



JONATHAN FUNG

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A music professor once explained that if a person stands in front a piece of art, expressing hate or admiration, it is not the piece of art itself that they find distasteful or pleasurable. Rather, they are responding to an aspect of themselves that is reflected in the piece. Art, then, is relative in nature and does not exist in isolation. It is a mirror of pure intention, reconfigured by the artist to reflect the unseen, the angles that go unnoticed just by viewing straight on. At times these unseen angles prompt the viewer to question how they understand and interact with the world. Interdisciplinary artist, filmmaker, photographer, professor, and pastor Jonathan Fung wields this principal in his work, provoking social consciousness in an effort to bring light to otherwise dark corners of society. Jonathan is first and foremost an advocate and social activist. He is devoted to utilizing the creative process to bring much-needed attention

to the atrocities of modern slavery and human trafficking. While still surprising to some, California—especially the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles—is recognized as a major hotspot for human trafficking and modern slavery. In 2018 alone, Polaris Project confirmed over 3,000 victims of human trafficking in California. These numbers, however, are just the tip of the iceberg as they only represent cases being reported through Polaris's national hotline. Jonathan currently serves as faculty fellow for the Mosaic Cross Cultural Center and is a professor of photography at San Jose State University, where he advocates for historically underrepresented students and teaches through a social justice lens. He hopes to instill a sense of love and compassion that his students will pay forward in their own work. Jonathan accomplishes this through what he knows best: art. "The power of art can overcome psychic numb-



Down the Rabbit Hole, 2009



Peep, Washington DC, 2014



Hark, 2012

ing and humanize social justice issues and initiate conversation to attempt to bring change and healing," Jonathan says. An image can touch the viewer and stimulate an instant response.

In 2016, his site installation piece, *PEEP*, was exhibited in the Bay Area as part of Super Bowl 50 and in Washington, DC, for the 5x5 Nonuments exhibition, to bring awareness to the commodification of people in the human trafficking trade. Here, Jonathan made multiple circular holes in a shipping container for viewers to peep through. Inside, the viewer saw alphabet blocks dangling. As they slowly turned, photos of enslaved children revealed themselves on the blocks. Then a row of sewing machines came into focus, symbolizing labor trafficking.

One of the main elements that makes Jonathan's artistic approach unique and powerful is how he uses the physical reality of a situation or place to form the basis, or medium, by which he tells a story. The medium, therefore, is always shifting, dependent on the physical reality of the subject matter. It is as if Jonathan is moving the mirror to reflect the objects which occupy a space or situation in the way he wants you to see them.

In one of his first video pieces in 2001, titled *I Eat Therefore I am*, Jonathan created a short video of his father eating various foods as a meditation on his father's then recent episode of strokes affecting his short-term memory and giving him a new obsession with food. Jonathan focused the video on his eating, interspersing it with images of his father's brain scans. The short video was then projected onto a dining table. Jonathan was able to create a piece where the mundane is key to articulating the subtle changes that age and health bring to us all. This method of moving and reframing the viewers point of view is prominent in Jonathan's work as he strives to undo the numbing of the human psyche.

In 2009's *Down the Rabbit Hole* art installation, Jonathan and collaborators used the placement of everyday objects to communicate the dis-

"The power of art can overcome psychic numbing and humanize social justice issues and initiate conversation to attempt to bring change and healing."

-Jonathan Fung

tance and discord between the normal life of a child and the gut-wrenching reality of a sex worker. Visitors were confronted with the uncomfortable and sober depiction of the environment a sex slave would work and live in. In one room, condom wrappers, penicillin, and morning-after pills were strewn around a dirty, bare mattress while a loop of Alice falling down the rabbit hole played on a TV. In the next room a video projection of a child on a merry-go-round played on an empty crib. This is reality arranged metaphorically, designed to bring awareness to the suffering that goes on unseen around us.

Jonathan's journey into advocating for victims began in 2008 upon learning about the horrific realities of human trafficking at a summit in Chicago. While initially over-

whelmed, as a parent himself, Jonathan felt compelled to devote his efforts toward bringing awareness to this social issue. After much research, he hit the ground running, producing multiple events and collaborating with other agencies, social activists, and other creatives.

"I value collaboration, which is rewarding and creates synergy," Jonathan says. "I enjoy creating a team of artists and also including students to mentor on a shared vision." One of Jonathan's greatest accomplishments came from collaborating with screenwriter Benjamin Enos and executive producer Leslie K. Hodge on the 15-minute short film entitled *Hark*, which Jonathan produced and directed. The film focuses on one man's moral dilemma between saving his own life or helping a young girl escape with hers. *Hark* highlights the way that perpetrators of human trafficking take advantage of a victim's weaknesses and exploit personal situations. The film won many awards, including best director and best narrative short film. More importantly, it is used to educate others on human trafficking at various screenings and conferences.

Jonathan's most recent exhibition was a video sculpture in Redwood City. *Play* consisted of vintage television sets arranged sliding down a playground slide. On each TV was a different video of teenagers playing, highlighting the innocence that should be protected by society rather than abused and commodified. Jonathan's subject matter is complex and challenging, to say the least. He leans heavily on his family and faith for inspiration and strength. Jonathan explains: "My relationship with God is important to me, which helps my creativity and is one of my main inspirations. Proverbs 31:8-9 has given me the strength to never waver in my fight to help eradicate human trafficking through arts advocacy and social practice." Proverbs 31:8-9 reads, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice." 