

THE
OTHER
AMERICA

A

photographic

journal

curated by

Ellen Denuto

November 1 - December 17, 2004

Walsh Library Gallery • Seton Hall University

The Other America

Artist/Curator: Ellen Denuto

The photographer's lens connects
directly to the heart of the subject,
creator & viewer.

Designated light tamers and
time keepers - we share the joys and
burden of seeing what is invisible
to the naked eye.

Ever present, the photographer
is witness to the world's beauty, pain,
injustice and triumph creating
a visual journal
of our time.

About the Exhibition

While enjoying commercial success as a photographer, I feel most fulfilled when working on personal projects that somehow give voice to those who are not heard.

The intention of this exhibition was to give the photographers involved the opportunity to break free from the constraints of their commercial assignments and explore an area of our society that would touch, move and inspire them in some way. Each photographer was selected for their creative spirit and the integrity in their work.

I could not have imagined the depth and insight these powerful photographers and their images would reveal when we began this journey.

My thanks and deepest appreciation to each of you for your time and generosity in making this exhibition a reality. The disparity in the perception and truth of what "America" is becomes more and more evident as we rocket through our daily lives buying into everything that is perceived as the American Dream.

This concept of America often overlooks the less fortunate of our society. The hidden hungry, homeless, and handicapped are our neighbors...yet we turn a blind eye on this America. Their isolation and disconnection, lack of resources and respect, leaves them with little hope for the future. In spite of this, they go on in life situations that will surely continue or get worse if ignored.

Through each photographer's unique vision and images created with compassion, we hope to create public awareness and a new possibility for the Other America.



"Scooter Ride, Asbury Park, NJ" by Bill Blanchard

These buildings still echo with the sounds of the big bands as heard between the still moments of the crashing surf. The long forgotten laughter of children on the beach replaced by the seagull's cry. The

whirling carousel's calliope spins out its faint haunting music.

Where once these buildings housed the glamorous and famous: now they house the homeless and forgotten. In this space where your grandparents met, danced, dreamed and fell in love, we now find decay and ruin. Time dissolves all things and man's lack of effort and imagination only hastens the process.

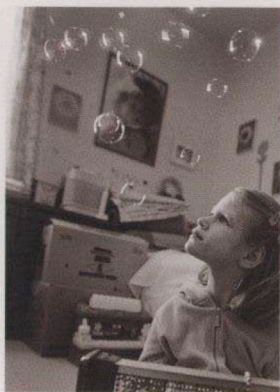


“No Child Left Behind” by Lesley Cecchi

Poor mothers and their children make headlines in America when they meet a tragic death, but it's easy to overlook the everyday heroism of their struggle to maintain stability. According to the most recent report from the U.S. Census Bureau (8/26/04), the number of Americans living in poverty, or lacking health insurance, is on the rise for the third straight year, with a jump of 12 percent. Sadly, but not surprisingly, women and children have been the hardest hit. The median household income has stagnated and women's wages have actually fallen, but most alarmingly, children, as a group, comprise more than half of that 12 percent. In addition, The Education Trust, a non-profit think-tank, has recently revealed that the poorest school districts are still receiving less funding than wealthy ones, with the disparity as much as \$1300 per student in some cases.

These figures, of course, fly in the face of America's cherished perceptions of itself as fair and egalitarian, as well as the world's view of us as the land of opportunity. The dissonance between the fantasy and the reality of America inspired me to title my photographs with the emblematic slogans found everywhere, from bumper stickers to broadcast news. These cliché's take on new and ironic meaning here for the simple reason that they have little or no relationship to the everyday lives of the women and children I depict.

Members of “The Other America” may lie literally right around the corner, but most Americans do not choose to find them. Participating in this show has given me the incentive to turn that corner. Traveling from East Orange, NJ, to Buffalo, NY, it was heartening to find that, in spite of all the challenges, the women and children in this study do more than just survive; they can still dream. One can see it in the exuberance of children being children behind wire fences and burnt-out buildings, or in the smiles of pride in the young mothers, who have recently completed their GED's and plan to enroll in nursing school.



“Rachel I” by Dennis Connors

I've been interested in doing some documentary photography with DDHA (Developmental Disabilities Health Alliance), an organization that provides services for developmentally disabled people, for some time. I'd spoken with the director on a number of occasions about his clients, many of whom have little other recourse than to deal with their problem in their homes with the help of, for the most part, family members (regardless of whether they're capable to do so), and whatever this agency can offer with its own limited resources.

