

Elena Haskins

2018 Whalen Symposium Proposal

"Exploring Adoption from Behind the Lens" Photography series

Faculty Sponsor: Rhonda Vanover, Cinema, Photography, & Media Arts Program

*Who gets to decide what family is? How can we celebrate adoptive identities through art?* This documentary series observes families with adopted children in the private sphere: their homes. The series aims to observe and celebrate what "family" means, while taking a closer look at their different relationships and lifestyles. It serves as an observational study to gain a better understanding of family cohesion, while celebrating biological differences. It is composed of documentary style photography of 8 local Ithaca families, each with varying adoptive situations including international, local, LGBTQ, and transracial. This series has also allowed me to explore my own identity as an adopted individual, and understand my relationship to the photographed families and my own parents. I have experimented with different forms of photography over the years through other series and coursework. I found that this documentary style is the most appropriate way to explore this topic, and allows me to connect with other people on a very intimate level through trust. I have gained inspiration from photographers like Sally Mann, Larry Sultan, and Walker Evans who captured their subjects in an observational, storytelling manner. This work will be presented as matted photographs with between 6-7 images, each conveying different moments of the families. The images will be presented to the audience in an art gallery style, to allow people to interpret the images in their own way and connect their experiences with family to the work. I can speak about my process, what I have learned about the photography, and how this varies from other series. This series contributes to the field of visual art and photography because it utilizes the medium to investigate and observe relationships and also document growth over time. It serves as a mode of storytelling, and identifies specific qualities about the people. Documentary work is different from candid family portraits because it contributes to a common theme and message, which in this case is adoptive family cohesion, and is carefully composed rather than capturing random moments.

Showing: Board/ Wall to display work