

Curator Bio



Nickolas Gaines is a father, educator, pastoral psychotherapist, international speaker, and veteran. He has a long career dedicated to physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being and guiding people to find their own resilience and strength.

In his inaugural gallery exhibition curation *Respite: Unearthing Strength in Blackness*, Gaines invites the viewer to come and find an interval of relief. After Americans have lived through years of perpetual political and social disruptions, a global pandemic, managing personal lives, relationships, and collective wellbeing, he seeks to remind viewers of the strength that is found within Blackness that is illuminated when we stop to rest.

Nickolas is a prominent scholar-practitioner who has a wealth of experience, expanding over 20 years of service in local, national, and international communities. He is a global citizen who has served the United States Army for seven years as an officer and Chaplain, has led initiatives for the Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs providing spiritual care and clinical mental health care, and social justice policy reform on the Utah Human Rights Commission.

Gaines did his undergraduate work in American Multicultural Studies with an emphasis in African American Humanities at Minnesota State University Moorhead. His graduate work in Divinity and Chaplaincy at Moody Theological Seminary and Tennessee Temple University. He later went to study Veteran's Behavioral Health at Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and did his Clinical Pastoral Education at Loyola University in Chicago. Nickolas also graduated at the top of his class from the United States Army Chaplain School and Center.

Nickolas is a national workshop facilitator and trainer. He has facilitated workshops and keynoted events for The United States Army, The Department of Defense, The Department of Veteran Affairs, AIDS United, the Southern HIV Impact Fund, Virginia Department of Public Health, Living Works Suicide Prevention Training Centre, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, the NAACP, The University of Denver Center for Marital and Family Studies, Penn State University, Morehouse College, The Seattle School of Theology, Loyola University Medical Center, and over 75 universities, colleges, and non-profit organizations.

As an educator, his work has been featured in *Ebony Magazine*, *The Good Man Project*, *Education Post*, and on NPR. He was also recognized by Apple Podcasts and the *New York Times* for his podcast work on topics such as masculinity, race, mental health, equity, and fatherhood. In 2017, he was awarded the Outstanding Young Alumni Award from his alma mater, Minnesota State University Moorhead. Most recently, he was named as a 2021 Texas Education Policy Institute Fellow. He'll be spending the next two years lobbying for progressive policies with the intention of centering the needs and interests of Black students; specifically, the statewide implementation of social-emotional learning curriculum, technology access, preventing the prison to school pipeline, and statewide equitable discipline policies.

Currently, Gaines works as a national consultant focusing on culturally responsive pedagogy, equity and inclusion, trauma-informed instruction, social-emotional learning, family engagement, and equitable discipline policies. He serves on the Executive Board of the Garland Area Alliance of Black School Educators and is a Liaison for the Texas Alliance of Black School Educators Faith Based-Community Support Commission.

Nickolas wants to amplify the power, might, and resilience of marginalized communities, particularly communities of color. While he believes in the strength of the human spirit, Nickolas recognizes people of color work to love themselves, their families, and be their best and highest selves in a world that constantly seeks to demean and belittle their unique expressions of culture, love, and joy. His own journey of healing through complex and painful family dynamics shaped his core value that when we heal -- and while we heal -- we must reach back and pull our people with us.

Nickolas is raising his two sons aged 7 and 11 in Dallas.