



THE NIGHT WATCHMAN

HIROSE CAPTURES P-TOWN'S NIGHTLIFE

By Ann Wood

There's something about the night that appeals to George Hirose.

It could be the color of the sky, the creatures wandering through it, or the mood transformed by darkness. Or, perhaps it's a combination of these things. But what really inspires the photographer is the idea of being in a fantasy world - being on a fantasy planet.

"That's very true," he says. "Not always to live in, but [it's] what I'd like to experience."

And now everyone can experience Hirose's glowing view of Provincetown at night in the aptly titled exhibition, *Blue Nights*, which opens with a reception from 7 to 9 p.m. on Friday, June 27, at Ernden Fine Art Gallery, 397 Commercial Street. The show runs through July 10.

After that, on July 11, Hirose's book of these and other Provincetown images, also titled *Blue Nights* (Provincetown Arts Press, \$30), will have its official release. This happens at the annual Provincetown Arts' publishing party, which runs from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, at 460

Commercial Street.

Blue Nights is more than a collection of photographs of Provincetown's nightlife, it's a tribute to the town and those who live here. So much so that the pictures captured the soul of one of the town's most famous residents, literary lion Norman Mailer. Back when he prowled the town, the two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning author went so far as to make Hirose a proposition: He'd help him get his Provincetown images published in book form.

"That's just amazing to me," Hirose says. "I was friends with his daughter, Elizabeth, for many, many years. [I'd visit her in Provincetown and hang around the Mailer house.] I never really wanted to show Norman my work because I felt like it would be taking advantage of him. [But] he responded to it immediately. It made him think immediately about when he first came to Provincetown. [He] responded to it in a really personal way."

Mailer first arrived in Provincetown during the Second World War, when the town was in the midst of a blackout.

"Strong light was absent, but small



continued on page 26

continued from page 21

candles and lanterns offered intense intimacy with the interiors of shuttered cottages, and Mailer said he felt an uncanny immediacy with the eighteenth century. Over the years, as a permanent resident, he has always been acutely aware of the town's mysterious and poetic dialogue with the past," Hirose writes on his Web site.

Mailer was so moved, that he penned the introduction to Hirose's book. He also gave the photographer tips on layout and, of course, photograph titles.

"He was very clear about what he liked and didn't like. [Mailer said,] 'Some of [the titles] are good, but most of them are terrible,'" Hirose says, adding that he was thrilled to have serious conversations about art with Norman. "It was really a nice way to get to know him."

When Mailer died in November of last year, it was "devastating" for Hirose. He hadn't shown the master all of his Provincetown pictures. But, even though Mailer was gone as he finished the book, Hirose thought of what he might have said, as he organized and edited.

While Mailer was a huge part of this book,

Hirose was and continues to be his own artist. The almost life-long New Yorker says that he comes from a place away from pure photography.

"A lot of people are out at night. The history of the town seems to come alive at night. The magical quality of town seems to change."

He was a filmmaker and a musician at Bard College, before he challenged himself to create a narrative in only one image.

"I think I was just really struggling to find an art form," he says, adding that when he took pictures, he would transform them with paint, making the real unreal. "So photographing at night really worked

for me... I do like that the night is a dark place and things just disappear."

Hirose continued to shoot still pictures, and has since racked up many exhibitions. He also received his M.F.A. from the Pratt Institute in New York, where he's now a professor. Still, that doesn't keep him inside.

"I like being outside all the time. Being a New Yorker, too, I sort of end up living a lot at night," he says, adding that while artists have historically come to Provincetown for the exceptionally bright light, nighttime has a vibe all its own. "A lot of people are out at night. The history of the town seems to come alive at night. The magical quality of the town seems to change."

Into a town of mystery, which is just how Hirose likes it.

