

jessica kirkham

Photography Teaching Portfolio

pronouns: she/they
(516) 502-8493
jesskirkham.com
jesskirkhamphoto@gmail.com

bronx junior photo league

2016-2021

AMY LILMAN

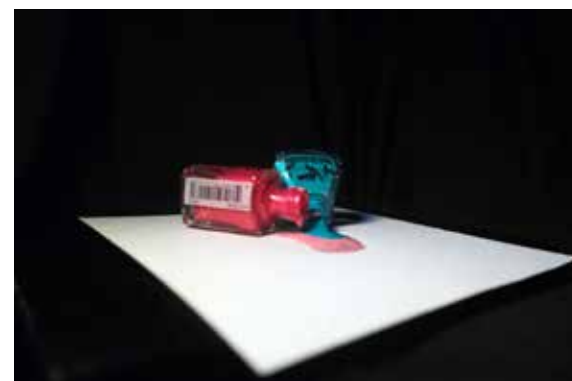
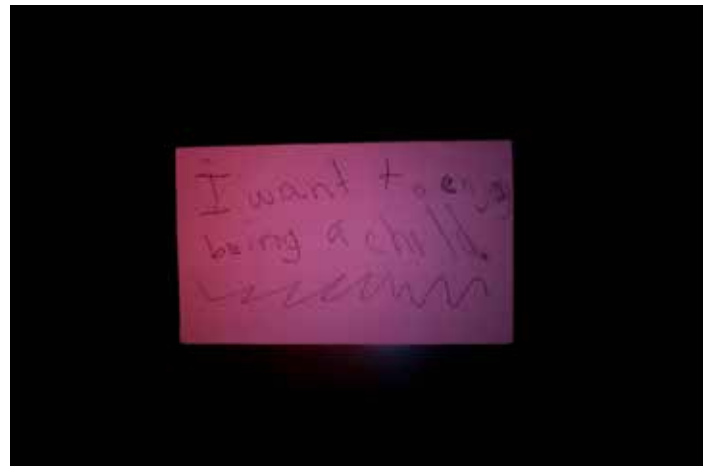
10TH GRADE

Identity Exploration

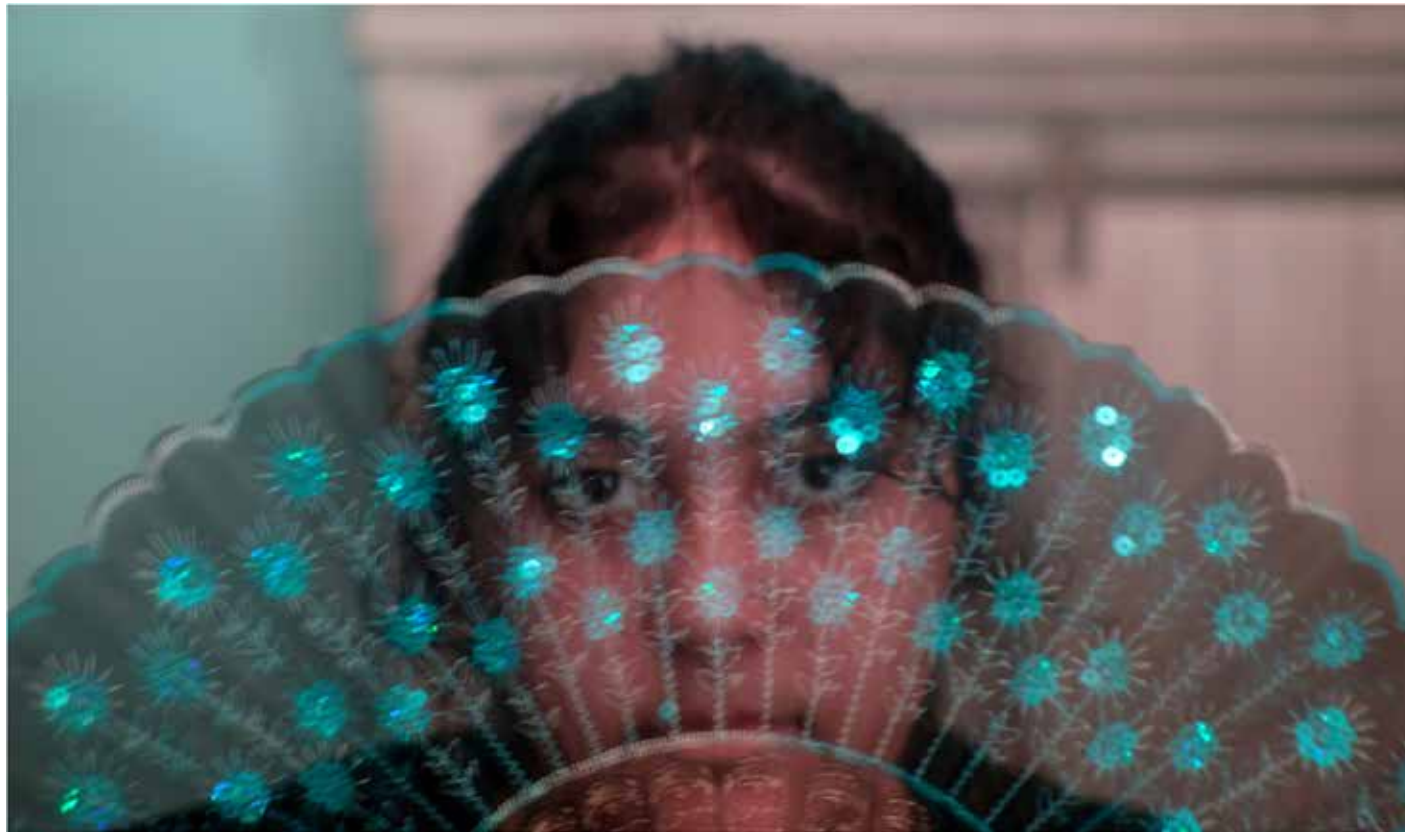
For most of my life, I have been surrounded by individuals who have embraced their identities. While photographing, this photo essay changed from an exploration of LGBTQIAP+ identities to something more intimate. My subjects were able to convey their self-perception and how their identities impact their lives. I created my project through portraits of myself and others. After interviewing each person, I took notes of images or objects they compared themselves to and tried to recreate them with a certain mood in mind. Many of them did not have an outlet to express themselves. I wanted them to look at my photographs and see themselves in them. In a way, I was looking for answers to inquiries I had often asked myself: do you feel comfortable in your romantic orientation, sexuality, and gender? Do you feel the constant need to be validated? Do you find comfort in knowing that others resonate with your experiences? I wondered if it was acceptable to reclaim the gray indescribable area within me I had neglected for so long.

