow humans a glimpse of reality they are not naturally privileged to see, Seale’s “chronoscope” makes us into time-travelers, at least for a moment.

The slitscan photos have been shown at SIGGRAPH, the international conference on computer graphics and in the “Top 40,” exhibit at the Los Angeles Center for Digital Art.

Seale will speak at the McNay Art Museum on Dec. 8 as part of the “Artists Looking at Art” series and his next large print show will be at the Photography is Art gallery in Fredericksburg, Dec 1 to Feb. 4. View the intriguingly beautiful photos at [www.ansenseale.com](http://www.ansenseale.com).