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“Fourth Grade Project”

Judy Gelles

Bernstein Gallery, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University

Exhibition dates: February 21 – April 4, 2013

Artist reception: Friday, February 22, 2013, 4:00 p.m.

Contact: Kate Somers (609) 497-2441

“The Fourth Grade Project” is a provocative and illuminating series of portraits of young children from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The conceptual and photo-based artist, Judy Gelles, has traveled to schools in China, India, and the USA and asked the same three questions of nine and ten year old students: “With whom do you live? What do you wish for? And what do you worry about?”

By combining the children’s portraits and text from their interviews, stereo-typing of entire cultures, or cultural sub-sets, is hard to avoid. The ways the children present themselves to the camera, and their verbal responses to the questions, are strikingly similar within each school. The viewer is asked to reflect upon cultural boundary zones and what implications they have for a broader discussion of how we live together with tolerance and understanding of those different from ourselves.

Gelles believes that fourth grade is a turning point in children’s lives as they begin to enter into adolescence. Many of their attitudes and beliefs, firmly rooted in their cultural milieu, are in place at this time. The artist believes that, “children today live in social silos, cut off from diverse cultural and economic groups.” It is her hope that *“The Fourth Grade Project”* will be used “as a vehicle to teach about cultural differences to create a stronger, relatable global community.”

Judy Gelles received her MFA in photography from the Rhode Island School of Design and her Masters in Counseling from the University of Miami. Her work is in major collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, and the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She has had residencies at the MacDowell Colony, the Visual Studies Workshop, and the Atlantic Center for the Arts. Awards include a grant from the Lomax Family Foundation, an Individual Artist Grant from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, an Independence Foundation Fellowship in the Arts, a Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation Artist as Catalyst Grant, a grant from WYBE Public Television, a Philadelphia Stories New Program Grant, and a Fleisher Challenge Artist Exhibition. In 2009, Critical Mass listed her as one of the top 50 photographers in the US. Her work has been featured in Ms. Magazine; Vision Magazine, Beijing, China; Camerawork; New Art Examiner; Artweek; and Photography Now.

Picture credit: © Judy Gelles, “Get Shot”, 2012, Archival Pigment Print, 25 x 20”