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In her photos, Elizabeth Shatner looks for what's hidden inside

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By Rich Copley
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Elizabeth Shatner has always been focused on beauty.

That led to her career with horses as a rider, trainer and equine judge.

"I would study photographs of Arabian horses, which are incredibly beautiful," Shatner said from her California home. "That love of beauty was probably imprinted on me at an early age.

"All my life, I would see beautiful scenes and say, 'I wish I could paint that.'"

Shatner never picked up a paint brush. But in 2001, she found herself in Israel with a camera in her hands. She was on a photo safari with her new husband, actor William Shatner. They met after she sent him a letter of condolence after the death of his wife, Nerine, in 1999. She had lost her husband, Mike Martin, a few years earlier, and William and Elizabeth were drawn together through mutual experience and a love for horses.

The Shatners were invited on the Israel trip as part of a program with Canon cameras, and although she was essentially along for the ride, Elizabeth Shatner was given a camera and invited to shoot away.

She loved it.

Her first images were landscapes, but soon she found herself zooming into the interiors of flowers.

Lexington will get its first exhibit of Shatner's floral photography this week with *The Enchanted Garden*, an exhibit of various forms of floral art at Artique Gallery in The Mall at Lexington Green.

The show will include blown glass by Loy Allen, tea cup fairies by Susan Snodgrass, ceramic sculpture by Bonnie Day, copper flower bouquets by Bovano, jewelry by urban links and silver seasons, pottery from Louisville Stoneware, water fountains by Charles White, and water showers by Joe and Karen Hart.

Shatner was drawn into flowers by the physics of them and the suggestion that they were the original source of the ubiquitous heart shape.

"I took my macro lens and said, 'Let's see what these flowers have to say inside,'" Shatner says. "I started to think, 'What was the first use of the heart as a symbol of love?'"

Her exploration has been with close-up lenses, and digital cropping and adjustment of images.

"I don't consider myself a photographer," Shatner says. "I consider the camera my sketch pad, and I try to get what I can with natural light."

She then looks into the flowers for the natural shapes they offer, cropping for images such as *Pansy Angel*.

Working on the images led her to deeper study of flowers, and she likens looking at photographs to studying horses.

"I can go into them for hours," she says.

The growth of her flower studies from a personal project into public exhibits in California and now Lexington mirrors other endeavors by the Shatners that started small and have grown large, such as a song by the couple that grew into a collaboration with Ben Folds, a ballet and now a film, *William Shatner's Gonzo Ballet*, which has gotten positive notices at film festivals.

One of their Saddlebreds, All Glory, is being honored as the celebration horse at this year's Breyerfest, July 23 to 25 at the Kentucky Horse Park.

And as intrigued as Elizabeth Shatner is with flowers, she has been photographing horses and hopes to have an exhibit of equine and Kentucky images for Artique during the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games this fall.

This month, though, she is looking forward to the opening of the flower show.

"It's going to be a big celebration of love and good will," Shatner says.

And, of course, beauty.

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