

Immersed: A Journal of Faith, Arts, and Letters

See The Word

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Artist Statement

I have been a Christian all my life and know that God uses people to share the open invitation of His love, and I wanted to be one of those people. My time since high school has been spent studying photography and American Sign Language (ASL), not only to become proficient in both but so that I can become a light for Christ in these areas. I can look through a camera lens or communicate through another language, and both actions lead me to see the diversity and beauty of God's creation and people. When I learned that photography was not one of the mediums Deaf artists used within a genre called Deaf View Image Art (De'VIA), I wondered why and started looking for any photographic work of ASL on the internet. However, I could not find anything and took this as a challenge to find my own methods of capturing the feeling and movement of sign language with a camera. In the years since, I have become very proficient in the long exposure and light painting techniques that have allowed me to bring about this body of work. Every step of the way, I have learned to adjust settings through trial after trial to perfect the technique. Whenever a new step forward works, I catch myself jumping up and down in pure excitement, thinking ahead to when Deaf and hearing people alike can see the final work and God can use it to bring people into His loving family.

Keywords: *Photography, Long Exposure, American Sign Language, Deaf.*

Introduction

In photography, an artist can use long exposure techniques to capture movement in ways unique to the typical, quick-shutter look of static photos. In my series, I use these techniques in order to capture the movement and feeling of American Sign Language better than stationary photos would. Image 1, "Philippians 4:8," is a collage of signs which become the translated message of the verse, which was chosen and translated by the man who signed it. Austin Cary is Deaf and an active participant at the Grove Deaf Church in Riverside, CA. I met him after attending a service there and watched him lead worship, from which I saw his heart for Christ and his church. Although it may seem like an inconsequential church, Deaf churches where the message of Christ is taught and exemplified in their native language of ASL are a necessity for the Deaf community—and there is a drastic lack of them. According to statistics that the pastor mentioned the day I visited, "only 2 to 4% of Deaf people claim to know Jesus as their Savior and fewer than 8 out of every 100 deaf people in the US attend church. Fewer than 4 out 100 claim a person relationship with Jesus." As we know from the Bible, Jesus frequently ministered to and healed the deaf and blind—not because they were "defective," but because no one in society at that time would help them. This project is an opportunity to give access to gospel messages in a photographic medium in an effort to follow in Christ's footsteps.

Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

Image 1

“Philippians 4:8”

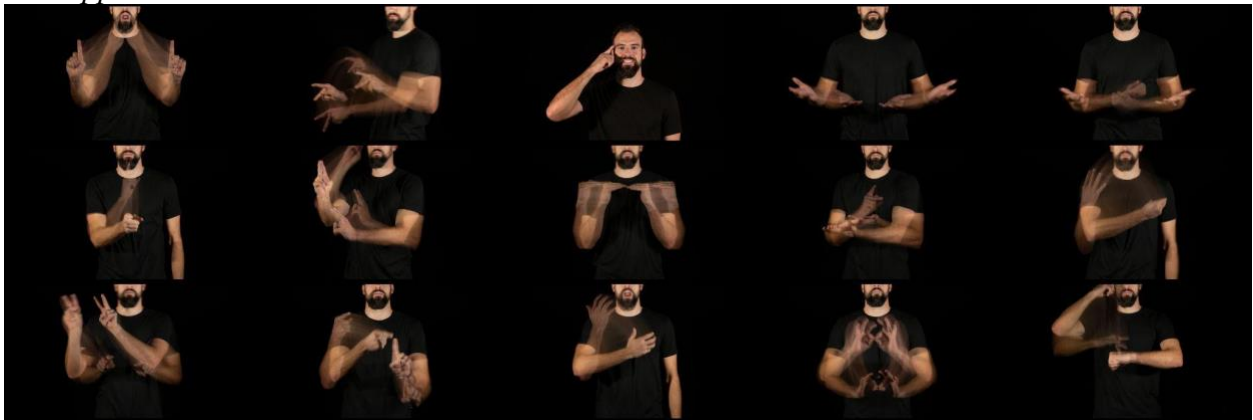


Image 2

“JESUS”