It is difficult to feel like an outcast in one's home, to constantly put up a facade for the sake of one's safety. Many people I interviewed allowed themselves to be vulnerable enough to admit that their safety would be compromised if they were their genuine selves. They have no choice but to conform to this unaccepting society where queer children are overlooked and their feelings are dismissed. I remember talking to my cousin about his experiences as a trans masculine person. I can never forget the way they would not meet my eyes as he took my hands in theirs and told me that they wished he could live his life as a child.

We should be able to exist without holding ourselves back because of this cishnormative, heteronormative, and amatonormative society. Our complexity and nuance are beautiful. My subjects gave me the courage to embrace who I am, and I'm forever thankful.



[Click here](#) to view more of Amy's final project.



SOPHIA MORALES

9TH GRADE

Kinship of Nature

My project is about me trying to understand myself better through the things I do and the things I like. I understand myself more while daydreaming and creating different scenarios in my head. I feel more comfortable when I am alone and not having to explain myself around others. This project is a learning experience for me because I now know that the relationships that I have with others are not hanging on by threads, but simply have their strong points and weak points. While creating this project, I analyzed my relationship with myself because you can't love or care about others without understanding yourself. I've come to the conclusion that I am quite creative and have solid beliefs that can be changed depending on different experiences.

Nature helps me destress. Even in those times when I feel like giving up completely, I think about my imaginary friend that will always be there for me through my hard times: NATURE!!! I try to surround myself with nature because it reminds me of the peaceful balance of the life cycle of plants. When I surround myself with any form of nature, I feel closer to my Taino ancestors because they relied on nature for most of their needs. Nature reminds me of my grandmother because she taught me about different types of herbal medicines. She had her own herbs and plant garden. Whenever I think about my grandmother, I am reminded of all the stories she would tell me; from the time she emigrated from Puerto Rico as a young girl, to the stories about raising my dad. She was my best friend and still is part of my inner-circle of those who will always understand me without explanation. When I was little, I didn't have many friends, but that changed when she taught me something that I hope stays with me for the rest of my life: how to use nature to calm down and how to confide in myself instead of depending on others.

Photography has helped me get closer to my family. It helped me have some of the conversations I was scared of having with them. I can understand them better and we've become closer. I am really close to my brother Lucas. When I was younger, I didn't have many friends at the time and once Lucas came into the world, I wasn't by myself anymore. With him, it became easier to have the childhood that I wanted. Before Lucas, it was just me and my mom. It was the same cycle every day, going to the Bronx for my mom's job and then back to Yonkers. My life felt very feminine in those years because all the people around me were women. I wasn't exposed to masculinity at that time. My mom is a hardcore feminist, and I want to learn from that part of her. I feel grateful to her for teaching me to defend and stand up for myself from a young age. Many family relationships are difficult and sometimes lead to getting into arguments, but, at the end of the day, you all love each other. I think my mom and I have a close, but different, bond because we both have had hard childhoods, and I feel we both understand what we want to change. I want to tell her not to feel guilty for any of the past decisions she made. And I want to say thank you, because I never felt like I had the chance to.



[Click here](#) to view more of Nix's final project.

