CATALOGING BEAUTY OF NATIONAL PARKS

By Ryan Kost

The 59 national parks cover tens of millions of acres across the United States and its territories. California is home to eight of any state through Alaska's parks are larger overall. The diversity in their landscapes is striking, ever-changing. And still, even knowing that, it's often easy to forget that they exist at all.

That makes the work of photographer QT Luong all the more important. Over a span of two decades, Luong made some 300 visits to these parks, and again, and again, on large format film, creating images that give the viewer a sense of place that can jump off the page to convey through a single photograph.

Thirty of his photographs are on display in the hallway of the Winckler House in San Francisco. It's a traverse version of what would normally be a jigsaw puzzle exhibition called "Treasured Lands," a show that puts one photograph on display for each park. That Luong usually has to narrow the show down to one photograph per park feels cruel, but that's what it takes to cut it by half for this space is very much worth a walk through the metal detectors at the entrance of the building.

One part of the display is dedicated entirely to California. Viewers can jump between the misty peaks of Yosemite National Park to the soft and rounded Dunes of Death Valley National Park in Alaska. Side by side, the neon glow of lava rock, and a lavender-blue sky creased Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes of Death Valley National Park by just walking a few feet. The images are so detailed you can make out the individual alpine spires of the cholla cactus in the Joshua Tree National Park.

"There was so much of variety that I just wanted to try to see it all for myself, and then after that is try to comment catalognize the contents of being there," Luong says. "I wanted to see all of it."

One of the most stunning aspects of the collection Luong has put together is how magnifies this truth by juxtaposing certain images. In one snapshot, a diabolical pumpkin, Luong places an image of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park next to an image of Glacier Bay National Park in Alaska. Side by side, the neon glow of lava rock, the dragonfly, the glacier on the banks of the Murr Inlet. Luong says, "I tried to group them so that you see all at the same time, the similarities and the contrasts in the parks." He explains. Given the show volume of images that Luong has collected over the years, it would be impossible to convey the extent of his work in a single show, even if it had been allowed to show all its images. To help with that, Luong has also placed a "look-on" display (available for purchase online at www.treasur elandsbook.com) that does much deeper into each of the parks, showing off their varying moods and individual depths – as well as his own respect for each of them.

Luong, it feels important to say, grows up in France, which to the touch of gloom. One of 2017 work has its title engraved into it: it "sold my soul but I swear I'm a sensible person."