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***The Fourth Grade Project* opens at the Bullock Museum on Saturday, June 25**

The exhibition features photographs of and insights from fourth graders from around the world

JUNE 22, 2022 (AUSTIN, TX) — *The Fourth Grade Project*, an exhibition highlighting the work of acclaimed visual artist Judy Gelles (1944–2020), opens at the Bullock Texas State History Museum this Saturday, June 25. The photography exhibition features images and personal stories of school children across the globe.

Between 2008 and 2019, Gelles interviewed and photographed more than 300 fourth grade students from a wide range of economic and cultural backgrounds in numerous countries and in multiple areas of the United States. She asked each of the students the same three basic life questions: Who do you live with? What do you wish for? What do you worry about? Their voices capture poignant experiences and insights that speak to both the commonalities and distinctions in growing up in different families and communities.

"The Bullock Museum selected this traveling exhibition prior to the start of the pandemic. Welcoming thousands of fourth graders studying Texas history at the Museum every year, we felt the beautiful and thoughtful way the artist captured the image and voice of each student would resonate with our audiences in a meaningful way," said Bullock Museum Director Margaret Koch. "Considering the challenges our communities have had to face since Judy Gelles completed the project in 2019, we invite visitors to pause and reflect and find a heartfelt connection with the students interviewed. They show a wisdom beyond their years."

The photographs in the exhibition capture students in a combination of frontal and reverse portraits, reflecting the spectrum of countries included and each caretaker's reaction to photography. In the United States, photographing from the front can be problematic due to privacy issues, while in other countries it is considered disrespectful to photograph from the back. In all of the photographs the children are presented as individuals, and their juxtaposed stories speak to greater pervasive truths and challenges within our society.

The exhibition also allows visitors to contemplate the same questions that Gelles posed to the students with interactive experiences. Visitors can reflect on their responses with a mirror interactive or become a part of the exhibition by posing and snapping their own photograph. The exhibition is presented in English and Spanish, and an educator guide is available to help



Judy Gelles, *St. Lucia Portrait*, St. Lucia, Public School, 2015; digital print on Diabond; 40 x 30 inches, Courtesy of Pentimenti Gallery, Philadelphia.

teachers with lesson plans focusing on global understanding and tolerance.

Gelles, who passed away in 2020, received her MFA in photography from the Rhode Island School of Design and her Masters in Counseling from the University of Miami. She had a long-time focus on themes of family and children, with work in major collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

“A notable commonality across all schools is that every group of fourth graders has very little contact with or knowledge of people from cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds different than their own. Nine-year-old children are on the cusp of adolescence. They are able to think critically and consider relationships to be very important. They are socially conscious, interested in helping others, and openly curious about the world. It is also a moment in children’s development when worldviews start to become entrenched and paths for the future start to become more set,” said Gelles. “The project allows students to learn about others’ lives in a uniquely personal way and to use the project as a catalyst for their own explorations.”

The Fourth Grade Project is on view at the Bullock Museum from June 25 through December 11, 2022. For more information, visit TheStoryofTexas.com.

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The Fourth Grade Project is a program of ExhibitsUSA, a national division of Mid-America Arts Alliance with Texas Commission on the Arts and The National Endowment for the Arts.

The Bullock Museum, a division of the Texas State Preservation Board, is funded by Museum members, donors, and patrons, the Texas State History Museum Foundation, and the State of Texas.

ABOUT THE BULLOCK MUSEUM

The Bullock Texas State History Museum, a division of the State Preservation Board and an accredited institution of the American Alliance of Museums, illuminates and celebrates Texas history, people, and culture. With dynamic, award-winning exhibitions, educational programming for all ages, and an IMAX® theater with the largest screen in Texas, the Museum collaborates with more than 700 museums, libraries, archives and individuals across the world to bring the Story of Texas to life.

ABOUT EXHIBITSUSA

This exhibition is toured by ExhibitsUSA, a national program of Mid-America Arts Alliance. ExhibitsUSA sends more than twenty-five exhibitions on tour to over 100 small- and mid-sized communities every year. These exhibitions create access to an array of arts and humanities experiences, nurture the understanding of diverse cultures and art forms, and encourage the expanding depth and breadth of cultural life in local communities. For more about ExhibitsUSA, email MoreArt@maaa.org or visit www.eusa.org.

ABOUT MID-AMERICA ARTS ALLIANCE

Mid-America Arts Alliance (M-AAA) strengthens and supports artists, cultural organizations, and communities throughout our region and beyond. Additional information about M-AAA is available at www.maaa.org.