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Photos illustrate character through action

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Cheryl Hall's "Natural | Playful | Beautiful: Fine Artistic Portraiture of Babies and Children" at Cafe Zola reinvents the photographic genre through a thoroughly spirited examination of its fundamental principles.

Hall's artist statement says she specializes in "photographing images of babies, children, and expectant mothers in (a) unique artistic style."

Working solely in black and white, Hall is a "proponent of film." However, she has left old-school, static portraiture behind in favor of a vivid aesthetic.

Hall illustrates character through action, with the 14 portraits in her display all being marked by movement within the frame. In no instance is her model immobile. Even in the photos whose basis is purely portraiture, Hall works with her diminutive models to reveal personality through their gestures and facial expressions.

Some family portraits - such as her "Dad and Child" diptych, as well as "Siblings" and "Mother and Child" - casually capture a familiar intimacy. Yet Hall can also deepen the emotional gravity; her "Mother's Touch 2" is an especially poignant composition of contrasting monochromatic hues in which a mother tenderly holds her infant against her right arm.

Hall's exploration of portraiture yields some unexpected results. Her "Beautiful Boy" triptych, for example, captures an infant in a trio of settings - front, close-up, and back - in three simple but telling poses. And the imaginative masterwork of the exhibit, "Baby Crawling," consists of five separate horizontal images featuring a baby crawling into the picture. It's natural, playful and beautifully shot.

"Natural | Playful | Beautiful: Fine Artistic Portraiture of Babies and Children" will continue through May 31 at Cafe Zola, 112 W. Washington St. Exhibit hours are 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, and 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday-Saturday. For information, call 734-769-2020.

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