

# Arts

## Cracking the Metaphoric Mirror

Artist Jonathan Goldman Looks at Himself and Others in a New Way

By Matthew S. Robinson  
Advocate Staff

BOSTON — Since he was a young boy, Jonathan Goldman's life has been deeply steeped in Jewish values. So deeply steeped, in fact, that it affected his educational career.

Raised outside of Baltimore, Goldman attended nursery school and kindergarten at his neighborhood synagogue. When he came home one day and asked his parents why they didn't keep kosher, they promptly sent young Jonathan to an all-boys private school where he was one of only a small group of Jews.

"Being a minority made me stronger in my faith," Goldman says.

This ironic reaction was taken to its extreme when Goldman went to Korea to teach English and prepare a photographic essay at a school for learning disabled children.

"I was never more Jewish than in a country with no synagogues," Goldman maintains.

In Korea, Goldman recalls, Jews were greatly unknown.

"All they knew, or claimed to know, was that Jews were smart and wealthy," Goldman recalls.

These positionings as the "other" profoundly affected Goldman's religious fervor and also led him to his latest creation.

From September 14 through October 1, Goldman's thesis exhibition from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts will be on display at the Aidekman Arts Center at Tufts University.

Entitled "Stereotypical Evidence:



Jonathan Goldman looks at the affects of stereotypes

Documentary Portraiture," Goldman's show deals with how people view each other and how they view themselves.

Though all subjects have been candidly photographed, the photographs will be hung on a separate wall. The only clues to the subjects' identities will be a series of questionnaires on which have been placed each subject's toothbrush, keys and watch.

"These personal effects provide a better metaphor and symbol for the person because they are less loaded," Goldman posits. "At base, they are all the same, but they can also be very different."

For example, while one subject has a worn-out toothbrush from the local drug store, another has a highly advanced mechanical model. In addition to demonstrating how each perceives the importance of dental hygiene, the differences also say something about how, though all people are similar, there are differences even among the similarities.

"Basically," Goldman says, "Bill Gates and a starving child in Africa are the same, at least relative to other beings," Goldman notes. "However, we tend to focus on differences."

By removing the obvious differences (e.g., race and gender) from the depictions of his subjects, Goldman hopes to instruct and challenge his viewers to look at themselves and each other differently.

"If someone is black or white," he says, "you can't avoid that element of them and many people attach values to those attributes. What I want to talk about are the more important elements of these people. These objects allow us to see differences among the people without seeing the people themselves."

The questionnaires focus on personal issues such as what social class the subjects consider themselves to be in, what their fondest childhood memories are, etc. Though the people may be very different (at least by outward appearances), surprising similarities arise.

"A gay man and a poor black woman both remember times with their families," Goldman observes.

Goldman first focused on identity and human interaction while studying at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Policy and Public Affairs.

"I didn't want to major in anything in particular," Goldman admits, "so I created my own focus area in how domestic policy has influenced the development of racial-, ethnic-, religious- and gender-based groups."

This intensive study of individuals and communities was enhanced by Goldman's post-graduate work with Hillel of Greater Baltimore at Johns Hopkins University.

"I got to see how different Jews reacted within a community," he recalls, noting how, even though they were all Jewish, the Hillel community was often greatly divided.

"Even with that base similarity, many of them couldn't talk to each other," he says. "I tried to remind them of the idea of *kol ha'kavod* — we're all one."

Though it is a daunting self-assignment, Goldman is still trying to remind his community of this fact.

"I want to use what I've learned to

help people," Goldman says, noting how a percentage of proceeds from his show will go to the Metro Boston Housing Authority. "I want to help with *tikkun olam* — the repairing of the world."

Through pointing out the superficialities of differences between people in new and provocative ways, Jonathan Goldman may do just that.

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