

RANIA MATAR: LEBANON AT THE CROSSROADS LISSA RIVERA: EDUCATION

Gallery Kayafas
450 Harrison Avenue
Boston

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LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHERS SQUARE OFF THIS JANUARY IN GALLERY KAYAFAS. RANIA MATAR STUDIES THE LIVES OF MIDDLE EASTERN WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN BLACK AND WHITE, WHILE LISSA RIVERA EXPLORES PRIVATE SCHOOL INTERIORS AND FRATERNITY HOUSES IN PLUSH COLOR. BOTH PROBE NOTIONS OF CLASS, SOCIETY AND REALITY IN STARKLY DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS.



Front Stairs, Phi Delta Theta, MIT by Lissa Rivera

In her collection Matar captures everyday life in war-torn Lebanon. Women chat, study and nurse infants as their children play among crumbling walls and rubble. Against a backdrop of seeming despair, survivors thrive in defiance. Take one woman, photographed sitting on a plastic chair where an apartment building once stood. Along with her friends, she wanders to lots where apartments once stood and arranges improvised (and outdoor) sitting rooms.

So life goes on in a haphazard fashion. Children study the Koran; girls learn to tie silky veils for the first time in front of shattered mirrors. And in the Arab World, the West breaks through, slowly but persistently like weeds nudging through a bed of flowers. A girl jumps through the street in a Barbie doll tee shirt, Coca-Cola advertisements decorate city streets and a young woman daydreams to beats from her iPod. And women with a bit more means sip tea at an outdoor café. Sitting veiled in front of a sultry beauty parlor advertisement in a city where Botox boutiques are popular Matar embraces the contradictions and complexities of the modern Middle East.

Closer to home, Rivera explores academic institutions, penetrating privileged worlds of wealth and power. Elegant upholstery bathes in soft light at Windsor while stern portraits of great men line imposing hallways at Philips Academy. At Theta Xi (MIT) deep blue walls and drapes give way to a grand pool table. There's no one in the room but Rivera sets the stage for mischief. The front stairs of Phi Delta Theta (MIT) are grand and white and lined with composites – generations of bright young men. You don't belong, Rivera seems to say, in these storied houses. But for those who do belong, the notion of education as a springboard to success – the American Dream – may be quite a bit easier to achieve.

Catherine Laferriere



I-Pod by Rania Matar