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Democracy Dies in Darkness

Museums Review

By Mark Jenkins
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In the Galleries: “Tonal Vision”



Alan Sisen, “Curves and Fins,” 2019. (Alan Sisen/Multiple Exposures Gallery)

Alan Sisen

To judge from Alan Sisen’s pictures at Multiple Exposures Gallery, the Bethesda, Md., photographer is most interested in swooping curves, dramatic angles and repeated motifs, which he finds primarily in D.C.-area modernist architecture. Yet the show’s title is “Tonal Visions,” emphasizing not the buildings’ profiles but the grays and whites of their facades and the black skies that often frame them.

The skies aren't black because Sisen shoots at night. He shoots in color, then converts his images to higher-contrast black-and-white. Some of those skies are blue in the originals. (His "Tonal Visions" book, available for browsing at the gallery, shows before-and-after versions of the pictures.) Sisen, who also depicts the occasional neo-Gothic or Art Deco structure, could have done something similar in the pre-digital era. While contemporary technology gives him more control of the tones, his sense of how to frame the composition is classic.

Alan Sisen: Tonal Visions Through June 15 at *Multiple Exposures Gallery, Torpedo Factory Art Center, 105 N. Union St., Alexandria.*