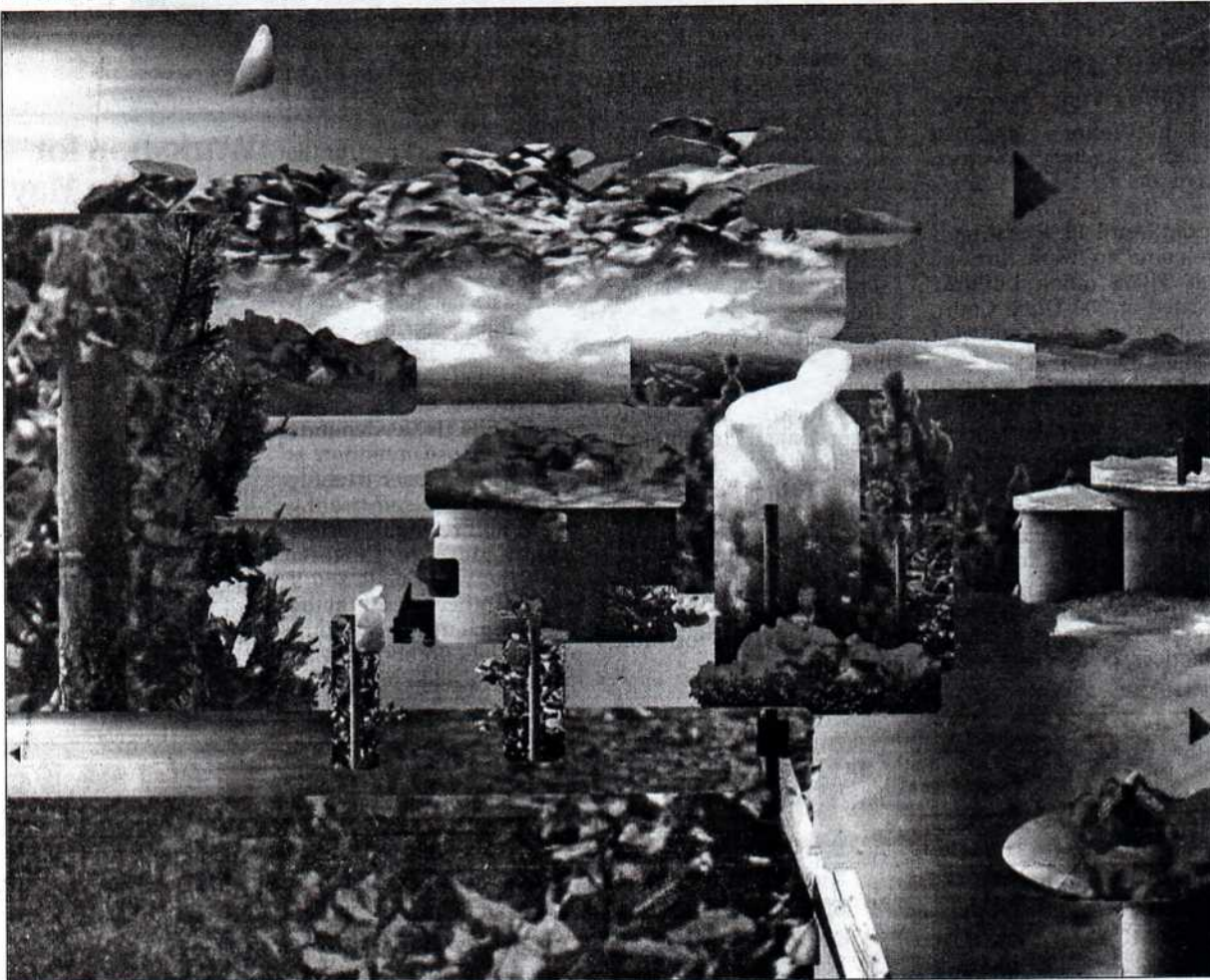


North Lake Tahoe Bonanza

tahoe view of roses



This original artwork by Les Barta, titled "Tahoe View of Roses," is one of the creations the Incline Village artist currently has on display at a retrospective at the International Photography Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City.

Photographer focuses on perception

By Merry Thomas
BONANZA STAFF WRITER

To Incline photographer Les Barta, it's all in how you look at it.

A retrospective of his photographs went on exhibit at the beginning of the month, and will continue through June at the International Photographic Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City.

Nearly all of the work displayed are photo collages, according to Barta. Since his venture into collage formats in the 1980s, he has expanded his art into digital photography.

A fine arts photographer, Barta chooses to challenge himself by

reconstructing visual reality.

"Beauty has inherent poetic value," Barta said. "... when stripped of its familiarity, it is transformed into power." Barta's work nudges viewers out of their comfort zone. There's nothing more powerful than opening peoples' minds to new perceptions.