JOCELYN OJEDA MORENO

T11TH GRADE

Being Mexican can be a challenge. Many people that immigrate to the United States grew up in their home countries wanting to leave and live “The American Dream,” my mother being one of them. She is one of the many Mexican women who have strong stories to tell. My mother was born and raised in Morelos, Mexico until she left her home at the age of 19 and risked her life to immigrate to the United States. She wanted a better life and to help her family financially. In her eyes, the only way was to move to the land where there are many opportunities.

My mother often reminisces about her childhood and shares these stories with my sisters and me. I am inspired by the stories she shares about her life and our family in Mexico. One of the stories she told me when I was young was about how she and her sisters would look out for each other and never think about themselves. My mother’s family did not have much. When her sisters would go to school, my mother would sell fruit along with the other vendors to make money for her and her sisters. After visiting Mexico three times, I learned that childhood is different there. I realized that the simplest thing can make a child happy, leaving them with many bright memories.

My mother passes on the many lessons of kindness and sisterhood that she learned from her mother. My grandmother was known in their town as the most generous person. My mother adores my grandmother’s reputation and tells my sisters and I to always be kind to people. My mother, my sisters, me, and all the other Mexican women in my life, are a part of the same sisterhood. We share the same blood and we value it. There have been ups and downs in my family ever since the COVID-19 pandemic, but at the end of the day, no matter what occurs, we all support each other. My mother always tells my sisters and me that it’s important to care and look out for each other. As the oldest I will always be on top of it. I’m proud of being a Mexican woman; sharing my culture, and carrying on the legacy and wisdom of my Mexican heritage.



[Click here](#) to view more of Jocelyn’s final project.

ELISA LUNA CAMERON

9TH GRADE

Masked Expectations

I'm surrounded by empty seats yet am being bombarded with sound. This situation I've been put in is an unusual one since you just expect, well, more. I expected teachers. I expected students. I expected fresh air. The mask I wear, double-layered out of fear, and yet I can still feel the pressure in the air around me.

Through this project I really wanted to express the closed-off nature of doing in-person learning during the pandemic. I photographed these moments with dim lighting and a dizzying uncentered-ness to show how uncertain it felt the entire time. Going into this pandemic as a freshman, I wanted to feel like I was going into "real" school so I immediately signed up for in-person learning, expecting all my teachers to be there as well. That wasn't what I got, exactly. I had one in-person teacher and the rest of my 5 classes were all to be had in the auditorium on my tablet. Quite disappointing, if you ask me. But you know what they say, always gotta make the best of a situation!

Making friends helped it feel real, being 6 entire auditorium seats apart did not.

Going inside the school helped it feel real, doing my classes on a tablet did not.

Facing drama in school helped it feel real, the drama being unable to go to school for 2 weeks when a classmate got COVID made it feel too real.

These experiences didn't make it not real, they just made it different. I think different is what's needed.



[Click here](#) to view more of Elisa's final project.

LATOYA BEECHAM

T11TH GRADE

Thicker Than Water

Everyone needs a house to live in, but a supportive family is what builds a home. Family can translate into a thousand different meanings, ideas, terms, and descriptions. I have been searching for a definition that translates for youth from the queer walk of life.

Throughout this project I've explored the connections I've built with people through this journey called my life. That journey has shaped me into who I am, but most importantly I've found and built a family that supports me because, before them, a safe home was never available to me.

It sounds harsh, but I've come to believe that family is more than blood and who puts a roof over your head. Your biological family can treat you as if family isn't what you are. My family isn't perfect, in fact, they are far from that. The things I've overheard about me, what has been said straight to my face, the backhanded compliments in my native tongue--all of this haunts me. The "yuh nah no sense mi nuh kno weh yuh mada get yuh fram"--speaking about me not living up to the quality of perfection they want me to be--hurts to hear.

The connections I have built and the family that I've created has taught me that I am more than enough. My best friend Markice and I grew closer during quarantine and created an essential bond. My brother Ty and I met in the 10th grade. People said we looked alike and now we live in the same apartment and I can't imagine life without him there. Although my partner Ace is a recent addition to my family, they show up for me. Even though we are long distance, their family has included me as a part of their family. Carolan and Ashley are my friends that remind me to reflect and that the road of life is more than just work. We have built a strong relationship. My queer youth family has motivated me to work hard and to not let obstacles stand in my path. Yes, we are not blood and we are separate as individuals, but we are a part of the same community that bonds us together in understanding the journey. Finding those who refuse to judge you and support you is my reflection of what family is.



[Click here](#) to view more of LaToya's final project.

REYNALDO OLIVERA

11TH GRADE

Growing Up

Mother, Do me a favor and lock up the door. I feel myself getting too close to the storm. Our sorrows are getting too big to ignore. Please hold on for a little bit more. I promise tomorrow won't be worse than before.

- Reynaldo Olivera

This project takes place in one environment. There is a small blue room with plastered-filled holes and nails scattered against the wall. A glass panel door, broken glass covered with wooden slabs. My mother's bamboo and her vine that stretches along a wall. Pictures on the walls and toys on the floor, Kiara makes a mess and we pick it up. The air is filled with either laughter or cries. This room is our home, where we spend most of our day together talking, playing and taking care of each other. The room holds pieces of us, whether that be through pictures, books, toys or stuffed animals.



