

ARTIST PROFILE

Golden States of Grace: Making the Invisible Visible

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

REVEALING THE FACE OF THE INVISIBLE, artist Rick Nahmias explores stereotypes of what it means to be spiritual.

“For me, photography is telling stories about people you may not see,” shared Nahmias, whose photo-documentary *Golden States of Grace: Prayers of the Disinherited* is on display at the Karpeles Museum. “It’s not enough to empathize. You have to be with the subject and hopefully part of an experience.”

A graduate of NYU in religious studies and film, Nahmias documented eleven marginalized spiritual groups including a transgender gospel choir in San Francisco, San Quentin inmates who have converted to Zen Buddhism, and the Santa Barbara-based Immaculate Heart Community.

“We all have something in us that we wish wasn’t there,” said Nahmias. “We do ourselves a disservice by repressing the range and depth of our diversity.” Creating these intimate photographs was a delicate process that required a lot of time, research, and coordination with each of the groups documented in the exhibit. The experience itself was the creative catalyst for Nahmias: “I believe with photography there’s a direct route, a visceral connection, to telling stories about people you may not be seeing.”

The exhibit includes fifty-six portraits and an audio soundtrack taken from in-depth interviews with congregations and community leaders. Each participating community in the project represents a



Buddhadharma Sangha at San Quentin Prison (San Quentin), photograph by Rick Nahmias

different denomination, a different ethnic group, and a different part of California’s geography from Santa Rosa to San Diego. In his artist statement, Nahmias wrote, “It became clear that in order to break down the barriers and ingrained stereotypes surrounding many of these people, I

would present the work not as segregated communities but by what joined them: visual themes, graphic resemblance, or spiritual metaphor.”

The exhibit, on display at the Karpeles Manuscript Library Museum through December 12th, is co-presented by the Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Ethics, Religion, and Public Life at UCSB, Just Communities Central Coast, and The Fund for Santa

Barbara. “Religion has always been both a vehicle of oppression and a powerful force for liberation,” shared Jarrod Schwartz, Executive Director of Just Communities. “In bringing *Golden States of Grace* to Santa Barbara, we hope to engage faith communities in looking inward to explore who we exclude and marginalize and in turning outward to work for justice in our community.” Related interfaith

community events are being organized throughout the engagement, including a gala opening reception on Friday, September 19th.

The Karpeles Museum is located at 21 W Anapamu St and is open daily from 10am to 4pm. *Golden States of Grace: Prayers of the Disinherited* will be on display Sept 19 through Dec 12. There will be a free preview on Tue, Sept 16 at 8pm and a gala opening on Fri, Sept 19 from 6 to 8pm. For more information call 893-2317.



Photo by Leroy Hamilton

Rick Nahmias



Immaculate Heart Community (Santa Barbara), photograph by Rick Nahmias