

2009/10 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships Young Photographer's Alliance Honorable Mention



NICOLE NOLAN

Photography
Graduate student
Pratt Institute

My name is Nicole Nolan, and I approach my life as I approach my art and my students: with an open mind that explores probabilities and allows possibilities to happen. Most recently, I have been working as a resident artist with the VSA Arts of Colorado and the Denver Public School Star Program, teaching photography to young people with physical and developmental disabilities, how to use and enhance their innate creativity. I use photography as a way to help them explore, understand and control their world, and as a means of showing others their vision and personal reality.

My goal is to instill greater self-esteem, release their creative energy and provide them a way of contributing to society. The creative art experience, found in my classes, helps students communicate more effectively and discover who they are. Many such students have been slated for failure and dependency, and I am certain that my art classes have moved them closer toward a renewed sense of confidence. My students have exhibited their work at the Access Gallery, giving them a feeling of accomplishment and proving to themselves that if they put their minds to it, they



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could achieve anything. Since then, my students have pushed themselves even further to explore concepts and abilities deep within themselves.

Advocating for disabled young people is a mission for me. I instinctively feel the anguish of injustice toward those who are different; this empathy comes from personal experiences of intolerance and isolation as a young child. I was not your ordinary child. I was diagnosed with dyslexia and attention deficit disorder. My differences were noticeable, leading to horrible teasing and being ostracized. Today, my "disabilities" guide my work; I use art to reveal my world and the ways it affects me. The camera has offered me the perfect vehicle to challenge commonly held notions of reality. As Plato suggested, I realized that truth is nothing but the shadow of reality. In this digital era, reality is no longer obvious and can easily be manipulated. The real world and the fabricated world are one; my images are drawn from both worlds. I want to show the universality of things, and how things that are different are really also similar. I am not trying to make a loud statement; I am just trying to create an open dialog. The final piece of artwork is less important than the path I take to get there.

I was just accepted to graduate school at Pratt Institute in New York where I will earn my Master of Fine Arts. I will become involved in VSA of New York. I plan to continue working with young people in order to mentor and inspire a more creative population of human beings. I believe that when people create art, they become more conscious of their own worth and this translates into becoming a more sensitive and justice loving person. I want to help students use their creativity to build a better world. The process of making art is, for me, like life—it evolves, it grows, it changes, and it is about the journey.

