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Reader Poll

To help alleviate traffic congestion, the City Council may consider charging motorists who drive into downtown Honolulu. Do you think this would be a good idea?

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## ON EXHIBIT



COURTESY MICHAEL NYE  
Through photographs and audio commentary, Michael Nye has captured the world of Peter, above, and Doris (not pictured) through narratives built from the characteristics of their mental conditions.

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- » Pedaling through a

## Portraits of Pain

By Katherine Nichols  
[knichols@starbulletin.com](mailto:knichols@starbulletin.com)

Haunting, vulnerable black-and-white images comprise photographer Michael Nye's audiovisual exhibit featuring people struggling with mental illness.

In one, a woman named Doris stares at the camera with her mouth slightly open, one hand clinging to a shoulder bag, the other to an old coat trimmed

### 'Fine Line: Mental Health/Mental Illness'

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in faux fur. The inquisitive look in her eyes -- framed by a mane of disheveled, graying hair -- is enough to captivate any viewer who appreciates artistic portraits. But what sets this show apart is the audio commentary linked to every photograph.

"Each person speaks in their own voice," Nye said from his home in San Antonio. "The narratives are in the context of someone's larger life. It's about mental health but it's also about the person."

Four years of work generated "Fine Line: Mental Health/Mental Illness" in 2003. Since then it has traveled to art galleries, libraries, medical schools, universities and even abandoned buildings around the country. It will stop at the Honolulu Academy of Arts for two weeks, beginning Thursday. Nye, who has not visited Hawaii since 1991, when he and his family lived here for nine months, will accompany his art show.

Inspiration for the project began when two close friends of Nye's committed suicide. He started exploring the lives of people suffering from or dealing with any sort of mental illness, from autism to bipolar disorder to dementia.

"It's very pervasive in our community," said Nye, who operates independently and selects his documentary topics accordingly. "I wanted to know more about mental health, but I also believe in holding on to people's stories. People know something important, and there's value in holding on to their experience and their voice."



COURTESY MICHAEL NYE  
Through photographs and audio commentary, Michael Nye has captured the world of Peter (not pictured) and Doris, above, through narratives built from the characteristics of their mental conditions.

A photographic/audio documentary exhibit by Michael Nye:

» **On view:** Thursday to May 31

» **Place:** Linekona Art Center, Honolulu Academy of Arts

» **Hours:** 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays to Saturdays, 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays

» **Admission:** Free

» **Call:** 532-8741 or visit [www.michaelnye.org](http://www.michaelnye.org)

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Columns | May 11

**Corky's Hawaii**  
Corky Trinidad

**Kokua Line**  
June Watanabe

**In the Military**  
Gregg K. Kakesako

**What the Heck?**  
John Heckathorn

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Consequently, he had little trouble inviting 60 people to participate.

"If someone believes that their voice can be important, and the project is truly reciprocal and serious, they want to be a part of it," he said. He allowed the participants to approve the final product before it went on display, inviting a certain level of comfort. The real tragedy, he insisted, is people who feel invisible and unable to communicate.

Nye used a camera that produces 8-by-10-inch negatives and required him to shoot with a hood over his head. The undertaking also involved four or five hours of interviews, reduced to five minutes of audio, which took 60 to 70 hours per person.

"The audio is really important," said Nye. "It's not just the content, but how people say things and how words are put together."

Indeed, the graphic, authentic qualities of those dealing with "pain and grace and complexities" are what Nye seeks most in his presentations. "That's what I'm after," he said. "Not something polished or romanticized."

Greg Payton, chief executive of Mental Health Kokua, the exhibit's sponsor, thinks this type of exhibit can help break through existing stereotypes. "What's always inspired me is how people with mental illness -- against all odds -- are so resilient," he said. "They want to become part of the community. They want to be just like everybody else. They want relationships and a place to live. They are not people to fear."

That's why Nye delved into the matter. He hopes to change attitudes about mental illness and start to abolish the discrimination so prevalent in the lives of those who suffer from it. "They are the teachers and the viewers are the students. We can walk out with a deeper understanding of something that's very complex."



COURTESY MICHAEL NYE  
Thomas is one of the 60 subjects whose portraits intimately display the complexities of mental illness.

## Honolulu Academy of Arts "Fine Line" exhibit

"'Fine Line: Mental Health/Mental Illness' is a documentary of voices, stories and portraits that confronts stereotypes and reveals the courage and fragility of those living with mental illnesses," according to a statement from artist Michael Nye.

Charles Memminger

### Yoga For You

Ray Madigan & Shelley Choy

### Water Ways

Ray Pendleton

### Press Box

Dave Reardon

### The Buzz

Erika Engle

### Secrets to Success

Deborah & John-Paul Micek

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Corky Trinidad

### On Politics

Richard Borreca

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Experiences recorded include schizophrenia, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, bipolar disorder and dementia. The exhibit -- on view Thursday through May 31 at the Linekona Art Center, Honolulu Academy of Arts -- invites viewers to explore an often impenetrable subject with surprising intimacy.

Mental Health Kokua, sponsor of the exhibit, offers housing, outreach and psychosocial rehabilitation programs to help people recover and reintegrate into society. It also provides peer coaching and respite support for families.

Since 1973 the organization has grown to 150 employees in 22 locations in Hawaii, serving 1,600 residents each year.



COURTESY MICHAEL NYE  
Cindy and Dylan are two of the 60 subjects whose portraits intimately display the complexities of mental illness.



COURTESY MICHAEL NYE  
Michael is one of the 60 subjects whose portraits intimately display the complexities of mental illness.



COURTESY MICHAEL NYE  
Anna is one of the 60 subjects whose portraits intimately display the complexities of mental illness.

**Mental Health Kokua**  
[www.mentalhealthkokua.org](http://www.mentalhealthkokua.org)

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