



## **Capturing the Essence of Humanity**

### ***Photographer Peter Donahoe helps men with prostate cancer create a new image***

Peter Donahoe is a portraitist who uses an unusual instrument—a pinhole camera—to capture images of his subjects. Made from tin cans and film boxes, the primitive camera creates a circular image using long light exposures. The challenges of this old-world technique enable Donahoe to create works of art that portray intimacy achieved not only through his vision, but through the intensity of the process.

“I strive to make as sophisticated an image as possible with as primitive an instrument as possible,” Donahoe says. “The long exposures require a discipline and connection between photographer and subject not common in conventional photography. Time—not just light—structures the photograph.”

The notion of time has taken on new meaning for Donahoe and his subjects. Donahoe, who lives in the Hudson River Valley of New York, was diagnosed with prostate cancer in July 2009. Extensive research brought him to urologist Jamison Jaffe, DO, at Urologic Consultants of Southeastern Pennsylvania. He underwent nerve-sparing surgery in October.

“The diagnosis slapped me in the head,” Donahoe says. “I thought, ‘OK, what do I do with this? Do I count the numbers and play roulette with my life?’ A bone marrow scan showed the cancer had probably not spread, but I decided not to play ‘wait and see.’ The only way to know for sure was to have the surgery.”

At the time he was diagnosed, the 62-year-old artist was writing a grant proposal for a portrait series on artists. When he discovered how many men are in denial about prostate cancer despite its prevalence, he shifted his focus to capturing what men with prostate cancer have gone through and how it has changed them. He received the grant and is now working on the project.

“For me, portrait-making is always an act of memorialization, a way that we counter loss, alienation and separation,” he says. “The men I have met are examples of courage. Through these portraits, I want men, their families and their communities to have an image of themselves that retains a humanity that no redefinition of masculinity can take away.”

Donahoe is also driven by the lack of public visibility for prostate cancer. “We need to raise the level of consciousness. People still don’t understand that men die from prostate cancer. They need to understand their options and what’s available, and make a reasoned and informed decision.

“I hope to advance the art of portraiture through this pinhole work, and also to recognize and memorialize the lives of the men who participate,” Donahoe says. “If this project strengthens the resolution of just one man to live and survive his cancer, it will be a success. If it raises the awareness of the community that one in six men will develop prostate cancer, that it is an under-recognized health threat, then it will be a success. If it begins to approach the public awareness that breast cancer has, then it will be a success.”

*Donahoe is looking for men with prostate cancer to help further education and awareness through this portrait series. For more information about Donahoe’s work or to contact him, visit his blog at <http://moticamera.blogspot.com/2010/02/and-portraitsyes-and-portraits.html>.*

*Urologic Consultants is a practice of 14 physicians with extensive experience, including robotic and minimally invasive surgery for treatment of prostate cancer. They have offices throughout the Philadelphia area. For more information, visit [www.urologicconsultsepa.com](http://www.urologicconsultsepa.com) or call 610-667-3020.*