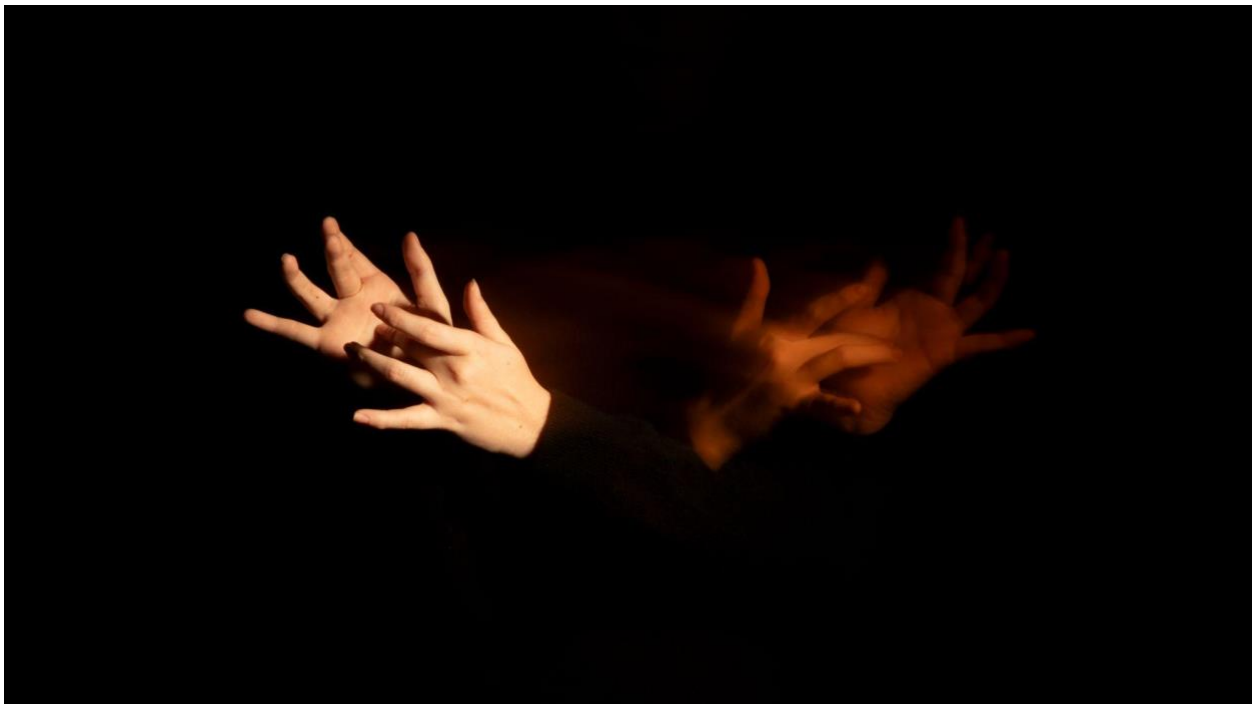


Image 3

“SPIRIT”



Conclusion

This work is meant to inspire you as much as it has provided continued inspiration for me, both artistically and spiritually. When Jesus Christ commanded his disciples to go to all nations, that included the deaf community who are apart of our nation. They are so often excluded from a lack of willingness to learn their language and teach using it. Austin has had the blessing of living near a deaf church with a wonderful bible smart deaf pastor who builds a community of deaf Christians. I hope this project can inspire both the deaf and hearing to share God's message to all of God's people. So I urge you brothers and sisters, think about such things and do not be afraid to share them with those around you.

At its heart, this work is meant to inspire the viewer as much as it has inspired me, both artistically and spiritually. While Christ followers are intrinsically aware of Jesus' final commandment, to make disciples of all nations, we as a community far too frequently forget to extend this invitation to those we feel are "different," even within our own nation. Deaf people are so often excluded from these circles due to a lack of willingness to learn their language and meet them using it. Austin may have had the blessing of living near a Deaf church who builds up a community of Deaf Christians, but so many are not so lucky. It is my hope that this project inspires both deaf and hearing people to share God's message, and so I urge you, brothers and sisters, to think about such things—and not be afraid to share them with those around you.