



## William Morel '97C

### Renowned Photography Professor Inspires Students

For William “Alex” Morel '97C, Assistant Professor of Photography, coming to St. John's University was the first step in a journey leading him to success as an internationally-known photographer and a respected member of the faculty.

Morel was attracted by the University's reputation for excellence, but he was undecided about his major. That is, until he took a photography course in the second semester of his sophomore year. “The minute I stepped behind the camera,” he said, “I knew that was where I was meant to be.”

His work impressed his instructors, including Belenna Lauto, Associate Professor of Fine Arts, who suggested he major in photography. Morel went on to earn his M.F.A. at Rutgers University.

Today, his work is exhibited worldwide. This spring, his photos were on view in *Sublime Porte: Art and Contemporary Turkey*, held at the Dr. M.T. Geoffrey Yeh Art Gallery on the Queens, NY, campus. The gallery also has presented his curatorial work, including *Seven Million Bodies* and *Jeff Mermelstein: 9/11/01*. In addition to a 2005 solo exhibition at Switzerland's *Fotomuseum Winterthur*, Morel's work was displayed in the 2012 show *Relations and Tales* at the *En Foco* Gallery.

“Nothing is more rewarding,” said Professor Lauto, “than seeing a student excel. Alex's photos and collections are truly remarkable—and I am very proud to call him a colleague.” As a professor himself, Morel also is experiencing the rewards of seeing his students mature professionally. Said Michael Alongi '10C, “taking Professor Morel's introductory class changed my life. He helped me discover that I have a gift for photography.” Since then, their relationship has evolved into a professional friendship, with Morel helping Alongi to mount his first solo show last summer.

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Sharing his expertise with his students and incorporating his photography into classroom discussions, Morel has also created résumé-building opportunities for students to take part in his projects. In addition, he helps them prepare presentations for Student Research Week and mentors thesis students, making sure they are ready to display their work at the annual [Department of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition](#) at the prestigious [Dorsky Gallery](#).

Last year, Morel invited eight students to help him comb through thousands of photos in the Library of Congress archives. They displayed their selections in an ambitious exhibit called [Unpacking the FSA: The Photographic Archives of the Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information](#), shown at the Yeh Art Gallery. “The experience was priceless,” said one of the students, Kalen Roach ’14C, who hopes to become a curator.

Equally invaluable, said Roach, is the opportunity he had this year to study full-time at the [International Center of Photography](#) (ICP), one of the world’s leading schools of photography. “Alex was the first student in our department to earn a certificate from the ICP,” Lauto noted. “Based on the quality of his work, the ICP decided to extend this partnership with St. John’s, making it an integral part of our unique photography program.”

Morel grew up in the Dominican Republic and the U.S. He has said that he inherited his mother’s emphasis on family and his father’s commitment to social responsibility, nurtured by a lifelong engagement in politics. This orientation is reflected in Morel’s choice of subjects, including undocumented immigrants, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, 9/11 and family relationships. Profoundly influenced as well by the philosophy of ICP founder Cornell Capa, who advocated the concept of the ‘concerned photographer,’ Morel uses his craft as a tool for effecting social change and for exploring relationships.

In the summer of 2013, Morel will return to the Caribbean to continue documenting recovery progress in Haiti and to pursue other projects in the region. He also looks forward to continuing to encourage and support his students. “It’s a privilege to be able to teach at St. John’s,” he said, “and to start giving back as much as I was given.”

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