Living Proof

Carolyn Jones' inspiring works in progress

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It's all there in the eyes, you know.

Look into Jack Rosenberg's eyes. Those weathered, handsome eyes reveal all the pain, all the hope, all the love this man has to offer. His eyes ask for something he can never quite utter: pride. His children -- their thoughts also rendered naked through their eyes -- clearly understand their father's uncomplicated, relentless love.

These private observations come to light effortlessly, as if we have known Jack Rosenberg all of our lives. This haunting image is but one in a collection filled with such images. Power, when introduced quietly through art, makes us sit up and shut up. Power in art makes us understand.

Similarly, photography, if it is to truly move us, change us, has a responsibility to confront and assault us head-on. The photo has to forcefully challenge our perceptions of what it is that we are actually looking at. By this definition, then, very few photographers have ever genuinely moved us or changed us as a people. It is with this kind of scrutiny that Carolyn Jones submits Living Proof: Courage in the Face of AIDS (Abbeville Press/New York), her brilliant photographic essay about life with AIDS.

In this stunning collection of black-and-white portraits of people living with AIDS, Carolyn Jones attacks our perceptions with her minimalist clarity. It is as though Jones is determined to prove that inspiring, powerful photography is not unattainable but, ultimately, her responsibility. The result is chilling.

"The first person who ever gave me a job was a man named Jay Pervis, who was art director of GQ at the time," says Jones. "He was such an important person in my life. After he died -- and after so many of my dear friends died -- I decided that I had to find a way to get involved and help in a very personal way. I just had to do something."

Jones, 36, has been well known for years in magazine publishing as a first-rate portrait photographer. Her images have been staples at Esquire, Lear's, Interviews, 7 Days and other publications. But it wasn't until early 1992 that Jones -- approached by her friend, art director Michael Liberatore, and his then-lover, George DeSipio -- first heard about the intriguing project

that the Liberatore/DeSipio duo had conceived. She was thrilled to help create Living Proof.

Born out of the frustration and downright depressing national media coverage of AIDS thus far, the trio sought to find the dignity of the AIDS survivor. The courage. The love. The truth. And, by critical standards, they have been hugely successful.

“I couldn’t see myself working on a project for two years that dealth with death,” says Jones. “This book is about life.”

Living Proof is currently on a national city tour with all proceeds going directly to the Design Industries Foundation for AIDS (DIFFA).

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