[Click here](#) to view more of Reynaldo's final project.

AWA FOFANA

12TH GRADE

2020 Within Four Walls

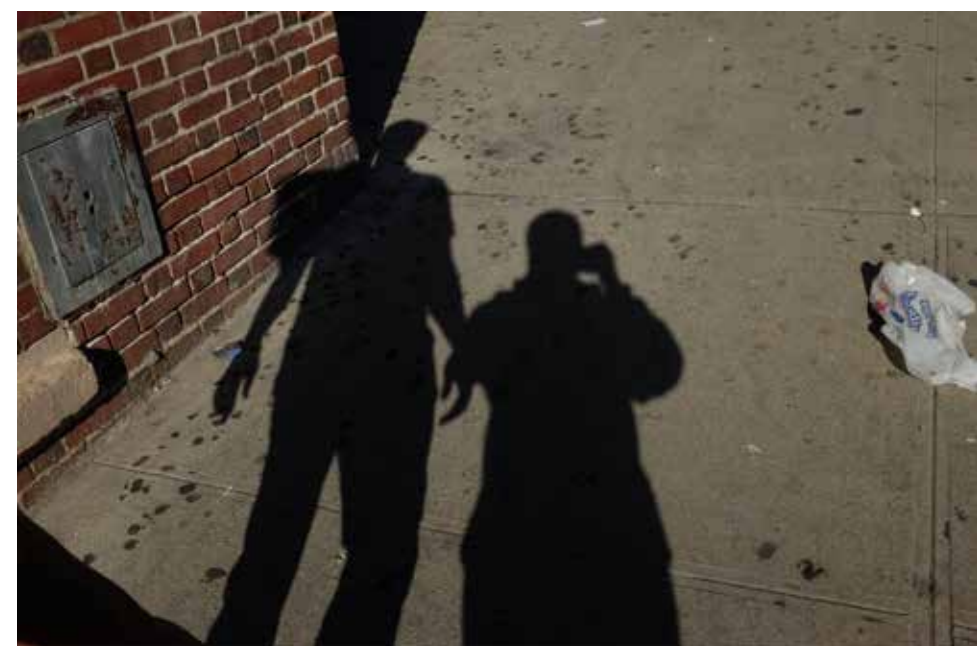
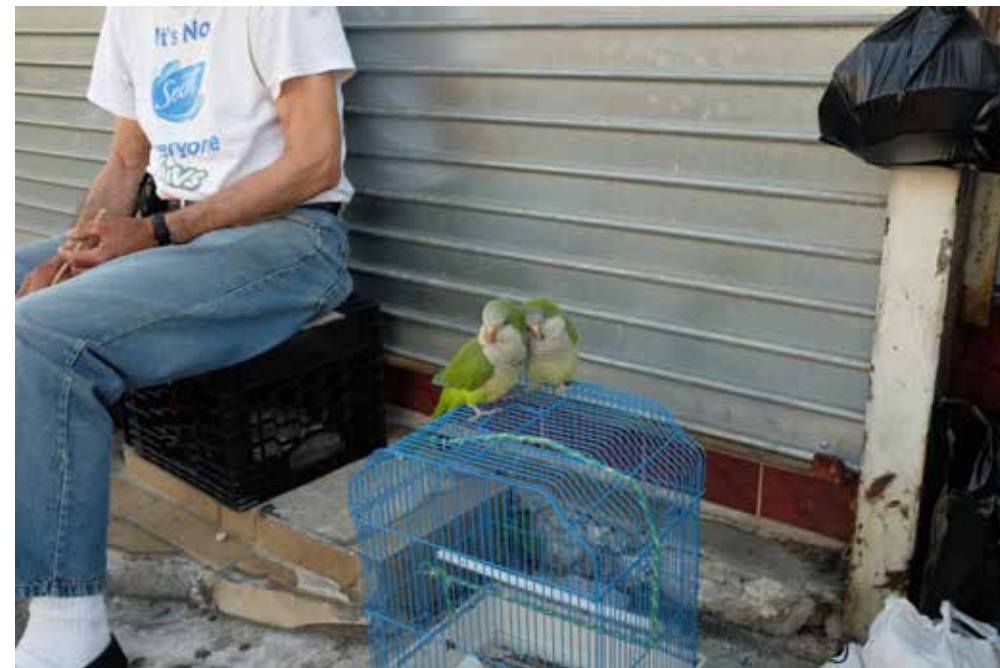
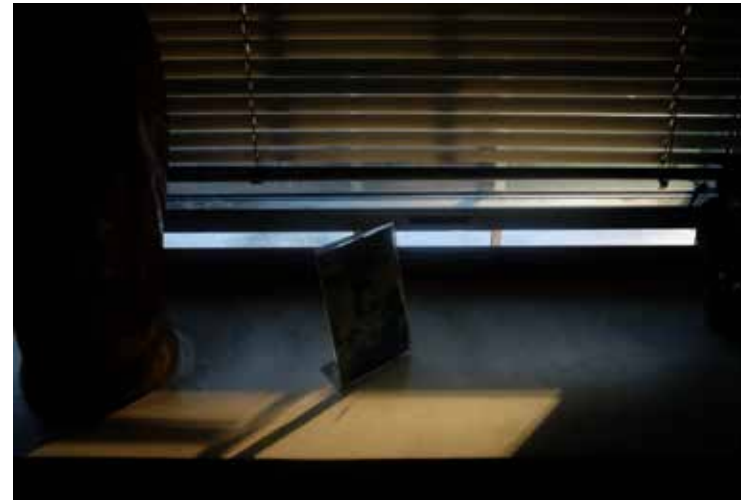
I remember when 2019 was close to ending, everyone said that 2020 was going to be their year and most of us went into the new year positively. It was going to be the year of trips, prom, senior activities, and graduation for my class. I thought I was going to have a lot of fun this year. Little did we know what was headed towards us. At first, I thought things weren't that bad. Then stores started closing, events were cancelled, and they closed all NYC schools. That's when things started to become a little too real. We were told that schools might open back up on April 20, but it's been over 2 months. To this day, we're left with many questions as to how the rest of this year and upcoming years are going to play out.

