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Photographer captures wonders of nature

► *What began as a hobby for the native of Taiwan has become something others covet.*

HOLLAND

Gina Velky
The Grand Rapids Press

Stone Peng has devoted many years to capturing the beauty of nature on film. A coincidental meeting with the owners of a Holland art gallery has resulted in Peng's work being featured in the artist's first solo exhibit.

The photographer was born into an artistic family on the island of Taiwan. His father and mother are musicians, and his sister, a painter. Peng's father earned his living as a farmer, but in addition to music, the elder Peng also enjoyed taking pictures. It was a hobby the younger Peng recognized as something that would not only be enjoyable, but something he could also afford to do.

"Although we were poor, my father had three cameras. It was something I knew I could do also," Peng said.

With no formal lessons, he began taking photos in the early '80s. Peng concentrated his efforts on documenting the wonders of nature in his native homeland.

About 10 years ago, Peng left his island to come to Michigan to earn his Master of Science degree in environmental earth science at Western Michigan University.

With camera in hand, he's continued his mission to unveil nature's dew-kissed secrets.

Using no high-tech lenses or filters, the photographer has often positioned himself lying on the ground to capture glistening dew dripping from green blades of grass, standing in the blistering winter wind to document ice flowing past the Holland lighthouse; or kneeling for hours patiently waiting for the sun to reach just the right angle to display the fiery red features of a blossoming flower.

Considering himself an amateur, Peng either kept or gave away the colorful images as gifts to family and friends. He'd never considered the possibility of his work being featured in a gallery. But four years ago, fate stepped in and provided Peng with an opportunity he'd never dreamed of.

While jogging in downtown Holland, he heard music coming



Stone Peng enjoys shooting an object from different angles in order to show its varied personality.

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STONE PENG photographer

from Centennial Park. Peng adjusted his running course to investigate what was going on. Jogging up to a strange couple, he learned it was a cultural celebration. After exchanging introductions with Murray and Kathy Leshner, Peng said he continued on his way home.

Two years later, while shopping at a local retail store, Peng said he heard someone call his name. Although he didn't recognize them right away, it was the Leshners, who are owners of Uptown Gallery and Framing in Holland.

They again struck up a conversation, and upon learning that Peng was a photographer, the couple requested that he bring in his portfolio for them to review. "It took me almost two months to keep my promise to bring in my portfolio," Peng said.

The Leshners immediately recognized the promise in Peng's work. His photos displayed the beauty of some of Holland's favorite icons in changing seasons: Peng had captured blossoming tulips, the Big Red lighthouse, and the "DeZwaan" windmill on Windmill Island at varying angles, which further highlighted the individuality of each photo.

"Different angles have a different life or personality for the flowers," the photographer explained.

Peng became one of the Leshners featured artists, and is currently enjoying his first solo exhibit throughout the month of August. Most of the photos are of the Holland area. He also has photos of the Festival of Lights in Battle Creek; the red peaks of Utah's Bryce Canyon peering out from under layers of snow; and

LAKE SHORE SPOTLIGHT

WHO: Stone W.S. Peng

CURRENTLY: His photographs are featured at Uptown Gallery in Holland through Labor Day.

CREDITS: Has also exhibited his work at Art in the Park in Holland. Won First Place in the Nature Division of the "Focus on Michigan" Photograph Holland contest, sponsored by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Recreation and Park Association, and the Holland Recreation Department in 1995. Was vice president of the Art and Folk Club at the Chinese Culture University in 1982-83; is active in the Treasury Department of the Taiwanese Association in Grand Rapids. Has earned several academic, teaching, and leadership awards, including the 1991 Excellence in Leadership award from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Taiwan, for his term as president of the Chinese Student Association at Western Michigan University, and the All-American Scholar Collegiate Award from the United States Achievement Academy in 1992. Earned his undergraduate degree in geology from the Chinese Culture University, and his Master of Science degree in environmental earth science at Western Michigan University.

INFLUENCES: His parents, Sheng-Chien Peng and Lai-Mei Liu Peng; wife, Yun-Shu "Nancy" Peng; and Mother Nature.

QUOTE: "I try to catch a moment of beauty, when dramatic displays of color and light shine in the landscape. Every landscape has its own life and different meaning, depending on the viewer's mood. I try to show the emotional feeling in landscapes, and the life in nature."

the vibrant yellows, reds and golds of Michigan's fall foliage highlighted in the autumn sunlight.

"Loyal Guard" is a wintry sunset scene at the Holland lighthouse. Black, menacing clouds hang low, while the red-yellow sun sprinkles its rays across the channel. This photo earned Peng a first place award in the 1995 "Focus on Michigan" Photograph Holland contest, sponsored by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Recreation and Park Association, and the Holland Recreation Department.

"Clash of the Titans" shows two smaller pier markers battling for dominance against huge, angry waves. The cloudy, steel-gray sky and clawing white arms of spraying waves show Winter's awesome and untorgiving force.

Tulips of every color seem to jump from the frames. Focusing on one single blossom, Peng uses the surrounding flowers to add more depth and contrast to his work. In one picture, a single white daffodil floats among the rows of tulips. The photographer also documented a yellowjacket sipping dew from a bright yellow tulip, and in another, waves of purplish pink tulips lift their petals toward the sun.

The photographer lives in Holland with his wife, Nancy, a student in the International Business program at Daventry College. Peng's days are filled working as a hydrogeologist and groundwater computer modeler for an environmental company in Grand Rapids.

He said he and his wife venture out on evenings and weekends to take photos.