

Gallery from page D1

"Toy Story" retold
Over a five year period, Kenna spent his Sunday mornings in the kindergarten classroom at the Waldorf school in San Francisco where his daughter attended. It'd take a few hours, he said, before the "calm would settle in" and he would begin to point his camera - and listen.

Then, as if playing in a scene from the movie "Toy Story," Kenna would wait until the toys came alive. Many of the wooden and woven teaching props, dolls and games have been part of the Waldorf classroom for more than 30 years.

Monique, by the way, is the Waldorf kindergarten teacher, who, said Kenna, takes precious care in arranging her classroom to cultivate the children's sense of wonder and respect.

In some ways, the choice of

objects in the kindergarten classroom offers a microcosmic view of the principles lying behind the photographer's "selective vision" that has placed him in the upper echelon of contemporary fine art photography.

Like the Waldorf system of education, Kenna's two decades of work reflects a reverence and awe for the humbler side of life. Even in his billowing smokestacks of the Rouge Plant series, there's a sense that manufacturing efficiency is faceless and destitute compared to humanistic values.

"I don't find the work in (Monique's Kindergarten) to be so different from my other work," said Kenna from his home near the seaside Golden Gate Park in San Francisco.

"It's all about capturing the atmosphere once human beings

go away," he said. "My work generally is about the conflict between natural elements and what humans leave behind."

Unlike most of his other work, however, "Monique's Kindergarten" resonates more on a personal level. Either as a student or parent, the images of a child's first formal classroom are likely to inspire a flood of memories, especially images of keys, marbles, a collection of dolls and a wooden horse.

"I think what people like about these photographs is that it reminds them of their childhood," said Tom Halsted, owner of the Halsted Gallery.

Quiet satisfaction
In the late 1970s, Halsted, who was one of the first gallery owners in the country to show exclusively black and white pho-

tography, couldn't sell Kenna's work.

But as photography grew in popularity (thanks to Ansel Adams, print advertising and technological innovations), Kenna's outstanding tonal scale and mystic visions caught on.

Twenty years later, Kenna is considered somewhat a phenomenon. Although only in his mid 40s, he's often cited as an influence by up-and-coming photographers. These days, in a typical review of his work in *The New York Times*, for instance, Kenna is characterized as one of the world's leading photographers.

Today, the price for Kenna's work runs from \$800 to \$3,000 for a print in editions of 45. In the "after market" - the demand once the full edition has been printed - prices increase

sharply.

Many collectors, according to Halsted, often buy more than one print to form their own series.

"Dying Rose," one of the images in the exhibit, has been purchased by Elton John, said Halsted. Reportedly, Elton John's home in Nice, France, has a wall filled with more than 100 of Kenna's photographs.

Halsted compares the current exhibit, which was kicked off with a reception for Kenna on Saturday, to the block-busting Ansel Adams exhibit in the early 1980s.

For those who can't afford an original print, the Halsted Gallery is also handling sales of Kenna's book, "Monique's Kindergarten," which includes all 62 images from the show, and a detailed narrative of the Wal-

dorf principles that inspired Kenna's work.

For one of his current projects, Kenna has traveled around Europe to photograph the concentration camps of World War II. An exhibit and book are scheduled for 1998. He plans to donate the photos to a French museum.

"There's a certain equilibrium that I need when I work," said Kenna. "The concentration camps are filled with powerfully negative and evil images. But then, there's the kindergarten - positively optimistic and a life force."

Of course, there'll be some who consider Kenna's latest work to be too subtle or commonplace.

But there's nothing ordinary in Kenna's work. For the past two decades, he's been quietly making a big statement.

Conversations from page D1

And then, he laughs long and hard.

Welcome to Rollin and Piasecki's orbit where adults get to imagine a world of talking cats, play dress up and sing fun songs.

Opening up
Piasecki would write a chapter, read it to Rollin. Then she'd sit at her piano and play the songs inspired by the Piasecki's tale.

"I just responded to Jerry's sense of play," said Rollin. "We both have a lot of kid at heart." That's like calling Dopey the Dwarf just another lovable short fella.