I started the project expecting to witness families terribly lacking in ability to properly cope with the caring of their disabled loved ones. I expected to find signs of families overwhelmed, that there are some things some folks just can't cope with, and that the government has been terribly remiss in providing the resources to properly help these people. That might still happen.

My first subject has been Rachel and her mom, Susanne. They're a far cry from the stories I'd heard about other families' difficulties. This is a success story of sorts. Susanne could be the poster mom for surviving daunting circumstances. There are certainly hardships. They're just not as obvious to the eye or to the camera.

This project is evolving. I'm photographing a beautiful kid and her amazing mom.



**“Reflections of Edward”
by Kadie Dempsey***

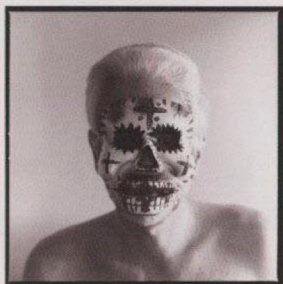
Somewhere in between the pages of Vogue and Architectural Digest and the family that cannot afford the simplest necessities for survival lies “The Other America”. The faces that you see may seem far away but in reality they exist so close to us that their stories, if you read them closely, could be us or a friend or a neighbor, or even a brother or sister.

These Americans never make it into the glossy pages of popular magazines. This is an America that is filled with wounded soldiers in all shapes and sizes, races and backgrounds. In this America there are dreams never fulfilled and harsh realities given to some that may have tried their best. It is not a world of black and white or a reality based on what you deserve. It is an unjust world that we must all come to terms with at one time or another in our own life. None of the faces that you see woke up and said “today I will fail, I will lose the hope of getting the job I wanted or getting into the school I always dreamed of, or I will become a victim of my own genetic make up or compromised brain chemistry. Today I will fall down and there will be no one to pick me up.

Yet in spite of the struggles if you look closely hopefully you too will be able to see and acknowledge the strength and dignity of the human spirit in their eyes. Edward, Joanna and Qui’s noble grandmother, thank you for your gracious hospitality and for your willingness to share your stories with me in hopes that your truth will awaken a greater truth in all of us.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal . . .”

* Cover detail “Reflections of Edward” by Kadie Dempsey



“Gregory” by Ellen Denuto

The images I've created for the Other America deal with the person behind the mask.

With or without greasepaint, we face each day wearing our own version of the mask.

Beautiful, ugly, young, old or bland, the mask tells the world what it wants to hear.

Only in the eyes can you see the truth.

Gregory:

I explore the bones and feathers and snips of this and that, destined to be the canvas for Gregory's art.

Gregory's very being is his art. The tiny gem painting, screaming skulls and written prayers, speak of his survival. Hard to explain the common thread, the language shared between artists, keeping us alive in whatever state of sanity we exist.

No words are needed as I snap the shutter. We both know I've captured the spirit behind the mask.



"Innocence Lost"
by Thomas Francisco*

The media is deluged with the growing problem of child abuse, child abductions, sexual harassment and murders. Raising a family, caring for and protecting them is our dream and our solemn duty. It is our ultimate joy.

That joy for some, is turning into a nightmare of fear, shock and outrage. We are finding out now that we are all much too vulnerable to the "invisible"

predators. In growing numbers we hear and read about adults who in their past, have been molested, abused and mentally scarred by the deviant acts forced upon them by predators.

Parents are realizing that they have to be concerned about family members, friends, neighbors, teachers, coaches and most ludicrous...religious leaders. We were taught as children "don't talk to strangers." We pass that simple warning on to our children expecting them to realize the dangers. What can we expect from an innocent, trusting child, who we encourage to "respect their elders"?

In most cases molesters are familiar to our children and hold a comfortable position of authority, trust and respect. They are invisible and their evil deeds go unpunished for years. Due to the embarrassment of the families and community many assaults are even "hushed up". To make matters worse, we have the "Internet" where unsuspecting children of all ages are being stalked, seduced and corrupted in even more outlandish ways. They're even coerced into face to face meetings!

Parents must remain vigilant and our warnings must be heard. The trust is gone-the innocence lost.

