

"I never intended to be a writer"

opened David Gonzalez at his latest opening of **'Urban Devotions, Images of Faith in the City'** at the institute's **Refuge Gallery** on Wednesday, April 2nd. Mr. Gonzalez recently retired from the New York Times as a visual journalist after thirty-three years. He started his career in his hometown, the Bronx, and became the Central America Bureau Chief for the Times 1999-2004, reporting on the aftermath of the region's Cold War-era conflicts. Mr. Gonzalez is intentional in his work and goes after the little things. Or, he stumbles upon them and, then and there, decides to take the shot. That is his approach to achieving honesty through his visual journalism. During the reception, he pointed out a black and white photograph, 'Finca del Sur' (English translation: South Farm), depicting a young girl grinning as she learns about okra. An adult's two palms hold over fifty okra seeds in the photo (p 2).

"My work stems from a connection to my community, but if I am going to be honest with myself, I have to represent the communities and all of its complexities. I also choose to show everyday mundane situations, which we sometimes don't have the pleasure of being given. Why is joy not a part of award-winning pictures? I am talking sentimentality and stuff. Joy is right here."

"Seeing the faith of the city through Gonzalez's photographs is very moving. Shrines, paintings, statues, churches, and rituals in all corners abound in a beautiful and very New York City way." - Julie, Fissinger, Fordham University Development and University Relations and two-time Urban Devotions attendee

Mr. Gonzalez continued to lead attendees around his exhibit and let them in on a lot of what lone spectators would not have been able to predict. For example, we learned his fascination with New York City and how ethnic groups move between neighborhoods. For example, one generation of Italians moved to Long Island, and now they are moving, and Haitians are coming in. "Where else does that happen?" Mr. Gonzalez probes his audience.

The essence of this gallery exhibit is on various - practical or impractical, official and unofficial - places of religious devotion, from Our Lady of Guadalupe Church on 14th Street to hospice patients to personal impromptu reflections. Some students who attended remarked how they had passed a mural several times and never knew its story. Today, they did.

Speaking of influential visual journalists, Mr. Gonzalez shared his icons: Walker Evans and Lee Friedlander. He also discussed what it was like to transition from film to digital, which allowed him to shoot many more frames while capturing everyday joy and community.

Many people participate and practice religion and joy differently and creatively, especially in metro areas and beyond in NYC. This behavior is so well explored through Mr. Gonzalez's eyes in Urban Devotions.

Mr. Gonzalez has led an impressive career in addition to the Times, including serving as a founding member of Los Seis del Sur, a collective of Nuyorican photographers. Read more about the artist, his writing, and his photography [here](#) (NYT) and [here](#) (IG).

