

Proposal to XXXX

Small Arms—Children of Conflict: Photographs by Michael Kienitz **Chazen Museum of Art**

Project Summary: The Chazen Museum of Art will present an exhibition of some thirty photographs by Madison-based artist Michael Kienitz from September 8 through October 28, 2007. *Small Arms—Children of Conflict: Photographs by Michael Kienitz* will feature black-and-white photographs of children taken during times of political and economic struggle and violence in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Lebanon, Guatemala, Belize, Pakistan, Northern Ireland, and the United States. As a photojournalist on national and foreign assignments from 1978 through 1988, Kienitz witnessed the challenges people faced during times of upheaval, and the photographs chosen for this exhibition reveal the ways that children, in particular, cope and adapt to conflicts—many of them violent—created by adults.

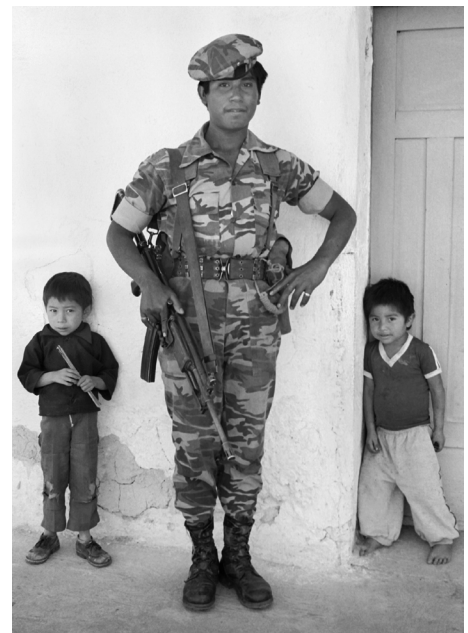
Artist Background: Michael Kienitz started making photographs as a student at the University of Wisconsin–Madison during the Vietnam War. A political philosophy major, Kienitz was particularly interested in what he saw at the time as “the revolution” outside the classroom windows. The political struggles close to home and academic studies of revolutionary movements motivated Kienitz to investigate and document revolutions around the world.

During the late 1970s, gripped by news of the ongoing Nicaraguan revolution, Kienitz traveled to Managua. When he arrived in the northern city of Esteli, he saw charred buildings and military vehicles lining the streets and Red Cross volunteers forced to burn corpses with gasoline to prevent the spread of disease. Kienitz carefully observed how daily life continued despite the destruction and grief. Through his photographs, Kienitz chose to document women and children as they adapted to the hardship. The artist became interested in the power of an image to create a connection between photographer and subject and then with the viewer.

Kienitz subsequently traveled to politically unstable countries such as Afghanistan in 1982, Lebanon in 1982 and again in 1984, Northern Ireland numerous times in the 1980s and early 1990s; he also went to Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. For these trips he had assignments from regional publications *The Capital Times* and *The Milwaukee Journal Sunday Magazine*, and national publications such as *U.S. News & World Report*.

Chazen Museum of Art Exhibition: In 2006, news reports of turmoil in Lebanon prompted Kienitz to reconsider his photographs from the 1980s. He was struck by the similarities between the photographs from the current conflict and his own images captured more than twenty years earlier in the same country. He assembled a collection of black-and-white photographs from a ten-year period of assignments, focusing on children. The resulting exhibition, *Small Arms—Children of Conflict*, shows children that behave a lot like those who grow up in relative comfort and safety—they dress up; climb on structures; withdraw, posture, and taunt; fly kites and play ball. Yet their costumes may be military uniforms and real machine guns, and their play structures may be bombed-out wreckage. At greater extremes, they may be seven-year-old street fighters in Northern Ireland or eleven- and twelve-year-old soldiers in Nicaragua or Lebanon. The images also show children carrying on their daily play—and work—with no visible sign of conflict, but in deep poverty. There are few adults in these pictures, yet their presence is as powerful as their absence.

Admission to the exhibition and educational programs will be free of charge to the general public. This will be the first museum presentation of Kienitz’s work in Madison, and an important opportunity for an estimated 8,000 museum visitors to view these photographs. The artist hopes that these images will spur viewers to consider the implications of political upheaval, and, perhaps, to imagine what we can do to make our world a better place.



Michael Kienitz
Kids and Soldier, 1988
Nebaj, Guatemala
Digital print, 20 in. x 23 in.