Until recently, I've been confined in my 2 bedroom apartment with my parents, who still continue to go to work during this pandemic as essential workers. My mother is a nurse at a nursing home for the elderly and my father is a dispatcher at AAA auto center. A lot of the time, it's just me in the house or in the living room. I stay in front of a screen for hours now since classes have been moved online. I really miss talking with my friends face to face, complaining about the amount of work we're getting from one teacher. Every now and then, I look away from my computer screen and see the sun shining through my windows and into my house, thinking of how pretty it looks in the darkness of my living room during these grim times.

I often feel like life is becoming a cycle of waking up, doing school work, going on my phone, then going to bed, and I know that many people can relate to feeling tired of the same surroundings day in and day out. In the beginning of this project, I would walk around my apartment searching for things to shoot and I was in a rut. As the days went by, I began to find objects or moments that had character and significance within my home and outside my window. Working on my project was a way for me to appreciate the little moments and to remind myself that this pandemic and being in quarantine hasn't stripped us of everything.

Ramadan would also be different from previous years due to the pandemic. Every night, my mom tried to make sure we always had food to break our fasts. Thankfully, quarantine didn't change that aspect of the holiday for us, something that some Muslim families are struggling with. Unfortunately, the end of Ramadan didn't include prayer at the mosques, showing off our Eid clothes, or parties like we had hoped for this year. Considering the circumstances, I'm just glad I was able to experience it with my family.

For the first 57 days, the only view I had of the outside was through my window. When the weather was nice, my dad and I decided to take a walk around the neighborhood so that I could stretch my legs. We got ready and put on our masks. The sun beamed on my glasses as we headed out of the building. It felt weird being outside again and I felt a little self conscience at first. We walked from our building to 167th grand concourse as I took pictures of pink and purple flowers hanging off of trees or planted outside, people chatting with their friends, pet parrots, and the two of us. I was shocked to see so many people outside, especially since I've only been around my parents for the past 2 months. There were many people with masks. Some were wearing the masks incorrectly and others either on or hanging off their faces as they went about their day. I enjoyed the walk with my dad that day. It was a moment of normalcy for me during the 60 days of the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of masks and the implementation of protective guidelines from our state governments are probably going to become our new normal. Someday, I hope that we can regain some of the freedom we had before and continue on with our lives.



[Click here](#) to view more of Awa's final project.

ALEXA PACHECO

8TH GRADE

My Experience In Quarantine

Being outside and being able to live life "normally" seems like a fantasy at times. New headlines appear every day about the coronavirus, and watching the news feels surreal that I am living through a pandemic. It can become very overwhelming and hard to adjust to. I usually distract myself with homework, reading a book, or just being on my phone.

Out of the five people in my household, my brother and dad are the only ones who need to go outside for work. I am so grateful that I don't have to go outside and possibly be exposed to or give others COVID. I miss being outside and being able to enjoy the sun and spending time with friends. Through photography, I am reimagining what it is like to be outdoors again. Sitting on my balcony and looking out my bedroom window have been the best ways for me to bring the outside in.



[Click here](#) to view more of Alexa's final project.

