

Drake discusses 'Double Vision' at exhibition opening



Todd Drake (middle) introduces his photos while Art Gallery Director Theresa Hammond '81 (right) and community members look on.

JULIE MAGOON/GUILFORDIAN

BY JULIE MAGOON
STAFF WRITER

On Sept. 18, Human Rights Photographer Todd Drake displayed his multimedia exhibition "Double Vision: Perspectives of Palestine" in the McMichael Atrium in Founders Hall.

The multifaceted exhibit featured an enthralling array of photos, narratives and videos taken by students living in West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Each image guides the viewer through a complex storyline, bringing to the surface the unsung voices of Palestinian youth. Drake's exhibition enlightens viewers about many perplexing issues of human rights and social injustice in Palestine from two viewpoints.

"(One perspective is) as a son of the American South, where a well-known black and white double vision still exists," said Drake. "And the other the vision of young Palestinians who have grown up with a narrative I can never fully know."

In 2013, Drake spent three weeks in these communities teaching photography workshops to students experiencing the constant grapple for identity that exists in Palestine.

The exhibit works in many moving parts. About half of the photos are Drake's own work taken during his stay in Palestine, and the others were taken by his students exploring forms of artistic expression.

"He is saying 'hey kids, here's some cameras, now tell your story,'" said senior art major Alejo Salcedo. "He is looking in and interacting with their culture and giving his perspective, while they are sharing their own stories."

So, why does Drake aim his photography toward storytelling and activism?

"Research has shown that images and narratives are the way that we remember, so we remember stills, not movie clips," said Drake. "We remember visuals, narratives and stories. What I am trying to do with my work is address the dehumanizing practices and stereotypes in our worldwide culture with new narratives and new images."

Drake feels as though Americans tend to struggle with the idea of balancing two cultures and his goal is to confront this idea.

"How do we balance two narratives?" asked Drake. "Just like when your eyes are out of focus and you have double vision, you feel off-kilter."

Drake guided the captivated group of onlookers to

each photograph, while speaking on their individual stories. This prompted viewers to feel a strong sense of place as the narrative unfolded before their eyes and ears.

As he spoke, listeners understood his genuine concern and sincerity. He cares about each individual student he taught in these communities, and he takes it as his own responsibility to represent a culture that often goes unheard of.

Drake's photographs were not merely images, they were glimpses into another life — a life filled with contradiction and irresolution.

As Drake and the group approached a breathtaking photograph that he created with one of his students, viewers were instantly mesmerized.

The subject was a youthful, beautiful Palestinian woman holding a mineral stone from the ground gingerly to her face. The photo was not only visually striking, it brought relevance to the connection between stones and Palestinian life.

"The experiences that I had going to the Western Wall and the Christian sites, where (stone) was laid, made me feel like the stones were the sources of the stories of this region," said Drake. "There are stones everywhere (in Palestine) like there are pine trees everywhere in North Carolina."

"I challenged my students to use the stones to tell their story, and she and I created this strikingly beautiful portrait of her kissing a stone. I think that it sums up her and her people's feelings to a 'T.'"

Although many of Drake's photographs, taken by both himself and his students, often depict the beauty and love Palestinians feel for their region, many of the pictures portray the strong juxtaposition of rest and unrest in the territory.

Many student artists chose to remain anonymous due to safety concerns.

A few of Drake's most powerful personal photographs representing the anguish in Palestine were actually taken from moving cars. There was simply no option to stop to take a photograph.

Though Drake's vision of bringing consciousness to the conflict in Palestine and Israel may be perplexing and at times dangerous, it unveils limitless virtue.

"For us to listen to the young Palestinian's voices and to visualize their inner struggle and confusion allows us to view a raw and uncut truth," said senior Hannah Schewel. "These are stories that you would never see on the news. Stories of what is happening now, behind closed doors."



The two photos above are images taken by students who participated in Todd Drake's photography workshops in Palestine during 2013.

SARA MINIS/GUILFORDIAN

Bonner students find success in independent service sites

BY NICOLE ZELNIKER
STAFF WRITER

From the Montagnard community in Vietnam to the refugee children in Greensboro, student initiatives have reached far and wide with aid from the Bonner Center. This year, four independent sites have already made a significant impact.

The oldest site is the African Youth Initiative, which began about a year ago.

"It's a coalition of organizations ... that come together to coordinate projects that benefit African youth," said project coordinator and Bonner Americorps member Bevelyn Ukah '10. "The main principle is that youth should be able to implement things that benefit their community."

African Youth Initiative gives young Africans in America the ability to take charge

of their futures.

"People of the African diaspora are the experts of their own experiences," said Ukah. "With that said, it makes a lot more sense to gauge community problem solving through consulting with people who are experiencing them."

The same principle applies to the Montagnard Research Team, led by project coordinators and members of the Montagnard community sophomore Hvung Ksor and junior Lek Siu.

"This summer, Lek and I went back to Vietnam and did research about Montagnard health, mostly hypertension," said Ksor. "We interviewed the villagers about their diet, family and lifestyle."

As members of the Montagnard community, Ksor and Siu know what the people need.

"They are not eating healthy food," said Siu. "They used to pick up the plants from the

mountains, and now they use chemicals to fertilize their plants. When you eat chemicals, it can damage your health."

Like Ksor and Siu, project coordinator and sophomore José Oliva runs Roads to College with the knowledge of what it is like to be a part of the refugee community.

"Roads to College (is) a college access program," said Oliva. "We provide workshops and motivational talks to local high schools."

Many sites, including Roads to College, collaborate with others to make a larger impact.

"This year, we're trying to provide the same services to other Bonner sites, like Glen Haven and Elimu," said Oliva.

Unlike the other independent projects, Guilford College Mental Health Outreach is run on Guilford's campus.

"It's an informational site that provides accurate information about mental illness and

what it means to have mental health issues," said project coordinator Shelby Smith, a senior.

The goal this year is to get rid of the stigma surrounding mental health problems.

"It's a (collection of) highly stigmatized medical condition(s)," said Smith. "I emphasize the word medical."

There are many things Guilfordians can do to support these independent sites.

"Guilford students could get involved in life skills," said Ksor. "We work with the Montagnard community, helping immigrants become citizens and trying to get a community center for the Montagnard."

Project coordinators are willing to answer any questions, especially those about their sites.

"Anybody is welcome to contact me if they want to get involved or talk about the issue," said Smith. "I'm always willing to have an open ear."