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Photograph: A Powerful Voice

The metaphor, “The eyes are the window to the soul,” is one that sounds true to many people for it can involve vulnerability and end up exposing one’s most precious memories or secrets. But the eye of a camera can expose even more through the image it creates. It exposes reality but also opens a whole realm of meaning. Images from The Gail Project (<https://gailproject.ucsc.edu/albums>), whose photographer is Charles Eugene Gail, are ones that I found interesting. The three photographs I chose from this gallery were taken in Okinawa between 1951-1952. Based on the book, *Visual Methodologies,* from Gillian Rose, I will be applying the Site of Production, the Site of the Image and the Site of Audiencing throughout this essay while analyzing the photographs.

**“**The Day’s Catch” **(**<https://gailproject.ucsc.edu/items/show/119> ) is the first image I will analyze. I chose this image because of the peace it represents with its beautiful horizon. My interpretation is that the meeting of calmness at this line shares the connection that humans hold. The point of production is how the photographer included so much such as boats, water, fishing, and survival to yield humanity’s essence – simplicity. Aspect is of strong, beautiful, happy ladies representative of good health. The black and white enhances their healthy tanned skin. The same coloring focuses on their teeth making them look big and white; again this being an indication of a healthy person. The women look happy indicating they had a great day catching food for dinner and look comfortable with each other’s company.

I believe Mr. Gail’s intention was to show a mix of young and mature ladies to demonstrate their strength as women who can do the hard work; perhaps the younger ones learned this trade from the older lady walking in front of them. One can assume she is their mother or an aunt. The fact that the picture is in black and white actually enhances the beauty of the movement of the waves. Similarly if one stares at the center of the photo, one can almost see color represented by each of the stripes on their blouses. A hint of color is noticeable on the jovial woman with the black and gray stripes to the right as well as her fishing device.

What is also admirable is the mixture nature creates. The day seems to be one of serenity and one can observe the center where the sky meets the ocean and the boats in the background float in the stillness. While it is a sunny day, the gray and the white of the heavens depicts such distinct huge clouds forming as if a strong storm is shaping. And similar to nature, the same calmness and strength holds the friendship these hard-working women share.

Woman carrying the basket of fish on head” (<https://gailproject.ucsc.edu/items/show/127>

is the second image. The site of production consists of a picture taken in black and white where a plain and simple woman is walking barefooted over a wooden road of a bridge carrying a basket full of fish on her head. She is walking and facing away from the photographer. Noticeable is the fact that the basket covers the scenery in front of her. By taking the picture this way, Charles Gail made it seem like her walk is a never-ending journey because the view is blocked. It is fair to assume that Mr. Gail might have purposely taken the picture from her backside so that we as viewers could feel either her pain or her strength. In analyzing this picture, one cannot help but to spot the bridge’s steel railing at the right side. The shadowing makes this section not only the focal point of the image but also the thickness of the bridge’s support. Moreover, the black and white tone seems to enlarge the eye of the big fish in her basket. I chose his picture because it represents perseverance. What is commendable about the woman in the photo is that she is walking barefooted over a bridge carrying a heavy basket over her head. If we direct our sight to the left, we notice the rough, arid ground with small rocks and some dry weeds. It is amazing that she walks through this coarse environment without any protection on her feet, which may mean that she will do whatever it takes to feed her family.

**“The key around the dog’s neck”** (<https://gailproject.ucsc.edu/items/show/145>) is the last image I selected becasue of the boys’ smiles and how happy they look. Not to mention that the boy on the right with the shorts melted my heart; he reminded me of my son when he was that age. It made me smile even more reading about the protector of their home and found the connection they have with their dog so sweet.

The site of production illustrates a very busy-looking space. The black and white shading contributes to the shaping of every crack and line making numerous areas stand out like the fence, the roof, the rocks, the dog’s ears, eyes and mouth. The best part that stands out are the children’s smiling lips and their beautiful happy eyes. While the dog’s stance is firm, it is not threatening. So it is reasonable to suggest that Mr. Gail’s purpose of including all this busyness was to have the attention on the boys initially so that the focus would then switch to the tiny key. Had the dog been in a threatening stance, the focus would have initially been the dog.

The image itself seems simple enough that in light of all that cheerfulness, it is easy to miss the key. Likewise, if one is not aware of the title, this leads to its site of audience as one’s eyes go directly to the smiling boys and their representation of simplicity in the middle of all the chaos of lines and cracks. I love that only the family members can approach the dog and grab the key to their happy home.

In conclusion, I enjoyed analyzing all these photographs because I also found it interesting how Mr. Gail brought out the beauty in each one.