* "The Other America" Catalog designed by Thomas Francisco



"Mobile Debris Pile"
by Greg Leshé

On a personal level the other America represents a shifting state of consciousness in our culture's sense of time; in how fast individuals conduct their lives in the pursuit of progress, self worth, or a sense of survival. In current American culture individuals are beset by an ever-increasing set of demands, obligations, and actions to fulfill on some sense of moving forward, toward an often intangible, sense of accomplishment. Rapidly advancing computer and information technologies, once regarded as breakthroughs in aiding the workplace and labor and freeing up personal time, have largely had the opposite effect. Expanding populations, unregulated growth, sprawling development, proliferating technologies, and consumerism have created even more of a sense of urgency to living life. This rapid march toward some great teleological endpoint is bringing us further away from ourselves. We are losing ground in just being present.

In response to this perceived shift in time and presence, I created myself into a mobile debris pile constructed out of sticks and tree branches and moved on a street and intersection in front of the South Orange train station. As I struggled to move around the street I looked out through the natural structure at people, cars, and life on the street and felt an overwhelming sense of protection, calm and peace. I felt that I had reclaimed some part of myself.



“Victoria” by Dan Longo

In order to document my view of “The Other America” I have chosen to make portraits of some of the residents of the Glenlora Nursing home in Chester, NJ. Through this documentation process I have piqued a self-awareness of how pathetic it is that the elderly in my very own community merely slip out of sight forgotten and unremembered. It appears to me that life is about sharing, sharing what we have learned so that others may gain from it. It is important that we share openly both the negative and the positive findings and

experiences of our daily lives, so that others may learn from our knowledge.

The conundrum I have witnessed is that the residents of Glenlora have such rich life stories to share. Stories of war and depression, prolific times and periods of great sorrow, stories of lost traditions and the way things used to be. Yet their stories are not being told. Society simply passes them by and pushes them aside as if they were unimportant. How, as a society, are we to progress if we merely ignore these people and the information each of them holds?

Each resident that I have photographed shared with me some of the most fascinating stories of their lives and the achievements they have made and what they have lent to society. Originally I planned to photograph each person and try to convey the mark they have made in life. But then I realized that what I was trying to capture was perfectly evident in the beauty of their natural character. And my revised attempt is to leave the viewer in a state of question that will evoke them to seek the residents out themselves and have their own conversation with them. I want the viewer to ask “what did this person lend to society” and act upon it in a way that moves them to seek out members of their community that are in peril of becoming another member of “The Other America”.

An important side note, each person that I photographed had a unique way of communicating with me. One was deaf and I had to write everything down for him. And some couldn't speak at all, but we were able to have a conversation with just our eyes and our gestures. What each of them told me though was wonderful!



“Tim of Mosherville”
by Alexander Noble

Inspired by the work of Shelby Lee Adams and Arnold Newman, I have developed a keen interest in two types of portrait: environmental portraits and documentary portraits. Environmental portraits, often commissioned by

the subject, require a delicate balance to assure that each portrait is both honest, revealing the unique character of the subject, and that it provides a pleasing likeness.

Documentary portraits, on the other hand, are less polished and emphasize the subjects' inner strength, with less regard for the carefully manicured image shown to the public. These are stronger images, often raw, but never dishonest, never unkind. They are not made for the subject. Nor are they made for the photographer. Documentary portraits are made to celebrate a moment in time, to help us all remember that those who do not have the look of the current concept of beauty are, indeed, beautiful in their own way.

The portraits in my contribution to this exhibit are documentary portraits. They are “gifts” offered to me by the generous people pictured, some of them neighbors, others initially strangers, now some of them friends.

During the two years I visited with and photographed these subjects, I learned a great deal about them, myself, and about the world in which I live. But most importantly, I learned that what makes America such a special social experiment is the people who live here.

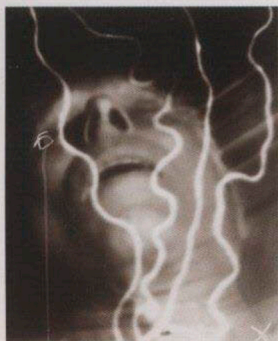


**“Portrait of Catherine Lazen”
by Joseph Pobereskin**

In addition to my work making images I've been very active in the photographic community, advocating for photographers' interests across a complete spectrum of issues since I first wielded a camera some thirty five years ago. In the meantime, my friend Catherine Lazen had established Arts Unbound, a not-for-profit corporation that supports the work of artists with developmental disabilities. I'd long been searching for a good excuse to photograph her “clients” in an effort to both draw attention to their plight and to help publicize Kate's important work to advance the cause of artists creating outside of the mainstream of the visual arts.

