

WHILE YOU WERE OUT

For photographers who teach, summer break is precious time to practice what they preach. That's valuable not only for their growth as artists, but also for the continuing education it provides about the process of making pictures—lessons they can pass on to their students. We spoke with three photo teachers to find out the creative ways they spent their summers.

BY RUSSELL HART

From Richard Ross's project *Girls in Justice*: "I got kicked out of school for partying and truancy. I use meth. They have had me here for two weeks. I think they keep me here because they think I am a risk of hurting myself. When they want to come in, they come in, they don't knock or anything—this is the observation room. There are five other girls here I think for things like running away and curfew violations...lewd and lascivious conduct, selling meth, robbery, weed...stuff like that." —C.T., age 15

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RICHARD ROSS: GIRLS IN JUSTICE

Professor, University of California, Santa Barbara

Richard Ross has devoted the past five years to an exploration of the growing problem of imprisoned young people, creating portraits of them in detention facilities across the country. He presented this work in 2012's award-winning book *Juvenile in Justice*, which featured 150 portraits and interviews with their subjects.

A second volume, *Girls in Justice*, is due out in January 2015. "As the project evolved, I realized that the children in this system aren't all just small adults in orange jumpsuits," says the photographer. "The girls experience incarceration differently from boys." Getting into facilities was tough, and Ross was not allowed to name the girls or show their faces—which is why, in most of the images, his subject turns away; he blurs those that would have contained a recognizable face.

Ross is comfortable with this limitation. "I don't want these kids having an image come back to haunt them," he explains. He also feels that the absence of an identifiable face makes the images more universal. "I want someone to feel that it could be herself, or his or her own daughter, or any kid they might know whose normal adoles-

"My mom is deceased. Drug overdose. I stayed with my auntie in Compton until I was 11. She was abusive, verbally and physically. I went to maybe 15 to 20 foster homes. They were all ladies, no man in the home. My baby is one. His daddy's family took him to Vegas to see his daddy. He wouldn't give my baby back. The baby was in the hospital with a lung problem. I asked my social worker if I could go to see my baby. She said I had to wait until my next court date in two months to see the judge. So I went AWOL to see my baby. They picked me up and now I am 241.1—dual custody between dependency and delinquency for going AWOL. I just wanted to see my baby." —T.L., age 16

cent behavior has been criminalized," he says.

When Ross first meets his subjects, he sits on the floor of their cells. "I spend about an hour taking notes," he says. Ross's interviews confirm the circumstances, typically beyond a girl's control, that landed her in detention. At the end, he says, "I cry. These kids are heartbreaking. But it's a privilege to have them trust me with their stories." And the stories are crucial—excerpts from the interviews accompany each image as its title.

While an art critic might make much of the connection between *Girls in Justice* and earlier projects such as the Guggenheim-funded *The Architecture of Authority* (spaces that "exert power" over people), or *Waiting for the End of the World* (post-Cold War bomb shelters)—and the way in which they show how fluid the line between security and captivity can be—the photographer's objectives are more altruistic. "I'm more interested in changing the way we treat kids," says Ross. *Girls in Justice* will hang this fall in the rotunda of Washington, D.C.'s Russell Senate Office Building, where, he hopes, "policy makers see it and it moves the discussion forward."



"I've only been here 17 days. I've been in ICU for four days. During the day you're not allowed to lay down. If they see you laying down, they take away your mattress. I got in a fight. I hit the staff while they were trying to break it up. They think I'm intimidating. I can't go out into the day room; I have to stay in the cell. They release me for a shower. I've been to Oak Creek three times. I have a daughter, so I'm stressed. My sister ran away from home with a white dude. When my sister left I was sort of alone. .then my mother left with a new boyfriend, so my aunt has custody. My aunt smoked weed, snorts powder, does pills, lots of prescription stuff. I started running away. So I was basically grown when I was about 14. But I wasn't doing meth. Then I stopped going to school and dropped out after eighth grade. Then I was in a parenting program for young mothers...then I left that, so they said I was endangering my baby. The people in the program were scared of me. I was selling meth, crack, and powder when I was 15. I was Measure 11. I was with some other girls—they blame the crime on me, and I took the charges because I was the youngest. They beat up this girl and stole from her, but I didn't do it. But they charged me with assault and robbery, too."

