

The Arts



Jonathan Goldman's prints of young mothers and children from the Paquin School afford the viewer a respectful glimpse of reality.

Moving Pictures

Jonathan Goldman's photography exhibit chronicles the struggles of young mothers and pregnant teens.

MELINDA GREENBERG STAFF REPORTER

Their two very disparate worlds were brought together by a camera. Jonathan Goldman is a 22-year-old white Jewish male, raised in a comfortable Owings Mills home, a graduate of the Gilman School and Princeton University. His focus is the students of the Laurence G. Paquin School, an inner-city public school for pregnant teens and new mothers. All but a handful of the 300 students at the 30-year-old school are African-Americans.

Despite their differences, the warm and affable Mr. Goldman won over his subjects. For three weeks last spring, he visited the

school on a regular basis, documenting the struggles of attending high school and raising an infant or preparing for the arrival of a baby. The resulting pictures make up an exhibit called "Lullabies," on display through Aug. 24 at Galerie Françoise et Ses Freres, in Greenspring Station.

An opening reception was to be held on Aug. 8. Mr. Goldman invited a number of the students to attend the opening. Shot with Polaroid positive/negative film, the photographs served as a bridge between Mr. Goldman and his subjects. The film produces both a picture and a 4-by-5 negative. He gave each student her own picture.

Using the pictures, the students composed poetry that ac-

companies the photographs.

"I wanted them to write about themselves and how they feel about themselves," Mr. Goldman said. "I would like to go back there and run a longer creative writing workshop with the students."

Susan Yaruta, a local poet and writer, helped the students compose their poetry. Ms. Yaruta, whose daughter and young granddaughter also attend Paquin, directs a program called Partners in the Arts Inc., which sponsors artist residencies at the school. Ms. Yaruta is on an extended vacation and could not be reached for comment about the photographs.

Mr. Goldman, who used his own money to fund the project and will be donating 10 percent of all

photography sales to the school, sees his photographs as tributes to the determination it will take for these young women and their children to succeed in the world around them.

"They may be 15 and may come from broken homes where they've lived with drugs or poverty, but these are some tough women and they're dealing with a lot of stuff," he said. "They may never get to a place that our society deems as success, but if they raise those children well, they'll be extremely successful."

His respect for his subjects is evident in the 24 black-and-white photographs on display, and it is something he also has brought to his earlier work — including pictures of "real people" shot during

a car trip through Kentucky, Tennessee and Alabama.

"He has this way with strangers that is really special," said Emmett Gowin, a renowned photographer and one of Mr. Goldman's professors at Princeton. "He must be able to communicate that they are safe, that they are thought of seriously and that he is not there to do them any harm. People present to him the most dignified, serious presentation of themselves."

He also was able to help some of the pregnant women deal with self-esteem issues and feel comfortable with how they look. "Some of the new mothers tease the pregnant girls and call them fat," he said. "The camera helped me solve some of that. I showed

them the pictures of the pregnant girls and said, "Look at that, isn't that amazing and incredible and beautiful?"

Mr. Gowin watched Mr. Goldman's work at Paquin unfold and he praises his student's willingness to undertake so demanding a project. "So few people do what he's done: get to the edge and jump into something so big and challenging," said Mr. Gowin, reached at his home in Bucks County, Pa. "If he can maintain that kind of passion, he could be a really marvelous artist."

Mr. Goldman entered Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public Policy and International Affairs in 1992 with thoughts of attending law school after college. In his sophomore year, he picked up a camera for the first time.

"I always felt really artsy," he said. "But no one pushed me in that direction. I was taught to be an athlete, a lawyer, an Ivy League college prospect."

After one year, he added visual arts as his minor and immersed himself in photography. Through his lens, he has seen sides of the world he had never been privy to before.

"I've seen real people," he said, "people who didn't go to Gilman or Princeton or a country club driving nice cars." In September, he will go to Korea to teach English through a Princeton program. It will afford him the opportunity to travel and photograph people in the Far East.

After that year, he is unsure what the future holds for him. He is considering three graduate degrees — a master's of fine arts in photography, a law degree and a rabbinical degree. He credits the Paquin project with stirring his interests in the rabbinate. "I like the counseling aspect of being a rabbi," said Mr. Goldman, who became a bar mitzvah at the Conservative Chizuk Amuno Congregation.

Mr. Goldman is on a mission of self-discovery, one that began with his thesis show at Princeton, a series of self-portraits that Mr. Gowin called a "blockbuster." After turning the focus on himself, he was better able to understand the subjects who now fill his lens.

"If I am trying to discover the true person behind these mothers," he said, "then I need to discover the true person behind me." □

"Lullabies: Recent Photographs" is on display at Galerie Françoise et Ses Freres, in Greenspring Station, through Aug. 24. For more information, call (410) 337-2787.