



A Mystic's Art by Leon Nigrosh

You can come home again, and artist Daniel Ranalli proves it. He was graduated from Clark University in 1968 and now, 35 years later, he has returned to mount a one-artist exhibition of his latest photographic work. For this particular show he has assembled examples from three different photographic series – each distinct in concept and execution, yet all bound together within a greater context.

For more than twenty years Ranalli has spent his summers in the dunes and marshlands of the Outer Cape, where the air, light, and sounds are unique — as any city-dweller who has spent any time there can attest. These elements bring a certain equanimity to the mind and soul, which led Ranalli to an early project,

"Seven Daily Stones," photos of different stones with holes in them found each day, an activity he thought significant. As it turns out, this undertaking was a precursor to his recent ventures based on his sabbatical to Thailand and Nepal in 1999.

Upon his return, Ranalli began his made-from-memory Buddha Photographs/Cliché Verre series, a group of gestural ink drawings on tissue paper that have been projected onto photo paper in a darkroom. The resulting images possess a hazy, spectral quality, with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas floating in space, some sheltered in gilt frames; others taking on smoky, ethereal attributes; others appear as translucent bones. Streaked sepia tones enhance the otherworldly aspect of these pieces.

His series of straight photos of actual stone Buddhas scattered throughout the Asian continent, while presented with reverence, is tinged with humor. The sepia-toned diptych, "Buddha Parts & Buddha With Wrong Head," shows just that: a pile of broken arms, legs, and torsos next to an image of a Buddha's body with an obviously mismatched head propped up by person or persons unknown. A grouping of eight close up pictures of statuary hands shows them in varying states of decay — broken fingers, wind worn, crumbling, or just plain missing.

Bringing this feeling of ephemeral tranquility home to the Cape Cod dunes, Ranalli has produced a number of color photos in his "Zen Dunes" series. In each of these images he has

photographed his version of a reverently raked gravel Zen garden, temporarily raking the sparkling beach sand in great swirls or calm furrows around existing tufts of sea grass, shore vegetation, and the occasional piece of bleached driftwood. Most of the images on display might have been produced anywhere, but in some the sea laps against the distant shoreline adding to the transitory yet timeless sensation that the setting evokes.

Although he continues to seek to uncover the relationships between humans and nature, found and altered landscapes, and the effects of chaos on momentarily imposed order, his works are infused with peace and tranquility — to the extent that the gallery has thoughtfully provided large cushions for visitors to recline upon while experiencing Ranalli's soothing, contemplative endeavors. **art**

Asian Work: Daniel Ranalli
University Gallery at Goddard Library,
Clark University, Worcester, MA
through November 22.

Above: Zen Dune #8
by Daniel Ranalli