



THOUSAND OAKS STAR

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THE ARTS

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This week: Friday: Religion Monday: Senior Life Tuesday: Youth & Recreation Wednesday: Learning

Store displays unusual prints

CYANOTYPES: Technique employs specially treated paper that's put in sun with objects sitting on it.

By Nicole D'Amore
Staff writer

When it comes to photography, Lis J. Schwitters has just about done it all.

She's worked as a newspaper staff photographer, a photo lab technician, a color printer and a fine art photographer. But she has returned to the process that originally piqued her interest in photography back in junior high in the mid-70s.

Her exhibit of cyanotypes and Van Dyke brown prints, titled "Sunprints," is on display at Borders Books and Music in Thousand Oaks through Aug. 26.

"They offered a photography workshop given by a woman who was working on her master's degree," said Schwitters, a Moorpark resident.

The instructor gave the junior high students chemically coated paper, and they put coins or other items on it and placed it in the sun for a few minutes. Then they brought it inside and, like magic, an image appeared. That was Schwitters' introduction to the cyanotype process.

"I felt sheer amazement that the paper could change like that," she said.

But she also developed her first roll of film in the workshop, and her intrigue turned to the conventional art of shooting and developing photographs.

Schwitters worked as a staff photographer for the Daily Star-Progress in La Habra while majoring in photocommunications at California State University, Fullerton.

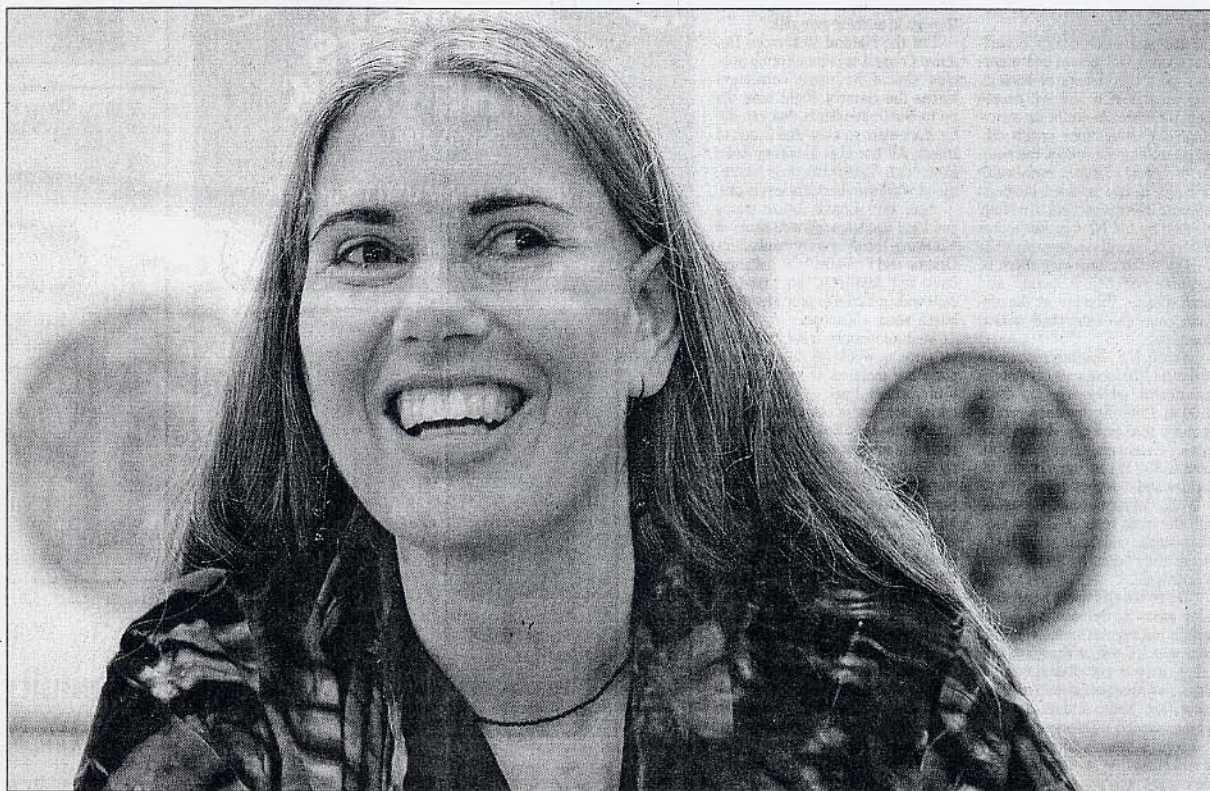
She won numerous awards for her photographs, but after receiving her bachelor's degree, she decided she wanted to try something else.

She turned to the lab and worked as a printer and lab technician at the California Institute of Technology Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena and then at Warner Bros. and Paramount studios.

"I handled film by some very famous photographers," she said.

But it was the photographer who got credit for a great photo, not the person printing the picture, she said.

"It's very simple to go out and



Staff photo by Chi Kuang Hwang

MANY TALENTS: Lis Schwitters of Moorpark has been a prize-winning photojournalist, but her efforts at the moment are being devoted to a technique she learned in a junior high school class. Her exhibit of cyanotypes and Van Dyke brown prints, titled "Sunprints," is on display at Borders Books.

photograph and send it to a lab," Schwitters said. "But if you can do the whole process you are showing your creativity. It's like a songwriter who also sings and plays an instrument."

Ironically, it was a downsizing at Paramount that gave Schwitters the opportunity to explore other aspects of her art.

"I wanted to explore the realm of fine art photography," she said. "I kept seeing the same things in black and white and I was looking for something fresh. My learning from photography is so broad now I thought, how can I explore that further?"

Deciding on the cyanotype process,

she had to start at the beginning, doing research on proper chemicals that would produce the blue shades of cyanotype and the brown shades of Van Dyke. "I want to demonstrate comparison and contrast and to explain the medium," she said. Her prints range from conventional to kaleidoscopic images.

"It's things that interest me, sort of a documentation within my life but not biographical," she said.

It can be very visual on one level, but on another level it is a biographical extension of herself that she is sharing.

"It's an ocular dance. The eye does this ballet, this movement —

it's very uplifting."

But when entering competitions, Schwitters found she was often overlooked.

In the photography category she was competing against portrait and landscape photographs.

"I was like a fish out of water," she said. "I was trying to find where I fit."

As a result of a discussion with a juror at a Thousand Oaks Art Association show, she switched to the print category and has had much more success.

She recently won first place and an honorable mention in that category at the Ventura County Fair.

But her most prestigious honor was having one of her prints chosen from 1,216 entries in a national juried exhibition at the Palm Springs Desert Museum in March.

"Things like that are an affirmation that say proceed," she said. "People enjoy looking at this as much as I do."

The exhibit is very unusual, said Sue Zussman, area marketing manager at Borders. "We have a lot of photographers, but her technique is very, very different. I thought it was something people would enjoy."

The exhibit is in the cafe at Borders, at 125 W. Thousand Oaks Blvd., Thousand Oaks.