

Lou Stoumen Award Winners: The Legacy



EXHIBITION RESOURCE

Curriculum Resource for:

Lou Stoumen Award Winners: The Legacy
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Cover Image: Mikhael Subotzky (South African, b. 1981), *Cell, Voorberg Prison*, 2004, Digital print, Gift of the artist to the Lou Stoumen Collection, 2008.037.006

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Lou Stoumen was a photographer, filmmaker, teacher, poet, and author. In his long career he traveled all over the world, creating thousands of images renowned for their humanistic approach to photography. After retiring to northern California in 1988, he arranged his estate so that upon his death the Museum of Photographic Arts would receive his archive. In addition, he established an endowment through MoPA that allowed for a financial award to be given to a successful working photographer.

The Lou Stoumen Prize for Photography is awarded to a mid-career photographer whose work relates in spirit to Stoumen's own humanistic style of photography. The photographic work of the prize recipient should explore the nature of people, cultures, religions, science, and/or social causes. The award is not designed to distinguish novelty, technical innovation, or fame, but instead to acknowledge a photographer who conveys heart, compassion, and sustained productivity in the field.

The Museum of Photographic Arts has awarded the Lou Stoumen Prize five times. The first award went to Debbie Fleming Caffery in 1996. Following recipients include Kenro Izu (1998), James Nachtwey (2002), and more recently Gary Schneider (2006). MoPA is proud to present the 2009 Lou Stoumen Prize to South African photographer Mikhael Subotzky.

Lou Stoumen Award Winners: The Legacy presents the photographic work of all past prize recipients, examining the work that won each of them their award. Also included in this exhibition are projects continued or completed after receiving the Lou Stoumen Prize for Photography.



Lou Stoumen, *Sea of Hats, New York*, 1940, gelatin silver, Bequest of the Lou Stoumen Estate, 1992.001.130

Debbie Fleming Caffery

Debbie Fleming Caffery was the first recipient of the Lou Stoumen Prize for Photography in 1996. Born in 1948, Caffery grew up in Louisiana, an area infused with the rich cultures of Cajun and African American food, music, and storytelling. Living across from a sugar mill she would often watch mill workers with a great deal of intensity and interest, always nervous that they would fall into the deep and treacherous waters of the bayou. Watching them work, she was conscious of the struggles and injustices that they faced due to their race and occupation. She began to photograph her first subjects in 1972, the African American workers throughout the sugar cane fields and mills of Louisiana. Caffery writes that since 1973, she returns to Louisiana each year to photograph the sugar cane harvest.

"The deepest root of my life's work began very young through watching and hearing unbelievable stories of injustices, struggles and survival among the African American community."

Caffery's connection to her subjects is strong, as if it were a love affair. Her images are not simple documents of life. She evokes the mystery and spirit of the people and places that she photographs. She is drawn to subjects that are "organic and emotional" and is remarkably comfortable in the shadows. As a result, her images often evoke a powerful emotional connection between herself as photographer, and her subjects. Her photographic style varies between straight portraiture and mysterious documentation but retain relatively constant themes of movements, shadows, darkness, and deep emotions.

After winning the Stoumen prize, Caffery traveled to Mexico. She lived in a small Mexican village on the grounds of a church for several years while she photographed. Aside from photographing in her native Louisiana, Caffery has worked on a number of other projects include photographs of rural Portugal, documentation of alligator hunting in Louisiana, Mardi Gras carnival performers, and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.



Debbie Fleming Caffery (American, b. 1948), *The Untouchables*, 2004, Gelatin silver print, Courtesy of the artist



Debbie Fleming Caffery (American, b. 1948), *Ocotlan*, 2004, Gelatin silver print, Courtesy of the artist