

2010/11 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships

Young Photographer's Alliance



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Photography
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Experiences in my childhood led me to understand the world as a violent place. Art provided the first opportunity for me to transition away from a world of violence. My mother is a preschool teacher. I grew up spending time with the kids in her art program. This experience provided me with an understanding of art's ability to heal. One of the students had been molested and was currently in therapy to cope with the trauma. We made puppets and acted out stories of positive domestic life. The stories helped both of us to reconcile with painful events. The time we spent did not undo a tragic experience. I do believe it allowed a temporary remission from painful memories and an opportunity to reflect on the beautiful things in life.



In my senior year at NYU, I took the course "Collaborations in the Arts." We taught photography at the Harvey Milk, the first high school for gay students. We explored how photography can build relationships with family and their communities. One student was able to use the camera to rebuild a difficult relationship with her father. I learned the photograph has the capacity to cultivate more than just beautiful images.



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These experiences led me to value art that incorporates social responsibility. I began a photo essay about an island disappearing into the Gulf Coast of Louisiana. It illuminates a range of social and environmental issues including, poverty, global warming and coastal erosion. Isle de Jean Charles is a fourth the size it was when its oldest residents were children. Sixty water-damaged houses remain, more than half of them are empty. The road that leads to the island disappears underwater during storms. The island is facing an apocalyptic future while at the same time reflecting parts of a cycle of poverty. I have come to understand the importance of the photograph's role in community activism.



I am enrolled in a class that explores the issues involved in the rehabilitation of the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. I volunteer with children in the neighborhood to build community gardens. Together, we plant seeds and harvest vegetables. I have started to reengage with my early experiences with violence and how art has allowed me to process personal experiences.

In August 2009 I arrived in Louisiana for my first year of graduate school. I began to teach beginning photography. The experience offers reciprocal rewards. My experience undoubtedly enhances my own photography. I have made every effort to continue to see how art can both serve and affect the community. When I am not spending time with families on the island, I am in New Orleans working with the Urban Farm Project or in Baton Rouge in class sharing my knowledge with undergraduate students. I see a future for myself that will balance my own documentary photography with volunteer work and teaching others about the power of the image. I have found a balance that I hope to continue for the rest of my life.

