

LOCAL
LENSES

Edna Bullock took up photography at age 61, after her husband died and left his small darkroom in the family's Monterey garage.

"John on Root," photographed in 1990, is an example of Bullock's male nudes shot against the backdrop of curvy natural settings.

THE FEMALE GAZE

NAOMI REDDERT



EDNA J. BULLOCK, MONTEREY MUSEUM OF ART, GIFT OF THE EDNA J. BULLOCK TRUST



DANCER EDNA BULLOCK TOOK UP PHOTOGRAPHY LATE IN LIFE, AND SAW THE WORLD IN A NEW WAY.

By Sara Rubin

THE CURVATURE OF KNOBBY, SPRAWLING TREE ROOTS HAS LONG BEEN AN INVITATION TO PHOTOGRAPHERS, serving as a natural

seat for the human form. Edna Bullock saw that invitation and laid languid models on the gentle slopes of sand dunes and into the nooks of tree roots, arms draped over the edges.

Some of those models, as many viewers' eyes will expect them to be, are female. But many are male, their curves emphasized by the shapes around them.

"When we think of nudes, it's always female nudes," says John Rexine, manager of collections and exhibitions for the Monterey Museum of Art. "This is different."

Rexine points at a series of two models, a younger, muscular man named Jeff posed with an older man, Don, whose

posture is slouched and whose skin sags on his bony figure. "They're not beautiful—I wouldn't use that word—but interesting," Rexine says.

Rexine was part of the team that selected 47 photographs by Bullock out of the Monterey Museum of Art's permanent collection, which includes 429 of her photographs, for an exhibit that opens Dec. 6 and caps the museum's Year of the Woman theme. The black-and-whites fall into four categories: nudes, gates and fences, flea markets and wood knots. The flea market images capture simple objects—sockets from head-on, looking through them, or hats and belts reduced to geometric features—squarish hats and long narrow rectangles formed by belts. One photograph, "Cats," shows dozens of ceramic cats lined up on a table at a Santa Cruz flea market.

"She definitely has her own eye and

sense of composition," Rexine notes. "She sees things others might miss, common everyday stuff."

Bullock didn't start seeing things through the camera until age 61, after the death of her husband, celebrated photographer Wynn Bullock. She picked up his camera equipment and used his garage darkroom and applied her dancer's sensibility—an attention to symmetry is apparent everywhere in this show.

In addition to developing dance components to phys ed curriculums (her vocation), Bullock was a creator—a seamstress who sewed all of her family's clothing, a gardener, a cook, a regular winner of a Monterey Christmas-decorating contest—"but photography was for dad," says their daughter, Barbara Bullock-Wilson. Dad operated the photography concession at Fort Ord from 1946-60, and did commercial work to support his family.

After Bullock first picked up the camera on a family trip to Arkansas where she photographed her son-in-law's mother, Lillie, she decided to pursue the art and enrolled in a class at Monterey Peninsula College to learn the basics.

Her first fine art photograph, taken in 1976, is titled "Lillie" and shows her subject sitting on a stoop, gazing at something in the distance, outside the frame.

"It's just a quiet portrait of a woman wrapped in her own thoughts," Bullock-Wilson says. "It revealed something of Lillie's character. She was strong, but self-effacing. People respond to it because they recognize the humanity reflected in it." ★

Edna Bullock: Through a Dancer's Eye opens Thursday, Dec. 6 at Monterey Museum of Art, 559 Pacific St., Monterey. Barbara Bullock-Wilson speaks at noon Thursday, Dec. 20 at MMA-La Mirada about Bullock's work. 372-5477, montereyart.org.