Alter server
Robe, worn
on Sundays
to help the
priest.



drawers
OF
materials
needed
for church



Immaculate Conception church

tiara m

ropf

Ring

Eye shadow

Friendship

Trust

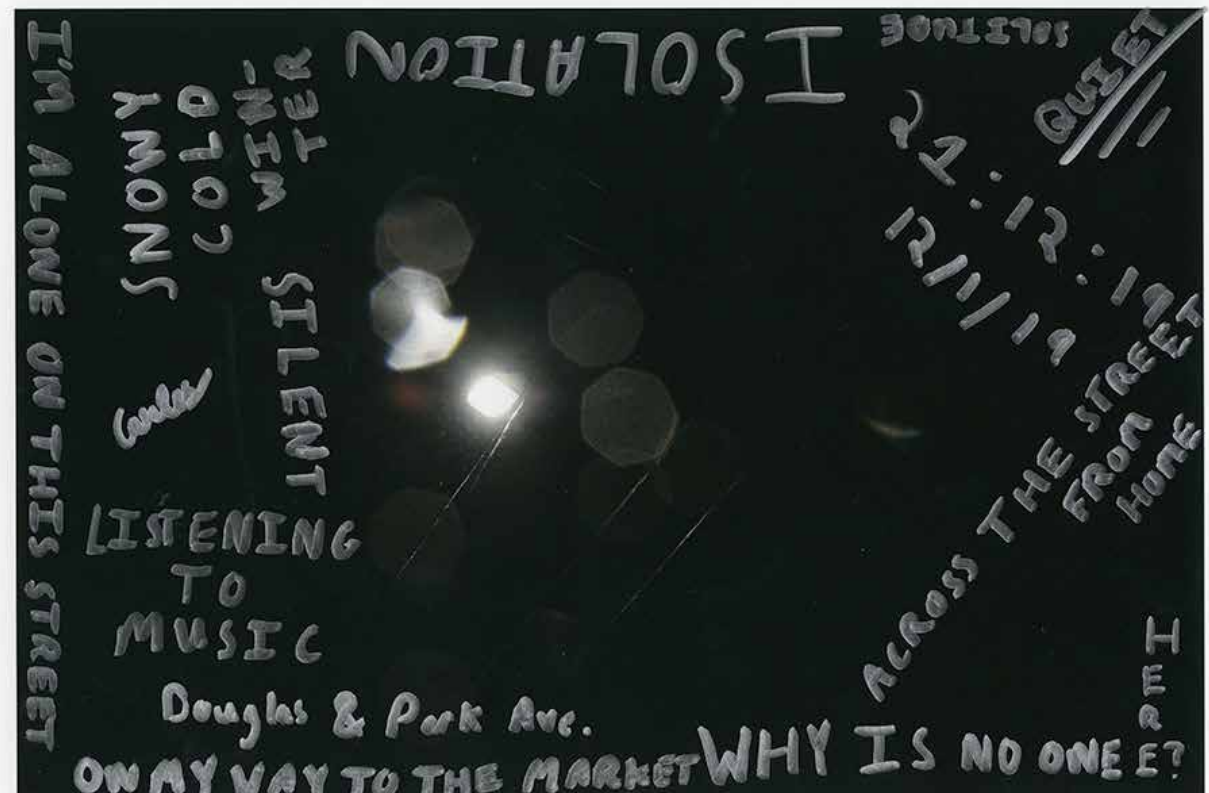


Self-care

My friend getting her makeup done for her Halloween costume.

Bright palette
colors

Dear Poet I only ask that You take me to walk in the shoreline of reality
 Teach me how to swim in your ocean of words Let me live
 in your stories I want to feel The heartache & pain
 The laughter myself in pieces & joys Poet, show me how to brave
 some day of breadcrumbs with hope that
 leads to the someone will find the path that
 the delicacy real me I have fallen in love with
 your of your words the elegance of
 to places I've metaphors The way you take me
 try eyes in have never been before I have baptized
 rhymes I have every worn out page filled with your
 in my shortcomings spent my life trying to find the meaning
 a home Poet, I thank you for letting me make
 out of your words An
 oasis away from this
 painful plain of
 Existence



December 2nd, 2010
9:12 P.M.

Douglas Avenue
Yonkers, New York

A car on the road

Bokeh
STREET
Lamp

Electrical Wires

Christmas Lights

1/60 SHUTTER SPEED

40,000 ISO
Aperture: q

You became my first love / my world, but the less I used to see you, you became more of a stranger to me rather than a dad. Fast forward 7 years, ~~you~~ ~~still~~ after I was born you still felt like a stranger.



100 missed my special days =

at some point there never was =)

Over the years that I've lived with you, we have learned how to construct a relationship, that at times have broken down, but then it's rebuild. We may still not have the ~~same~~ best one but at least there is one that

Peaches



mangoes

Look at all the colorful fruits! and veggies



With corn

Pispet

Cherry Tomatoes

So fresh

oranges

Coconuts?

Plums

I love fresh produce that's close to home. I love to support local farmers. Cultivating and growing crops in the family is tough. Supplies are getting much more expensive. On with healthy eating, off with processed foods with chemicals!

My Dad and I

This was taken in a photo booth... I like how confused my dad and I look in the third photo.

It brings me to a time where we were really happy...



This photo means a lot to me...

tranquility for

love

happy

smile

laughter



Mercades x PABLO!

There is still Love..