—K.Y., age 19



ANDREA MODICA: HORSE SENSE

Professor, Drexel University

"I've never been a documentarian," says Andrea Modica. Anyone familiar with Modica's pensive images would agree. Yet one of her summer projects seems, on its surface, to be documentary: a study of horses recovering from surgical anesthesia in Bagiarolo di Budrio near Bologna, Italy.

Modica has been to Italy many times since a 1990 Fulbright Scholarship in Sicily. This summer she connected with a veterinarian who specializes in horses, a man who also happened to be an artist. Sympathetic to Modica's fascination with his day job, the vet invited her to set up her 8x10 view camera where she pleased. "I was primarily drawn to the post-operative recovery rooms," says the photographer. "They were simple padded stalls with overhead windows that created beautiful, soft light, with floors covered in the doctor's shredded junk mail, medical journals, and art publications."

Modica's horses are at odds with our usual notions of equine beauty and grandness. Rather than standing tall they languish on the floor,

Above: Funny Boy, Show Jumper, Castration, 2014.

mouths open, as likely to be dead as alive. That uncertainty makes the images disturbing and poignant. "I'm deeply interested in ambiguity," says Modica. "The images are printed in platinum, by contact, so they have a beauty that may seem in opposition to the horses' vulnerable state."

Photographing this subject with a view camera seems counter to the demands of its environment, in which low light creates a risk of blur. "I required a minimum one-second exposure," Modica recalls. "The horses were still enough for that. But I got that adrenaline rush from having to get it done before the horse woke up and bolted. An attending vet would quickly close the doors to the stall at the first flicker of an eyelid."

When asked about the impact on viewers of her unorthodox representation of an animal that has such sentimental meaning for humans, Modica demurs. "Though shooting is often emotionally charged for me, my method of working is to tackle the problem of physically making the photograph," she says. "So I give little conscious attention to what the outcome might mean for a viewer. Of course, this changes after I live with the image and think about putting it out into the world."



Above: Speed Fire,
American Saddle Horse,
Tooth Extraction, 2014.
Left: Romeo, Pony,
Inguinal Biopsy, 2014.



JAIME PERMUTH: EL SISTEMA

Faculty, School of Visual Arts

“El Sistema” refers to the Sistema de Orquestas de Guatemala, a nonprofit group that aims to give hope and self-esteem to that Latin American nation’s disadvantaged young people by teaching them to play classical music. Jaime Permut produced the project’s photographs and video on a recent three-week trip to Guatemala.

The photographer’s first subject was a small string orchestra in a remote agricultural village. “The locals refer to it as the Orchestra of Vegetables,” says Permut. “The conductor finances the group with proceeds from his yearly crop.” He then traveled to a larger town with a 50-piece youth orchestra now sponsored by the local government. “Originally, a group of five musicians earned money to buy the instruments by selling homemade burritos from backpacks in the local marketplace,” he says. Permut’s final stop was a still-larger orchestra of students at a Catholic school in a crime-ridden neighborhood of Guatemala City. “The school has been under siege from local gang

Above: “Untitled,” from *El Sistema*, 2014.

members trying to extort money,” he says. “The perimeter is surrounded by razor wire.”

Permut says that photographing in the school was like working in a bunker. Indeed, the ease and upbeat nature of *El Sistema*’s images belie the often difficult circumstances of their creation. Permut didn’t make things any easier with his determination not simply to show young people learning and playing their instruments in formal settings, but also to put their experience in the context of a sometimes desperate daily life by including images of such things as the sugar cane harvest, their ramshackle homes, and the daunting barricades that are often part of the landscape. “I wanted to raise awareness of the dire conditions in which my country’s youth struggle to reach adulthood and self-realization,” Permut explains. “But I also wanted to find a metaphor for hope and redemption.”

Permut spent the rest of his summer in Washington, D.C., on a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship. That project, titled *The Street Becomes*, incorporates archival images from the Smithsonian’s Anacostia Community Museum and the National Museum of American History. **AP**



Two images, "Untitled,"
from the series *El Sistema*, 2014.