



**BURCHFIELD PENNEY  
ART CENTER**

*at SUNY Buffalo State*

**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **VICTOR SHANCHUK: CHEMICAL LIGHT**

*New exhibition by unconventional photographer, painter, and art educator stretches the limits of experimentation in taking pictures*

**On View Friday, April 12–Sunday, July 28, 2019**

(Buffalo, NY, March 19, 2019) Victor Shanchuk, Jr. taught art in Buffalo Public Schools from 1961 until his retirement in 1997, of which 20 years were spent as a fine arts instructor at City Honors School (CHS). His commitment to developing its photography program led to a notable number of CHS students advancing to national recognition for their art and scholarship. Andrea Mancuso of the Buffalo-based VIROCODE, celebrated documentary photographer Gregory Halpern, philosopher and film theorist David LaRocca, and experimental photographer and educator John Opera studied and worked closely with Shanchuk.

The Burchfield Penney at SUNY Buffalo State today announced that two innovative, collective representations that illustrate his sweeping allegiance to experimentation and production will be the subject of *Chemical Light*, a new exhibition opening Friday, April 21 as part of M&T Second Friday. The installation will be on view thru Sunday, July 28, 2019.

“Victor Shanchuk’s work has tendencies very much informed by other art forms, namely painting and drawing. Trained as a commercial artist and illustrator in the late 1950s, he later turned to photography as his primary tool,” said John Opera, exhibition curator and University

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at Buffalo photography program head and assistant professor.

The exhibition will unveil several never-seen-before works, including fluid, observational figure drawings from the 1970s designed using various photographic chemicals in place of traditional drawing materials. “These works were created at Buffalo State after Victor received his master’s and influenced by the photo experiments of his legendary mentor Oscar Bailey, professor of photography at the college 1958-1969.”

While serving as a teacher, Shanchuk created a highly diverse body of his own work. Dedicated, prolific and largely under-recognized, his approach often stretches the limits of photography in experimental and unconventional ways.

*Chemical Light* will include his *Polarization* slide-projector installations from the 1980s and 1990s that contain hand-made slides of collaged, manipulated plastic sheeting sandwiched between transparent polarizing material. “Bursting with abstract form and color, the *Polarizations* are perhaps his most original and significant moment as an artist,” believes Opera. “Using up to three Kodak analog slide projectors outfitted with dissolve units, the slides will be projected on the walls of the media project space and experienced exactly as they were when originally shown.”

Visitors can view a curated selection of large-format photographic prints of the slides. While the projections emphasize seemingly infinite compositional variation and time-based display, the prints illustrate the delicate surfaces and surprising details contained within Shanchuk’s unorthodox approach to photographic collage.

“Both bodies of work emphasize photography’s relationship to chemical reaction, alchemy and natural phenomena,” said Opera. “By manipulating and exploiting the peculiar characteristics of photographic materials and processes, Victor managed to create work that speaks to the

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mysterious and ambiguous nature of photography's relationship to observed reality, all without the use of a camera lens."

### **About Victor Shanchuk, Jr.**

Victor Shanchuk, Jr., is a photographer, painter, and art educator who was born in Brooklyn, N.Y. After receiving a B.S. in art education from SUNY College for Teachers at Buffalo in 1961, he served in the military from 1964 to 1966, then returned to the renamed State University College at Buffalo for an M.S. in the same subject in 1971. He pursued post-graduate studies at the institution from 1972 to 1978.

His early influences were diverse, ranging from Seurat to Rothko and Pollock. Instructors who helped to shape his aesthetic include Roland Wise, George O'Connell, Oscar Bailey, and Wally Green, while newspaper critic Trevor Thomas provided an alternative perspective. Artist friends Wes Olmsted and Ken Peterson contributed to an ongoing discussion as well.

Shanchuk taught art in public schools in Buffalo from 1961 until his retirement in 1997. During the same period, he worked as a lecturer, instructor, and adjunct professor at colleges including State University College at Buffalo, Canisius, SUNY at Buffalo, Villa Maria, and D'Youville, as well as the Albright Knox Art Gallery and Nichols Summer School. Shanchuk's teaching philosophy was simple: What he learned, he taught. His primary goal was to change the way his students saw the world, and his oft-repeated motto was "Art is life and life is art."

He was a founding member of the performance group MAP, or Multi-Arts Performers, which was active from 1979 through the mid-1980s. The ensemble incorporated music, dance, theater, and Shanchuk's own contribution, projections through which the dancers moved. Among other venues, MAP presented its work at Hallwalls and the Burchfield Penney Art Center. Shanchuk has also been involved with such Western New York organizations and events as Artists Gallery (chairperson, 1985-90), AAO Gallery (curator of exhibitions/designer, 1983-87), the Buffalo Society of Artists (1992-93), the Allentown Art Festival (juror, 1994), the Elmwood Festival of the Arts (juror, 2001), and the Burchfield Penney Art Center (volunteer curator, tour leader, and other positions, 2001-2012).

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As a painter and experimental photographer, Shanchuk has exhibited at many arts organizations, including the Burchfield Penney, CEPA, Hallwalls, the Clary-Miner Gallery, Artists Gallery, Nina Freudenheim Gallery, Big Orbit, and Art Dialogue (all in Buffalo, N.Y.); the National Building Museum in Washington D.C.; and the Boca Museum of Art in Florida. He created “Impression Buffalo” for the *Herd About Buffalo* public art project (2000) and “Roosevelt Rides Again” for the *Art on Wheels* public art project (2003).

Victor Shanchuk has been designated a “Living Legacy” by the Burchfield Penney.

### **About John Opera**

John Opera is a photographer and educator born in Buffalo, NY. He was based in Chicago, IL for more than a decade and returned to Buffalo in 2017 to teach at the University at Buffalo. He received his BFA at SUNY New Paltz (1998) and his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2005). He has exhibited his work nationally and is included in various collections, among them the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago, IL, O’Melveny & Myers LLP in Los Angeles, CA, the Burchfield Penney Art Center and the Ruth Horwich Collection in Chicago, IL. He is the subject of a 2009 monograph published by Aperture Books under the auspices of Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Photography.

Opera’s earlier work investigates the familiarity of nature photography, capturing natural phenomena to conceptualize how interactions with these images inform the observer’s understanding of themselves in relation to the larger world. Grounded in philosophical ideas of transcendentalism, the photographs created in this frame of research include landscapes, abstractions, and a series shot in Western New York inspired by the paintings of Charles Burchfield. Many of the subjects and areas chosen in Western New York are inspired by his own experiences growing up in the area.

### **About the Burchfield Penney Art Center at SUNY Buffalo State**

Founded in 1966 on the campus of SUNY Buffalo State, the Burchfield Penney Art Center is dedicated to the art and vision of renowned American watercolorist Charles E. Burchfield (1893–1967) and the distinguished artists of Western New York. In 2008, the Burchfield Penney expanded from its location in

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Rockwell Hall to a new \$36 million freestanding facility in the heart of Buffalo's Museum District.

Designed by Gwathmey Siegel and Associates Architects, the museum includes more than 84,000 square feet dedicated primarily to galleries, as well as education and program space. It is home to the world's largest collection of artwork and ephemera by Burchfield, totaling more than 25,000 objects, and a collection of more than 8,000 works by over 850 artists. The Burchfield Penney was the first LEED certified art museum in New York State and was featured by travel editors of the New York Times as one of the "[44 Places to Go in 2009](#)." For more information go to, [www.burchfieldpenney.org](http://www.burchfieldpenney.org)

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