LOVEY DUST



Bronx Activists

High School Advanced 2017-2019



Bernard Smith, founder of Stop the Violence, lost both his 19-year-old son and 32-year-old nephew to gun violence in 2000. Shortly after they were killed, Smith started the Bronx-based organization in order to raise awareness about the violence and loss of life within the community. Photo by Tony Baizan

[Photoville Exhibition](#)

[BDC Exhibition](#)

Photographs on pages 14-18 by: Angie Avendaño, Tony Baizan, Kayla Beltran, Zarah Browne, Anastasia Cardona, Aisha Conte, Fanta Diop, Lucki Islam, Julie Lozano, Tianna Maldonado, Yessica Morocho, Agnes Ollivier-Yamin Chloe Rodriguez, Ruby Simon.



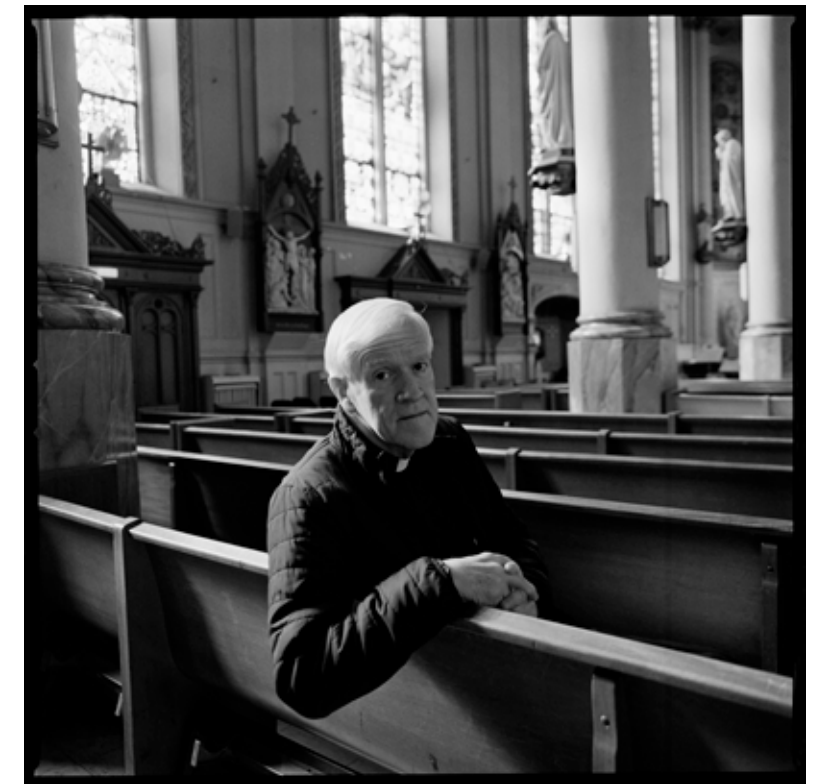
Martin Rogers, a community activist working to make the community garden a safe haven for the youth in the neighborhood. Photo by Ruby Simon



Hebh Jamal, a Palestinian-American activist born and raised in the Bronx. Photo by Julie Lozano



Barbara Holmes, a housing activist, runs the Claremont Community Center and advocates for NYCHA residents at Claremont. Photo by Fritzi Garcia



Father Skelly has been a community and social justice activist since the 1970s. He was a part of a wave of post Vatican II priests who combined ministry with social justice and helped empower people and transform the South Bronx. Photo by Fritzi Garcia



Marlene Nuñez, founded Artsy Movement: Creative Writing Club at her high school and organized her school's only gun control student walkout. Photo by Bianca Colon



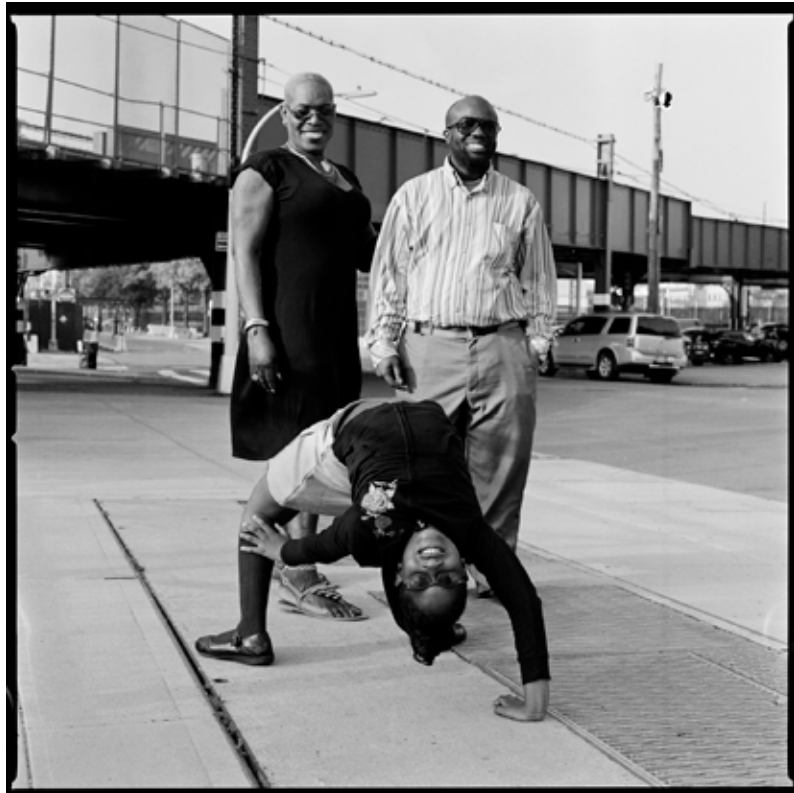
Wanda Salaman founded Mothers on the Move to advocate for housing, environmental justice, traffic safety, and other social justice issues for families in the Bronx. Photo by Tony Baizan



