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United in Nima: Bay Area and Ghanaian Youth
Share Lives Through the Lens
A new exhibition this winter at SF Camerawork

January 8 through March 25, 2009

SAN FRANCISCO-- This winter, SF Camerawork presents *United in Nima: Bay Area and Ghanaian Youth Share Lives Through the Lens*, a new exhibition featuring photographs by low-income youth from SF Camerawork's First Exposures photography mentoring program and teens living in the notoriously poor Nima slum of Accra, Ghana who spent three weeks together last summer in Africa sharing their lives, culture and art. The exhibition is on view January 8 – March 25, 2009 at SF Camerawork and is produced by SF Camerawork and the students from First Exposures, as part of Adobe Youth Voices, a global youth media initiative.

“The exhibition really tells the story of the cultural exchange between these American and African teens,” says Erik Auerbach, Program Director of First Exposures. “And it’s a profound story. These are all young people who don’t currently have the means to travel and meet peers in other countries. But they had so much to share with each other. It ended up really touching their lives in a deep way, and the photographs really speak to that.”

The five teenagers from the Bay Area who traveled to Ghana in July 2008 are all students in SF Camerawork's First Exposures mentoring program that pairs low-income Bay Area youth with professional or fine art photographers for weekly photography classes and one-on-one guidance. Many of the young people, ages 11 to 18, have faced challenging life circumstances and several have experienced homelessness or have lived in foster care. One of the program's long-term mentors, Jamie Lloyd, was inspired to create a similar program in Ghana in 2005. She established The Ghana Youth Photo Project to provide similar opportunities for youth in Nima, one of the poorest slums of the city of Accra.

Lloyd's involvement in both programs opened the door to the possibility of this unprecedented cultural exchange. SF Camerawork seized the opportunity, raising funds and preparing the students for their journey which included everything from helping them get their first passports and immunizations to shooting and printing the photographs they would bring to Ghana to share their lives with the students there.

“They made photographs that explore what it means to be misrepresented and misunderstood,” says Auerbach. “They brought these concepts to Ghana to explore the same issues with the African youth.”

While in Ghana, the youth met daily for three weeks with 17 students there, taking photographs together and leading classes for each other on representation, aesthetics, photography, culture, music and language. The five Bay Area young people, along with Auerbach, Lloyd and First Exposures mentor Vivian Chan, stayed in a local guesthouse owned by an African woman and her daughter. There were also trips to a local beach, only 15 minutes from the community, but a place most of the Ghanaian youth had rarely been.

The circumstances of the Ghanaians were an eye opening experience for the Bay Area teens. “I have been truly humbled and see life in a whole new light,” wrote 17-year-old Naomi Castro on the group's travel blog. “Ghana has made me thankful for what I have ... even the bad stuff ... I am thankful for my kitchen with my ghetto sink and broken cabinet when there are people in Ghana who have some rocks, wood and a fire as their kitchen. I am thankful for my small bathroom with my quirky toilet when the gutter and outdoors are people's bathroom ... I mean here we are complaining over dumb stuff while these people are struggling and we have everything and still aren't happy.”

Although adjusting to Ghanaian life presented some challenges, the personal bonds the youth formed were deep and lasting. For Castro, the most important aspect of the upcoming exhibition is doing justice to her new friends in Africa. “I just really want to represent them right,” she says. “We aren't another group trying to send the same message of 'feed the children' or 'AIDS epidemic!' but we are trying to show a positive side of Ghana and all the great things we had a chance to experience.”

Castro along with her fellow travelers, 15-year-old Marcio Ramirez of San Francisco's Mission District, 18-year-old Karen Gochez also from the Mission, 18-year-old Jontonnette Clark of Bayview Hunters Point and her sister Bethany Castro, also 18 and from San Pablo, are working alongside Lloyd, Chan and Auerbach to organize the exhibition.

United in Nima: Bay Area and Ghanaian Youth Share Lives Through the Lens features more than 50 prints taken by the participating youth that focus on portraiture, the community of Nima, the school there and the experiences they shared. Excerpts from the group's blog and journals will be posted throughout the exhibition to share personal impressions with gallery visitors.

Several special programs take place throughout the run of the exhibition, including a **free opening night reception with the Bay Area youth on January 8 from 5 to 8 pm**, a special mentoring forum with John Yap of the Youth Development Initiative of San Mateo County on January 31 from 3 to 6 pm as part of National Mentoring Month, a film series called Breaking the Odds about youth empowerment with post film discussions in February and March, and a Family Day hosted by First Exposures youth on February 21 from 2-5 pm.

On March 25, the exhibition closes with a special Premier Party from 6-9 pm. At this event, the work from the exhibition will be sold in a silent auction, and youth from the program will premiere their First Exposures Adobe Youth Voices multimedia arts project.

This exhibition is being shown concurrently with *Test Patterns: Recent Video From South Africa*, an exhibition featuring the work of eight contemporary South African video artists who explore ideas of citizenship and belonging in post apartheid South Africa.

All exhibitions are on view Tuesdays – Saturdays 12-5 p.m. at SF Camerawork, 657 Mission St., Second Floor. Admission to the gallery is \$5.00; \$2.00 for students and seniors; free to Camerawork members. For more information, the public should visit www.sfcamerawork.org or call 415.512.2020.

About SF Camerawork

Founded in 1974, SF Camerawork encourages emerging and mid-career artists to explore new directions in photography and related media by fostering creative forms of expression that push existing boundaries. Throughout its history, SF Camerawork has nurtured artists, mentored youth and helped make San Francisco a destination for the exploration of photography as an artist's medium. Its exhibitions are nationally recognized as a focal point for innovation, a pacesetter for new trends in the medium and a launching pad for the careers of young artists. With three galleries and an education center at its centrally located facility, SF Camerawork is the only non-profit organization in the Bay Area with an exhibition space and educational programs focused exclusively on contemporary photography and related visual image media. It is an accessible venue for people to view exhibitions, meet artists, participate in educational programs, peruse photographic publications, and gather for lectures, screenings, portfolio reviews, and discussions.

About Adobe Youth Voices

Adobe Youth Voices is the Adobe Foundation's global philanthropic initiative that empowers youth from underserved communities worldwide to comment on their world using multimedia and digital tools to communicate and share their ideas, demonstrate their potential, and take action in their communities. By harnessing the energy and insight of youth and enabling them to express themselves, their opinions, and aspirations, *Adobe Youth Voices* aims to inspire a dialogue for change in their communities. The program's goal is to empower young people, 13-18 years old, to *create with purpose* and to comment on their world by using multimedia and digital tools. Youth are expressing what they care about through documentary film-making, photography, print journalism, radio diaries, Web communications and other media to underserved communities around the globe.

JPG images can be requested electronically. Please contact Nina Szevich, Public Relations, at (415) 752-2483 or nina911@pacbell.net.

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