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Photo by Camilo Cruz

Judges Kelvin D. Filer and Allen J. Webster at the Compton Courthouse

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JUDGES AS ART: A PORTRAIT OF ARTIST CAMILO CRUZ

By Judge Michelle R. Rosenblatt (*Los Angeles Superior Court*)

On the walls of a conference room in the Stanley Mosk Courthouse in Los Angeles hang a series of black and white photographs. One can't help but notice that these photographs are not the typical judicial portraits that adorn courthouse walls. They are works of art. The artist, Camilo Cruz, created these portraits as part of his Masters of Fine Arts portfolio at California State University Long Beach.

The story of Camilo Cruz, photographer, artist, and Community Relations Administrator for the Los Angeles Superior Court, is the story of an artist who dedicates his non-business hours to his love of art. His medium is photography. His main focus is on judges, the courthouses in which he works, lawyers, and litigants. Camilo Cruz has studied the marble corridors, the "character inside the walls," the light, vanishing lines and space, and the materials. "Anything can be turned into creative expression of the human soul," says Cruz. He believes that his photography allows the viewer to study the world in still life and to perceive each subject differently than one ordinarily would.

Camilo Cruz loves being a "part of a human chain." He has studied historical judicial portraiture, including photographic portraits since the 1800s of judges and criminals, in order to build on the past. His photographs of judges reflect the character of the judge, but by placing the judge in an unlikely background, he is attempting to portray the subject's humanity. His aim is to show a distinct view of the judge rather than the typical view in a black robe sitting on the bench. Looking at the judge in a different setting, he hopes that the viewer will create his or her own narrative. That is one of Camilo Cruz's goals. He explains that "pseudo-documentary" is a contemporary concept practiced by art photographers. In a pseudo-documentary, the photographer is trying to make the viewer question what he or she is seeing. The public has not seen judges in art before. He hopes to create a different perception of the justice system by showing judges outside of their element; by showing their humanity. For example, if you ask people outside the justice system what a judge looks like, what will they say? What are their perceptions of judges as people? "We need a visual to teach us something. In shifting our perceptions, photography is a powerful medium," Cruz remarks.

The cover photo of *The Bench*, a photograph of Judge Allen J. Webster, Jr. and Judge Kelvin D. Filer, was taken at the Compton courthouse. When asked about the photo, Camilo Cruz explains

that here you see the two judges sitting outside of the courtrooms, together, surrounded by marble, juxtaposed with space. In real life you would never see this scene. It is subtly different than the setting in which you would normally see a judge. Here, the judges sit at the end of a very long day. Camilo likes the energy and the way the judges present themselves. He wants the viewer to choose the story of what he or she sees here.

The photo in the body of this article is a photograph of Judge Victor Chavez at the Stanley Mosk Courthouse. Camilo Cruz explains that this image is about the space, with the judge at the top of a stairway, the marble and light, and a curved railing. The image is meant to portray whatever the viewer wants it to. To the artist, Judge Chavez, although in a higher position than the viewer, does not promote fear; he appears as a humble, peaceful human being.



The photo of the judge standing next to a chair is a photograph of Judge Ernest Hiroshige taken in the halls of the Los Angeles Stanley Mosk courthouse. This is the only judicial portrait Cruz has taken without the judicial robe. By placing Judge Hiroshige next to the artist's antique chair, Camilo Cruz is exploring stature, history, stoicism, seriousness and challenging the reader to create a narrative.

The final photograph on the page is of Assistant Presiding Judge David S. Wesley. Here the artist notes the lighting, the cold, institutional hallway of the Clara Shortridge Foltz Criminal Justice Center behind the courtrooms where weighty decisions about life, death and liberty are made. Here, Camilo notes that one story the viewer might perceive is a human being with power reaching to the walls for support, showing his humanity. He challenges the viewer to see other stories.



Camilo Cruz grew up in a household in which the nightly dinner table conversation centered on politics and the law. His father was a prominent civil rights lawyer in Los Angeles who "fought for justice and fought the system every day from the outside." His mother was an advocate for the mayor's office who "fought for justice from the inside." Law, society and the importance of justice were a part of his life from a very young age. Cruz graduated college in 1996 and then obtained his masters in public policy at Claremont Graduate University. From 1999 until 2001, he worked for then Los Angeles City Council member Mike Feuer. He has been Community Outreach Administrator for the Los Angeles Superior Court since 2001.



Institution." In this series of 20 photos, which are all in color, Camilo Cruz photographs African American and Latino attorneys, judicial officers, bureaucrats, litigants and police officers. The goal of the artist in this show is to have the viewer question how people of color interact with institutional space that presses around them; to document how the system of justice and the institutional atmosphere affects them. To the artist, the use of color photography in this series shows more vulnerability and more humanness.

With the courthouse as his studio, Camilo Cruz plans to continue creating new and different styles of judicial portraiture, to show the subjects as both judges and people; to show their diversity, and to shift perceptions. In a way, his photography is also outreach.

As Community Outreach Administrator, Camilo Cruz manages the Court's outreach programs, working with judges and the public. One of the many programs of which he is very proud is the Stopping Hate and Delinquency by Empowering Students (SHADES) program, an extension of Teen Court which involves training at the Museum of Tolerance and is exploring ways of handling bullying and other issues that may not fall under the traditional criminal law cases handled by the original Teen Court. Another of the programs he manages is the Diversity Committee, in which the judges on the committee visit schools to speak of their experiences and promote an interest in service on the bench. Camilo values communicating the work of the Court in a positive,

What do judges look like? What is their humanity? As far as Cruz is concerned, art doesn't get better than that.

Author's Note: To view more work by Camilo Cruz, please go to camilocruzphoto.com.



progressive way. He sees his work of helping the community understand what courts do as a way to improve justice.

In 2008, Camilo Cruz obtained his Masters of Fine Arts.

The photographic art he created for his Masters portfolio was designed around the court space and judges, subjects that have rarely been photographed. His work took first place

in the College Art Association Show for 2009, a show that contained the black and white photographs of judges in this issue and those now displayed at the Stanley Mosk Courthouse.

Cruz currently has a photographic art show at the Administrative Office of the Courts that has been extended through the end of July, 2011, of lawyers and litigants in the justice system, entitled "Inside White Space: Portraits of Black and Brown Power in the

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