Adam Green founded Rocking the Boat, a non-profit that teaching youg people to build a boat from scratch as a team. Photo by Zarah Browne



Niya Ried encourages other youth living in NYCHA's Claremont housing to advocate and uplift their community. Photo by Kayla Beltran



Mr. Cris, Kim Watson and their daughter. Together, they founded Community Kinship Life to provide accessible healthcare for LGBTQ people in the Bronx. Photo by Fanta Diop



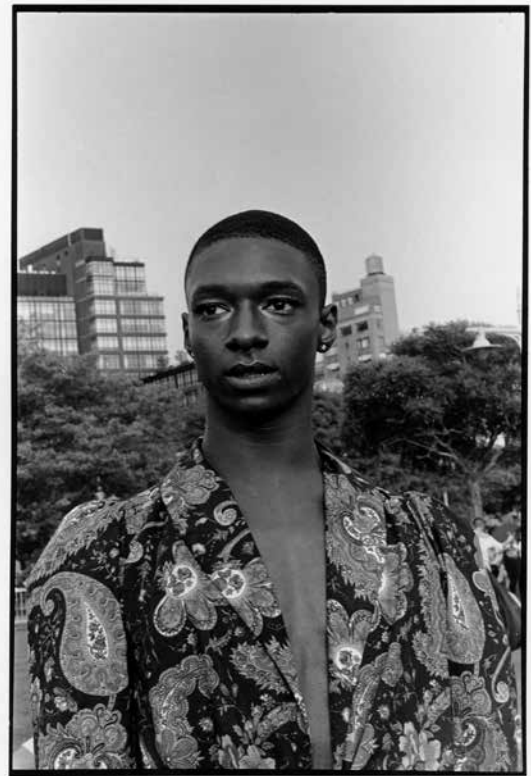
Mychal Johnson, co-founder of South Bronx Unite, works to make public land accessible to the community and fights for environmental justice. Photo by Tony Baizan



Maximo Rivera, helped save Hostos Community College from closing in 1970 by initiating a 22 day takeover of the college. Now, he focuses on organizing for workers' rights. Photo by Fanta Diop



Caridad De La Cruz is a Puerto Rican poet, actress, and arts activist based in the Bronx. She converted a garage into an interdisciplinary art space to serve as a gallery, concert, and workshop space. Photo by Kayla Beltran





Middle School

Summer Photography + Bookmaking 2019



Photographs by Jared Birks, Adriana Estrada, Imaya Ingram, Evan Jimenez, Tanisha Lewis, Onilisa Montero, Kendra Ramirez, Jennifer Reinozo, Stephanie Reinozo, Jayleen Torralba.



Links to more student work, exhibitions, awards, publications:

Bronx Junior Photo League

[The Lucies Awards 2021 - Best Photo Program of the Year](#)

Winner - Bronx Documentary Center

[‘The People That Are Within These Frames’: A Community Offers Self-Portraits](#)

New York Times Article

[The People That Are Within These Frames’ at Photoville](#)

[2020-2021 Bronx Documentary Center - BJPL Exhibition](#)

* HS1 dropdown menu

[2019-2020 Bronx Documentary Center - BJPL Exhibition](#)

* High school Tuesday/Thursday

[Bronx Activists at Photoville](#)

[Mott Haven Herald - Six Bronx Junior Photo League Students Recognized for Artistic Work](#)

[Mott Haven Herald - Bronx Doc Center Students Take Home National Prizes](#)

Bronx Senior Photo League

*also included in NYT article + Photoville exhibition

[2020-2021 Bronx Documentary Center - BSPL Exhibition](#)

*select Kips Bay Castle Hill Senior Center dropdown menu

[2019-2020 Bronx Documentary Center - BSPL Exhibition](#)

*scroll down to Castle Hill Senior Center 1, Castle Hill Senior Center 2

[WFUV - Getting to the Art of It: Bronx Senior Photo League](#)

[The Riverdale Press - Fighting Ageism One Photo at a Time](#)

[BronxNet - BDC Bronx Senior Photo League Opening](#)

[BronxNet - Bronx Senior Photo League](#)



My colleague Groana Melendez, our student alumni Julie Lozano and Kayla Beltran, and I at a photo and interview session for the Bronx Activists project.