

## Photographer brings 'NOH8' to SF for Pride weekend

by Matt Baume

Adam Bouska's photos are unmistakable: against a glowing white background, subjects stare into the camera with duct tape over their mouths and "NOH8" written on their cheek. And although his portraits have become icons in the fight for marriage equality, Bouska only recently became interested in activism.

The NOH8 phrase references California's Proposition 8, which voters passed in November 2008 and banned same-sex marriage in the Golden State.

This weekend, Bouska, who lives in West Hollywood, brings his iconic photography services to San Francisco for Pride.

"I'm somewhat new to Pride, myself," he admitted in an interview with the *Bay Area Reporter*.

The 26-year-old fashion photographer's recent subjects include *Glee*'s Jane Lynch, *Lost*'s Michael Emerson, and the cast of *The Real World: Washington, D.C.* But his most surprising subjects might be of Cindy and Meghan McCain, wife and daughter of Senator John McCain (R-Arizona). The two women posed for Bouska earlier this year.

Bouska, awoke to activism after Proposition 8 passed in 2008. He and his partner, Jeff Parshley, quickly founded NOH8, he said.

"I was never an activist in any respect before this," he said. "But after the rallies, we wanted to take it one step forward. ... My outlet was as a photographer, so it made sense to me to speak out through there."

Now, after photographing an estimated 4,300 people, he's thrilled by the project's success.

"We never intended for it to take off as much as it has," he said. "Seeing all the different stories and seeing these people come through ... I have a responsibility to make these messages public so everyone can see them."

And everyone does. Bouska's taken so many photos – and inspired so many individuals to take their own – that they've gained a degree of ubiquity among LGBTs, who often use the images as profile pictures on Facebook and Twitter.

Although the format of the photos is simple, there's nuance to their message. The word "hate" is particularly fraught, and organizations like Courage Campaign and Equality California train their canvassers to avoid using the word when canvassing with potential voters.

"There is some research that shows that when you talk to people who are not yet for equality, ... those people will often actually strengthen their opposition, because they're trying to justify that theirs is not a hateful position," said Geoff Kors, executive direc-



Courtesy Adam Bouska

tor of Equality California. "They'll say, 'it's not a hateful position, it's a fair position.'"

But, he points out, Bouska's work avoids accusing others of hate.

"I think in this context, it's a very appropriate word, because it's an individual saying 'no hate' about themselves," Kors said. "I think this is a really effective project that's resulted in several surprising people who might not have spoken out otherwise."

And it's that sparking of conversation that Bouska sees as the measure of his campaign's success.

"These photos go out there and provoke a dialogue," he said. "It's a simple way for people to speak out."

San Franciscans and others visiting the city will have an opportunity to be photographed by Bouska during Pride. On Saturday, June 26, he's holding an open shoot at the W Hotel, 181 Third Street (at Howard) from 2 to 5 p.m. and all are welcome. Single photos are \$40, and group photos are \$25 per person; with proceeds funding the NOH8 campaign's ongoing outreach. ▼

### Corrections

After the June 17 article "*SF doc arrested for drug possession*," was published Rachael Kagan, director of communications at San Francisco General Hospital, e-mailed to clarify that Dr. Keith Loring had "courtesy privileges" at the hospital at one time, which meant that he worked there occasionally. Kagan said that Loring resigned that position in May and no longer has any SFGH affiliation.

In the June 17 article "*Multi-media project shares intergenerational HIV stories*," the surname of media producer Marc Smolowitz was misspelled.

The online versions have been updated.



Cindy McCain, wife of Arizona Republican Senator John McCain, is one of the people who have participated in Adam Bouska's NOH8 campaign.