

On New Year's Day, aside from a hangover, what do over 100 million people have in common? They all watch the Tournament of Roses Parade, naturally.

Last year over 1 million people, standing in the chilly January air, saw it live, while another 125 million watched on television. This year the people at T. of R. in Pasadena expect even more viewers to witness the 22 bands, 60 floats and 230 equestrians. And with good reason — it's an event unique in the world.

With anticipatory eagerness, each year photographer Avery Danziger hunkers before the TV set as the announcer enthuses something about the 1200 magnolia petals that make up the wing of a goose. Danziger loves this stuff — especially the details. On Jan. 2, he'll pursue his habit of the last three years: photographing the floats at their post-parade observation stop.

These are no snapshots, mind you, but part of a larger series of pictures which Danziger titles "Man Made Animals." The prints are 20- by 24-inch closeup details of floats such as one from the 1982 parade called "Old MacDonald's Farm." In the vibrant color photos, the seeds, bark and petals that make up the heads of pigs or parrots are made dramatically clear.

Danziger explains, "The details are more exciting than the entire float, which has a theme. I'm not interested in the theme at all. That's what the TV thing is about: well-documented, well-paid-for, to get across the message of McDonald's hamburgers or the city of San Diego, or whatever. By getting rid of the products and the personalities, the bands and the crowds, I make it more universal. To make the transition to art, it has to be less specific and more international."

A bearded and cherubic character from Chapel Hill, N.C., Danziger chronicles his fascination with floats. "I watched the parade on TV for much of my life as a spectacular event. But on TV you never really see the floats. They show you the debutantes and the media stars. Then I saw them close up, after the parade. I thought, 'This is the world's largest conceptual art piece, and it's condoned by middle America.'"

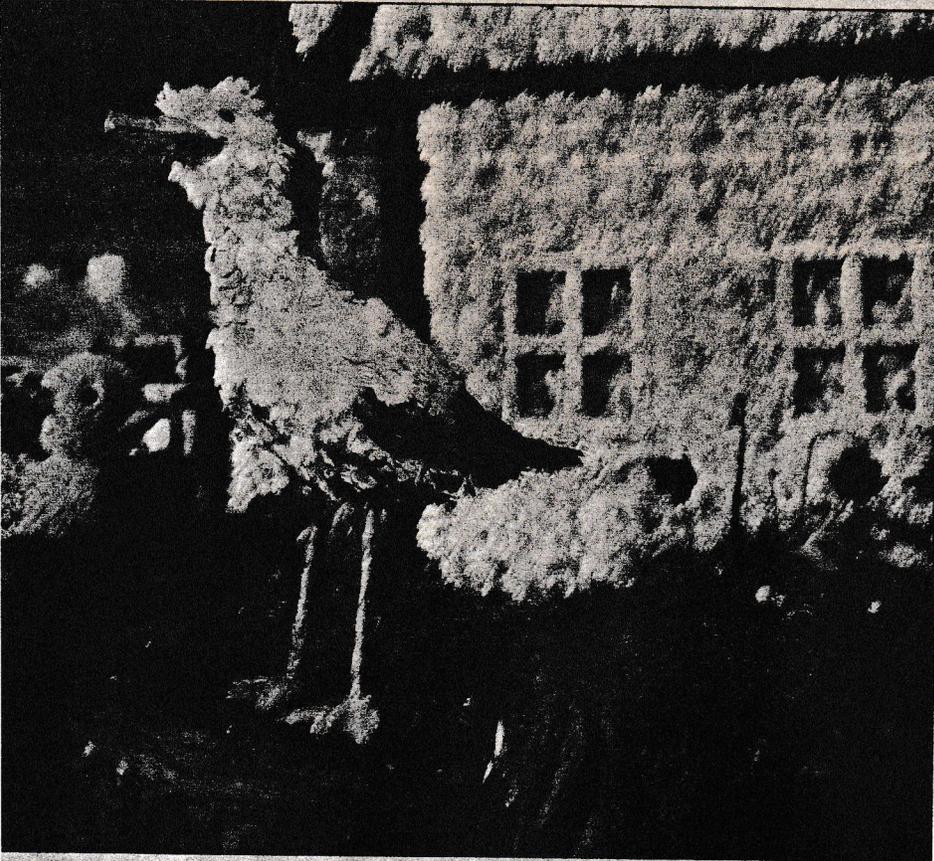
An irrepressible excitement quickens Danziger's drawl. "I think it's wonderful that the whole thing self-destructs, that it only exists for two days!" The weather elements that produced the flowers and other materials for each float — sun, rain, wind — are the same elements that destroy it. That's another reason I want to photograph it on the day after the parade. What excites me is taking the process a step further, animating the creatures and giving them a permanent life as a piece of artwork. It's a complement to the process of self-destruction."

Danziger, 29, has been taking photographs as an artist for nine years and using the techniques of strobe and camera movement for the last five. This

Free-lance writer Drobojowska's last piece for California Living was a cover story on portrait painters.



OF ROSES CLOSE UP AND FUZZY,
FANTASIES



causes parts of the photograph to appear blurry and out of focus. (No, you don't need glasses and the newspaper didn't make a mistake.) Danziger says: "I use a strobe and a very slow shutter speed. This allows me to isolate and intensify my prime subject, i.e., what *is* in focus. It enables me to use colors like a painter's palette. Juxtaposed primary colors are blurred by the controlled camera movement and form secondary hues. For example, in "Old MacDonald's Farm" (the print of the goose with an open beak), to the right of the pig and cow, behind that yellow police barrier, are a bunch of people reduced to just patches of color."

Danziger's usual style includes an element of unpredictability that seems to suit his personality. He takes half a dozen or more shots of any single image, then chooses his prints from the hundreds of developed slides. "[Unlike my earlier view-camera work, where the image was preconceived], with this process I really don't know what I'll get. I edit my slides to fit my mental image of what the scene *should* look like." Laughing, he adds, "I used to have a sign on my garbage can that read 'The Round Critic.' What doesn't make it goes in the trash can." The slides that finally do make it are made into cibachrome prints. An exhibition of these prints will open March 14 at the ARCO Center for Contemporary Art.

For 94 years, people have gotten just as enthusiastic as Danziger over the Tournament of Roses Parade. Occasionally, it's natural to wonder about such appeal. Danziger opines: "It's the illusion of the event, the monumentality of the floats combined with the fact that they are made of such fragile, transitory substances. How can something so massive be made of flower petals? It's a fantasy, working with the imagination to give the appearance of substance. There's nothing like it in the world." Danziger thinks for a moment before adding that "the only comparison might be places like Bali or India, where they create statues of fruits and flowers. But the intention there is religious!"

And what is the intention of the Rose Parade? Certainly it is a marketing event and a celebration. But there is something more. Danziger chuckles knowingly as he concludes, "I think for a country like this, so obsessed with being sane, that it feels wonderful to have one day be totally insane."

(This year the floats will come to rest at the end of the parade route along Sierra Madre Boulevard, between Washington Boulevard and Sierra Madre Villa. They will be on view to the public the afternoon of Jan. 1, and all day Jan. 2. Last year over 600,000 came to see the floats. For more information call 449-4100.) ■