Alongside other more glossy and sanitized story books, "The Adventures of Na Uh and Na Huh" is a welcome reminder that memorable stories are born from people intimately aware of the struggles of family life while revering the world of the imagination.

The book, Rollin and Piasecki concede, is written for children but intended for adults.

"It's not about writing down to children," said Piasecki. "It's often times writing up to their level. Most adults have had their

imaginings crushed because of criticism or rejection. You have to learn to open up accept the creative possibilities."

The choice of protagonists - two ornery cats, named "Na Uh" and "Na Huh," respectively - seemed appropriate.

"Who else reflects the universal language of conflict," said Piasecki, whose day job is a copywriter for Farmington Hills-based ad firm, Sepanek & Leder. "Cats are more independent and playful."

And, at times, cantankerous. Like a brother, sister, close friend and spouse. Or whomever you've ever played "Na Uh/Na Huh."

Rollin and Piasecki also play the game in real life. They've been "partners" for the last 14 years. Constant companions and collaborators, as well as critics and supporters of each other's work.

By day, Rollin teaches music at Echo Park School in Bloomfield Hills. By night and on weekends, she's known as the Piano Lady, appearing just about anywhere that can fit a piano. She describes her repertoire as "Broadway, Beatles and

Beyond."

Finding time around his 9-to-5, Piasecki has written six books for intermediate readers, published by Bantam. Several of his books have sold over 200,000 copies, and have been available through student book clubs.

While they've only completed a few other projects together, Piasecki said they've been constant collaborators. "I'll read what I'm writing, and Wendy will play me a song she's working on."

Already, Rollin and Piasecki are working on a series featuring "Na Uh" and "Na Huh," including a holiday story for next year.

Gravity seems to be working in their favor.

Of course, they have a monosyllabic way of putting it.

Listen for a harmonizing, "Na Huh."

And then, a long and hard laugh.

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Dance from page D1

In the Farmington area, according to Reid, they're building culture from the grassroots.

A master plan
"Many of the community bands, orchestras, choirs and arts groups were here before we were a city," said Dan W. Potter, director of special services, who oversees the parks and recreation department. "The nucleus for the arts has been here. But now, we're speaking with a unified voice."

Apparently, voters are also responding with a unified appeal.

With the overwhelming passage of a millage in November, \$1.6 million will be designated for senior and culture activities over the next 10 years, including funds for a full-time arts coordinator position to be filled in 1998.

Currently, preparations are being made to draft a master plan for the arts in the Farming-

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Dan W. Potter
director of special services

ton area. Once in place, the plan would offer additional art instruction and public facilities. The criterion for drafting the plan includes circulating a community wide survey, conducting focus groups and holding public hearings.

Many Farmington area residents believe there's a need for a community arts center, in addition to the William Costick Activities Center, where many programs are currently held. Reid called the master plan a "first step in working toward an arts center."

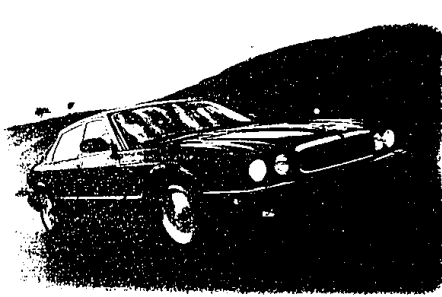
A proposed performing arts center at Novi Road and Grand

River Avenue is under consideration by the City of Novi, said Reid, who noted that partnerships in the arts could extend beyond city boundaries.

Considering that a new art center may cost as much as \$30 million, Potter is cautious about the possibility. "People aren't in a mood to support additional taxes," he said. "It might be down the line, but right now we're just in the walking stage."

For this week, Potter might want to change his assessment. Clearly, the current stage is all about dancing.

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Winner's names will be published in the Observer & Eccentric on Sunday, December 21. All winners will be contacted by phone on Monday, December 22. Employees of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers and Second City/Olympia Entertainment are not eligible to win.

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