When Ellen Denuto approached me to participate in her project, I immediately recognized the unique confluence of opportunity and purpose. At last I'd have the venue I desired to showcase Kate's clients and, therefore, the good excuse I needed to arrange special access to a special group of subjects, combining my passion for photography with my passionate support of artists' causes.

The photographs I've made for “The Other America: A Photographic Journal,” are an effort to do good for artists as both the impetus for, and the by-product of, creating art.

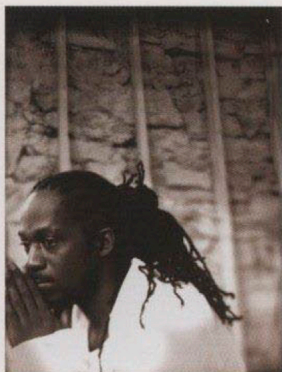


**“Face with Light Rays”
by Gerald Slota**

I have always been fascinated by the aspect of people being hidden away- especially for medical or psychological reasons. I feel most “normal” people go on with their daily life while others unfortunately are not heard of or seen by society.

The photographs in this show are part of a series that deals with this issue. In my work I like to give hints and let the viewer finish the narrative.

So are these people -being treated- experimented on- tortured- shocked- alive or dead??!!



“Barry”

by Allan Hunter Shoemake

My first brush with the prison system came while working on a radio documentary during my senior year in college. I was struck at the time with a feeling of sadness, dread and fascination with the prison system as a microcosm. When asked to participate in “The Other America”, my first thought was to revisit a prison - not to photograph the despair within it’s inmates, but to show hope and bring some attention to those within it’s

walls who have made the decision to change their lives. Unfortunately, I was unable to get permission to go inside of a working prison due to confidentiality constraints. My search lead me to the Fortune Society. Based in Harlem, this not-for-profit organization gives ex-prisoners a home, along with compassion, love and a huge support network. Their motto is “Building People, Not Prisons” and is a true reflection of their work and efforts.

To me these men and women of the Fortune Society embody the concept of “The Other America”. Each has a story of disenfranchisement that is all too familiar within the urban “inner-city”. Crime, drugs, violence and intimidation are all part of growing up their “America”. The strength and integrity of these men, able pull themselves out of the vicious cycle of crime and drugs is astounding. They have risen above their peers, still hanging out on the streets or in prison, and forged a new life with new meaning and a renewed sense of themselves. Theirs is a true story of hope. Much of the credit goes to the committed men and women who work for The Fortune Society, many of which are ex-offenders themselves and are simply an amazing and inspirational group.

This is just the start of what I hope will be a long relationship with this group. I hope to get to know many of the residents of “The Castle”, the building on One Hundred and Fortieth Street that serves as a home to many of these folks. JoAnn Page, the director of Fortune Society has been instrumental in making my contribution to The Other America possible and I thank her for all of her help.



"Mil"
by Maria Taglienti-
Molinari

I choose to photo illustrate the plight of one woman falling prey to the disease of Alzheimer.

For the past several years, I don't know whether I recognize Mildred, who was always happy, fun, witty and ready to pack her bags and travel off to adventure. Today she is stuck in a room with only photos of her many travels. She has become quiet, sad and tries hard to remember. It frustrates her. She knows something is wrong but cannot grab onto what it is.



"Heaven and Earth"
by Thomas Ufer

Conceived by Alexander Hamilton as the first planned Industrial City in 1791, Paterson's deep history continues to fade seemingly lost in a form of stasis, moving at its own pace, in a world that is going ninety miles an hour all around. Route 80 bisects it, people zooming by not even noticing the old city below. Though Paterson has more than its share of poverty, neglect and myriad other social ills, I've found many terrific and interesting people, and a creative energy I've

not found elsewhere. Here I've focused on images that illustrate the dense atmosphere that imbues this haunted place. I try not to balk from the dark complexities of this microcosm, nor the genuine underlying beauty found in and around my neighborhood. Bittersweet comes to mind. I hope these photos convey these impressions.

The Other America



Walsh Library Gallery • 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079

Information: 973-275-2033 or <http://library.shu.edu/gallery>

Jo Ann Cotz, Gallery Director