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Snap! Orlando exhibit highlights Van Gogh's influence on two women photographers

By **PATRICK CONNOLLY**
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"The Van Gogh Affect," which features the work of photographers Lynn Johnson and Patricia Lanza, is open beginning Feb. 12 at the Snap! Downtown gallery, shown Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2021. (Patrick Connolly/Orlando Sentinel)

Vincent van Gogh has been gone for more than a century, but his perception of the world and influence on art persists in the minds and work of many modern-day creators, including Lynn Johnson and Patricia Lanza.

A selection of Van Gogh-inspired work by the photographers is curated in an exhibit called “The Van Gogh Affect,” which is on display at Snap! Orlando’s downtown gallery Feb. 12-May 29. In their photos, Johnson and Lanza retrace the footsteps of the Dutch post-impressionist artist’s life and explore the modern-day impacts of his 37-year existence.

“It’s kind of like a trip, it’s a journey through Van Gogh’s life through the different places where he lived, worked and loved,” said Patrick Kahn, the founder and director of Snap! Orlando. “Each image ... gives you a real context of how it relates to his life.”

Some of Johnson’s photos were first created while on assignment for National Geographic nearly 25 years ago, and her black-and-white frames are meant to feel timeless as if they could have been taken when Van Gogh was alive.

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"The Van Gogh Affect," which features the work of photographers Lynn Johnson and Patricia Lanza, is open beginning Feb. 12 at the Snap! Downtown gallery in Orlando. (Patrick Connolly/Orlando Sentinel)

"I looked for a visual language that was completely opposite from what Van Gogh was doing, which was a very spirited brush stroke and colorful canvases," Johnson said. "I decided to shoot with a Hasselblad with a very formal eye and a slow process, and then in black and white ... I made the effort to always eliminate, in the frame, any element of modernity."

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Serving as both a contrast and a complement to Johnson's pictures, Lanza's work studies Van Gogh's use of light and sense of place through "impressionist-imbued" color photographs.

"Whether it's black and white or color, they try to give that sense of time period," Kahn said. "Even with the color, [Lanza] made it so painterly, you don't have the feeling that these are 20th or 21st century."

Sometimes, the frames follow exactly in Van Gogh's footsteps, such as a moment captured from a path the artist walked to create perhaps his final painting. Some photos are of timeless monuments like a restaurant where Van Gogh frequently ate in Paris, a chapel the painter visited and the site of his grave.



"The Van Gogh Affect" features a photo by Patricia Lanza of the farm where Van Gogh may have been shot, at the Snap! Downtown gallery in Orlando. (Patrick Connolly/Orlando Sentinel)

Other photos are based in folklore and local legend, such as a picture of the bed where the painter was believed to have slept at Saint Paul's Asylum. Another frame gazes out a window overlooking the farm where Van Gogh may have been shot.

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The photos aren't all literal — some feature subjects seen in Van Gogh's paintings like sunflowers and windmills.

Captions help to convey the connections between the photographers' works and the painter's life, but many photos are meant to convey a feeling or an idea more than they're meant to be taken literally.

"It's a very introspective exhibition," Kahn said. "The reason why it's called 'The Van Gogh Affect' instead of effect is it's more of an emotional state than just an effect ... it's deeply emotional and deeply felt."



Patrick Kahn, founder and director of Snap! Orlando, looks at work by Lynn Johnson for "The Van Gogh Affect," an exhibit at the Snap! Downtown gallery. (Patrick Connolly/Orlando Sentinel)

The final room of the exhibition is dedicated to photos of women who now inhabit the Saint Paul Asylum, where Van Gogh once resided and created nearly 150 paintings. Through an art atelier, patients have the space to develop a new identity through creativity as they work and draw inspiration from the same spaces where Van Gogh once lived.

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“Instead of seeing themselves as women who are ill or compromised or victims ... they can see themselves developing as artists,” Johnson said. “The power of that is extraordinary, and they take that power and put it into their work.”



A photo by Lynn Johnson shows two photos of artist Anne Desmarest taken 23 years apart, as a part of "The Van Gogh Affect" at the Snap! Downtown gallery in Orlando. (Patrick Connolly/Orlando Sentinel)

Ultimately, what art can do for us as humans and the inspiration of Van Gogh are at the core of this exhibit.

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As Johnson's artist statement reads: "His art is both spectacular and accessible: Van Gogh makes us believe we too can be artists."

If you go

"The Van Gogh Affect" is open at Snap! Downtown (420 E. Church St. in Orlando) Feb. 12-May 29. Visitors can experience opening night 7-10 p.m. Feb. 12 by reserving a donation-based time slot. Guests are required to wear a face-covering and maintain social distancing. The gallery is open 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Saturday and by appointment. For more information, visit snaporlando.com or eventbrite.com.

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