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Advanced Photography/Video

Lens as Witness: Photography and Resistance
Exhibition Review

Lens as Witness: Photography and Resistance takes on the relationship between photography and social justice from the 1960s till now. The exhibition asks the question: What does social justice mean to me? How does conflict show up in my own lived experience and in my spaces? As a medium, photography is used here to capture moments in time, showing various resistances from different perspectives. The exhibition successfully brings together images of local and national history and experiences, and finds interesting ways to promote conversations about oppositional movements.

One thing that succeeded in this exhibition was the use of juxtaposition to talk about opposing viewpoints and movements. In many cases, photographs of opposing ideas are placed above/below each other, or side by side. For example one of the first pairings of photographs are “Untitled” Vida 2025 and “Ceasefire Now” Jorge Paz 2024 which depict opposing shows of support for Israel/Palestine. The Untitled work by Vida does not directly make any statement, but invites questions about “heritage, political beliefs, or religious identity,” which an image of a house near Waterman Ave. in San Bernadino, with chipped paint, cracks in the street, and and the flag of Israel hanging on the porch. When paired with “Ceasefire Now” which captures protestors waving the Palestinian flag and a large banner that bears the same message as the work's title, the viewer can contextualize both images as being in conflict with one another. This primary juxtaposition shaped how I viewed the rest of the exhibition, leading me to questions of resistance in communities.

Two gelatin silver prints by Fred W. McDarrah juxtaposed the Antiwar and Pro-Vietnam War engagements, starting us off in the earliest part of the timeline for the exhibition in 1966-7. The images are thought provoking from the text “We regret to inform you” versus “God Bless America/Bomb Hano” to the subjects of the Antiwar piece being mostly women, and the subjects of the Pro-War piece being mainly men. Again, the placement of these two images provide context to the other, provide alternate perspectives on the same event, but also provide an example of resistance by these communities.

A powerful aspect of this exhibition is the space in which it was shown, at Cal State University in San Bernardino. Many of the works are centered in the Inland Empire/San Bernadino, using images that reflect the site it is displayed in. Other images such as “Faith in the Streets”/“Shadows of Authority” by Freddy Calderon highlight the moments of protest and peace that have been shadowed by violent intervention or police presence. These Images and the

work by Tomas McGovern from their series Swap Meet - This is San Bernardino “Chasing Shadows” by Amy Zapatista and Church of Decay, bear witness to the history and experience of living in the area, especially as people from communities that have been targeted and discriminated against. Laying flat in the exhibition are newspaper/campus published clippings from the university’s past student-led advocacy groups, and both their successes and pushback against them. Here, viewers can see the struggle of Black and Latino/a, women, queer/LGBTQ+, and disabled students in finding community and support, from fighting for Affirmative Action Programs, to sharing resources, to finding spaces where they are safe and celebrated. Bringing the college's own history of representation or repentance against it becomes more powerful when presented in the space it occurred.

