



Bridging the border

Film project illustrates both sides of border debate

by Ljiljana Ciric

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A group of Mexican immigrants smile next to their sleeping bags while they make their journey to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. On the other side of the border, Minutemen laugh with each other while surveying open land. Although their lives are different on many levels, both groups have a belief in a better future.

The "Border Film Project: El Proyecto Fronterizo Fotografico" is a photography exhibit with no names and no picture descriptions. A selection of 2,000 photographs show only faces of undocumented migrants and Minutemen telling their sides of the immigration story.

The "Border Film Project" is a collective effort of three friends, Brett Huneycutt, Victoria Criado and Rudy Adler - a Rhodes Scholar, filmmaker, and a Wall Street analyst. In the summer of 2005, they distributed more than 600 disposable cameras in prepaid, stamped envelopes to two groups on both sides of the border.

The amateur photographs present a rare insight into the complexities of immigrants facing the dangers of the desert at all costs to reach their American dream. It also depicts U.S. citizens who attempt to secure the border against these newcomers.

"Our project seeks to show the American public the true human content of immigration and sides of the issues that they would otherwise never see," Huneycutt says.

Huneycutt, a Phoenix native, says two distinct experiences were behind the idea for the project.

First, the friends visited the town of Altar, Mexico, in 2005. There they met a young mother and her three school-age children, a 12-year-old son, an 8-year-old daughter and a 5-year-old diabetic son, planning to cross the border in search of a better life. The family inspired them, Huneycutt says, to find a way to show the determination through the eyes of those who are crossing the desert.

The second inspiration came from spending a considerable amount of time with the volunteers of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps. They accompanied dozens of Minuteman volunteers on a weekend observation in Three Points, Ariz., and were surprised by the sensibility and likability of the so-called "vigilantes."

"I like that the project allows the migrants and the Minutemen to speak for themselves," Huneycutt says. "It goes deeper than the stereotypes of 'illegal aliens' and 'armed vigilantes' that the mainstream media portray."

Luis Ibarra and Teresa Rosano of Ibarra Rosano Design Architects in Tucson, who designed the exhibition setting, were inspired by the border shadows - both literal and metaphoric. They used principles of time, sequence and space in conjunction with shadow, light and sound to create a compelling atmosphere for gaining insight into these volatile issues.

David Gariboldi, a sophomore at Brophy College Preparatory high



Photo courtesy of the Border Film Project

This image from the "Minuteman Series" shows the other side of the border, where U.S. citizens dedicate their time to keeping immigrants out of the country.



Photo courtesy of the Border Film Project

This fence in the middle of the desert is only one obstacle this immigrant faced in his quest to cross the border.



Photo courtesy of the Border Film Project

This fence in the middle of the desert is only one obstacle this immigrant faced in his quest to cross the border.

school in Phoenix, came to see the exhibit for his school's Human Dignity seminar about border crossing. He says it was valuable for him to see what the immigrants are truly going through.

"It was appealing to see how hard it is for them to cross the border and search for a better life," Gariboldi says. "You don't see this in the media."

Jane Scribner, a sales representative at the RoomStore who recently moved from Texas, says she liked that both sides were equally represented.

"It's almost like a firsthand experience," Scribner says.

The exhibit, which opened Sept. 16 and runs through Jan. 28, 2007, is displayed at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art located in downtown Scottsdale near the corner of Drinkwater Boulevard and Second Street.

Huneycutt says immigration is the single most important domestic issue facing the United States in political, social and economic terms. It is also an extremely controversial and divisive issue that should be seen from all sides. "There is truth on both sides of the immigration issue, and the solution undoubtedly lies somewhere in the middle," he says.

One message that clearly echoes through the exhibit is that despite differences, both immigrants and Minutemen share a common belief, Huneycutt says.

"They are documenting a situation that should not be happening," he says. "U.S. border policy is broken and needs to be fixed in a comprehensive way."

If you go...

"Border Film Project:

El Proyecto Fronterizo Fotografico"

Sept. 16, 2006 through Jan. 28, 2007
Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art
7374 East Second Street, Scottsdale

Closed Mondays

Open Tuesday, Wednesday

Friday and Saturday,

10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Thursday 10:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Sunday 12:00 noon - 5:00 p.m.

\$7 general admission, \$5 students

borderfilmproject.com for more information

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