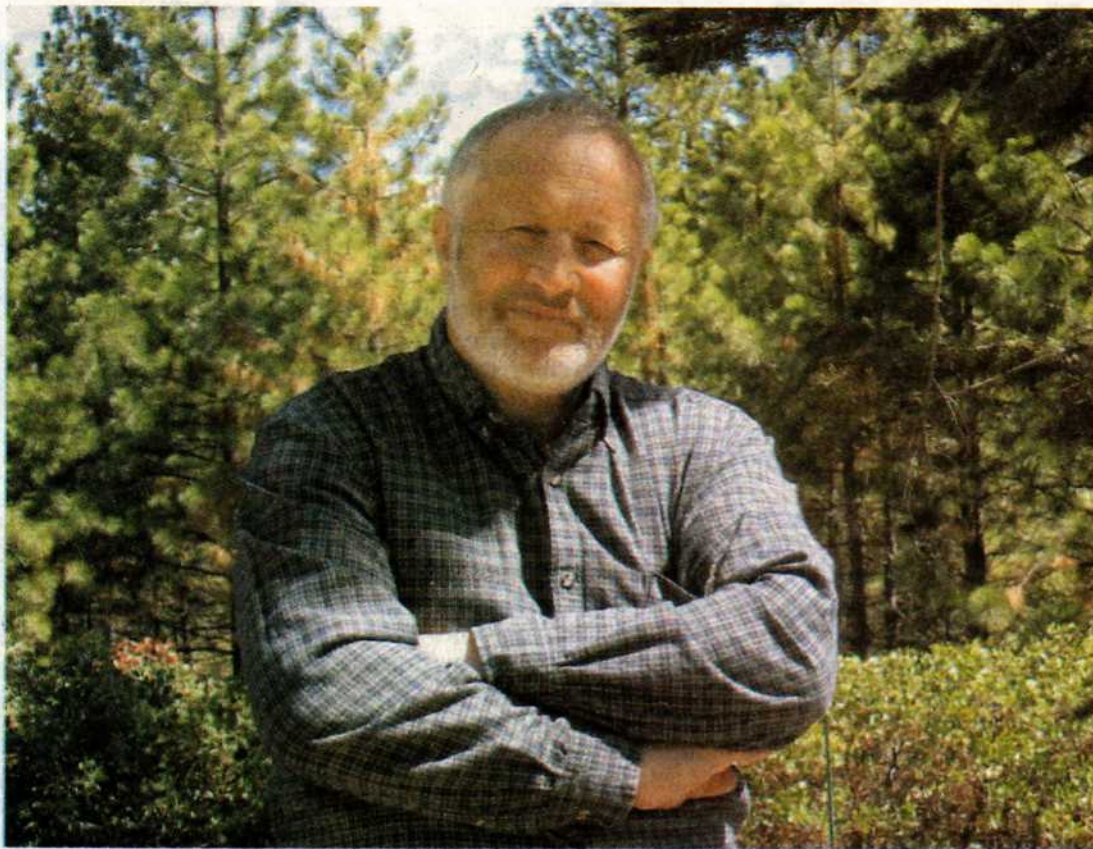
Barta challenges viewers' imaginations by taking an everyday image and transforming it into something viewers might not recognize; rethinking results as the mind strives to make sense of the photoconstruction.

"I do not seek to define abstract intent or to validate any new description of reality," Barta said.

"Rather, my work is an exercise." He chooses a simple graphic element, such as a flower, and treats it as a paradigm, a model on which he bases a work. He tends to place the image — removed from the context of the original photograph — into a beautiful or striking setting.

"I synthesize the components of these structures into images which I call photoconstructions," Barta said. He said he considers the computer uniquely suited to these techniques.

Each of his photo structures begins with one photo — often one that depicts an architectural struc-



Bonanza Photo - Kirk Caraway

Les Barta, a long-time Incline resident, creates his photoconstruction artwork using images from many different photos, mixing them together to create original scenes.

Barta

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ture. "Fine Arts Phenomenon," for instance, is based on the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco.

Next in the process, Barta chooses a design element to focus on — an image such as a column or a frieze. That becomes the metaphor for the whole visual concept he creates.

Barta calls his technique "metaphorical algebra." To Barta, nature's symmetry and mathematical order are true reality — and individuals' perceptions of reality miss the mark.

"Frank Synthesis" comprises images of Frank Lloyd Wright's Marin County building. His affinity for

Wright's work stems from the architect's use of natural elements synthesized with man-made structures.

Barta describes his approach to photography, his artistic intent, as belonging to the philosophical movement referred to as phenomenology.

"One of the significant insights of phenomenology is that familiar reality is a mode of assembling the world," he said. What is important to him is the works' ability to cultivate in people the power of choice, he said.

So much of everyday life is habit, including the habit of looking but not really seeing. If art can teach or challenge people to see things in at least one new way, Barta

would say it has succeeded on its highest level.

"This is not an art of describing the world," he said. "It is an art of deciding the world."

The Hungarian-born Barta has lived in Incline Village for many years. His work has been exhibited in numerous galleries nationwide, including a wide array of solo and juried exhibits, and several touring exhibitions.

His work also has earned some impressive awards. It has been featured in many articles and is included in several major art collections.

The April/May 2002 issue of *RangeFinder Magazine* includes an article featuring Barta.