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FotoWeek DC Exhibit: Crime & Redemption Theatre

Prison inmates step into theatrical roles and find redemption and greater meaning in life

Washington, DC – The *Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery* is excited to announce the November 9, 2012 opening of *Crime & Redemption Theatre*, featuring works by the Italian photographer Clara Vannucci. This new exhibition, in partnership with *FotoWeek DC*, documents the therapeutic use of method acting in Tuscany's Volterra Prison.

"Why should I run? Where would I go? Twenty years I've lived in prison. Now I have something to live for. Life has meaning." This was the unexpected and humbling response Vannucci received when she asked a prison inmate of Italy's notorious Volterra Prison and touring theatre actor why he did not try to escape when he had so many opportunities to do so.



Clara Vannucci's *Volterra Prison, July 2012: 2 inmate-actors waiting in the prison hall while the town crowd gathers outside to see Hamlice*, Archival Digital Print on Kodak Endura Paper

In 1998, Armando Punzo established the *Compagnia della Fortezza*, a theatre troupe comprised of dangerous felons and hardcore "lifers," at Tuscany's Volterra Prison, which shares a reputation akin to California's Folsom Prison and New York's Sing Sing. In Italy they have found prison theatre to be highly therapeutic, producing positive results for rehabilitating prisoners and ultimately reintegrating them into society. Actor-inmates are taught how to read, to work collaboratively, and to be responsible for each other, as well as themselves. Traveling troupes perform to sold-out crowds throughout Italy. And the inmate's experience is very much like a real touring actor's — During the day the men are free to roam, without supervision by guards, at night they perform, and then at the close of the performance they are escorted to the local prison for their overnight stay.

Clara Vannucci began her series six years ago, and through her lens continues to capture the remarkable transformation these men undergo — trying on roles of alternate characters' lives and in the process leaving behind the stigma and pain of their own past regressions, albeit for a brief moment on stage. Yet, that moment proves to be profound as it provides the actor-inmates with an opportunity to reconnect with their deeper humanity and figuratively escape the physical barriers that cut them off from society. For these men Vannucci reveals that **theatre is redemption**.

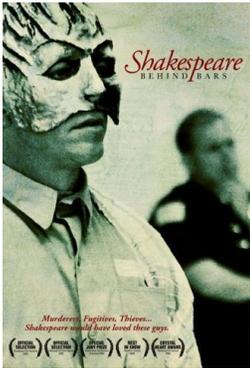
To an American viewer, Vannucci's images appear as realist images of Henri Magritte's surrealist world, juxtaposing

faceless, dapper-dressed characters with harsh prison facades. In other words, the images appear out of place and unreal, and yet their mystifying quality draws us into the drama that these men act and live. Standing regal in seemingly rich costumes the prison bars and brick courtyards recede into the background and we see these men apart from their labels as “felons” or “prisoners”, and rather in their new roles they are offered a greater dignity and perhaps even a new chance at life.

The *Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery* is honored to present for the first time ever in the United States the alluring and uplifting photography series, *Crime & Redemption Theatre* by Clara Vannucci, opening on **Friday, November 9th, 2012** and running through December 20, 2012.

Opening Reception - Friday, November 9, 7-9pm with the Artist's Talk starting at 6pm

Complementary Exhibition Event:



Documentary Screening of *Shakespeare Behind Bars* - Thursday, December 6, 6.30pm

Turning our focus stateside, Hank Rogerson's award-winning documentary takes us behind the scenes of a Kentucky prison's theatre troupe as they rehearse and perform Shakespeare's *Tempest*. The prisoners take on roles that reflect their life stories, incorporating details of their past crimes, which allows each actor-inmate to better connect with his role. The result is an extraordinary story about the creative process and the power of art to heal and redeem -- in a place where the very act of participation in theatre is a human triumph and a means of personal liberation.

Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery is located at 1632 U Street, in Northwest D.C.

Gallery Hours: Wednesday to Friday, 11am-5pm, Saturday, 11am-3pm, and by appointment

Please Note: The Gallery will be closed for the Thanksgiving Holiday Wednesday, Nov. 21 thru Saturday, Nov. 24.

Special thanks to our wine sponsor:



About: The *Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery* is a nonprofit arts space dedicated to exhibiting fine art exploring the innate connection between healing and creativity. Exhibitions feature contemporary artists addressing significant issues, such as spirituality, multiculturalism, and health. The gallery is a part of *Smith Center for Healing and the Arts*, a health, education, and arts organization that provides deep healing resources to cancer patients, their families, and caregivers. To learn more about our Center's community programs and gallery events please visit, www.smithcenter.org/gallery.