

"Island Souls" exhibit at Wailoa Center portrays the inner self | Big Island Weekly

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By Yisa Var

Who are you? A simple question to answer if a stranger asks, but if you ask this question of yourself, the answer can become quite complex. Photographer Michael Philip Manheim asks every one of his subjects to ponder the answer within and without words, letting the real self pour through to the surface.

Manheim uses an unusual technique that layers images on top of one another, multiple exposures that create one photo. Through his art, he has found a link to his subjects' deeper soul.

Manheim shares a little about his current work: "Island Souls is the Big Island segment of my Solo-Souls project. Solo-Souls began in 1996 as an experiment with Peter Sieg when he visited me in the Boston, Massachusetts area. I had met Peter on Maui, when I was developing this technique as a collaborative photographic exploration."

The goal of Manheim's photography is to reveal one's true inner self, and even bring to light emotions that the subject was unaware of. "In this approach, I ask each subject to reach within, release feelings that bubble up from inside, and turn that release into movement. I am a witness, not a director, so I only react, creating multiple exposures as my subject moves. Many exposures land onto one frame in the camera. I do nothing after the fact, other than creating the best print. Whatever works did so in the camera. Whatever didn't work is edited out."

Manheim admits that this soul-capturing photography is a far cry from his roots, yet he manages to find parallels. "It's so different from the photojournalism that began my career. But it's also alike. I had an early fascination with movement, with light, with composition, all primarily relating to the human condition. Developing skills in all these areas gave me the freedom to react quickly and reflexively." Manheim adds, "As my work evolved into fine art, I wanted initially to show the body in motion, with the nude in nature. But I wanted to develop a technique that was more impressionistic, and different from other approaches I had seen. The surprise was that the results were so often unlike the person's literal self. My multiple exposure method created interpretive possibilities that I brought into the studio. When I experimented with Peter Sieg I was amazed and delighted that the inner self would also appear in head-and-shoulders portraiture."

Manheim's incredible works will be on display at Wailoa Center, 200 Piopio Street in Hilo from July 8 through July 28, with a special opening reception Friday, July 8 from 5 p.m. – 7 p.m. The event is free and open to the public. Manheim dedicates his exhibit to Peter Sieg, who passed away in late 2010.

If you are curious about what lies beneath your own exterior, Manheim is looking for subjects to photograph. It's free, and some of the new images will be added to the exhibit. He trades prints or scans for a model release. Interested volunteers can stop by Patricia's Transitions, located at 277 Keawe Street, Wednesdays and Saturdays from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. during the month of July.

For more information about the artist or this and other exhibits, visit:

www.See-Saw.us

or

<http://michaelphilipmanheim.com/island-souls/>

Sidebar:

A personal account:

As a lover of the arts, I was compelled to volunteer for Mr. Manheim's project. I was curious to know more about his style of photography and see if he could capture the real Yisa on film.

We entered a small room where I quietly sat on a stool. Mr. Manheim stood at the other end of the room and asked me to simply take time to focus on all the chaos that I hear in my head; the stresses, frustrations and happiness in my life. I thought of so many subjects, both happy and sad. The first few rounds of photos captured a person I didn't recognize. There was a sadness in my eyes that I connected with, yet didn't realize was so prominent. The hardships I have faced lately read in my expression and my movement. For the next few rounds of photos, I focused on the happier things in my life and let those voices come through. I found myself laughing out loud to my own thoughts, which resulted in calm and happy photos that showed a hopefulness and peacefulness that I have never seen expressed before. Something about the building of the exposures pieces together a story of the true self. It was not only cathartic, it also helped me to become more aware of the emotions in my own life and how I react to them, not on the surface, but to the core. The session took an hour, but the experience will last a lifetime.