

Girl's life

By GREG COOK | October 2, 2012



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It's hard being a girl. "They're dealing with their body changing," Rania Matar says, "with becoming women, with how to react to at-large society, to who they are as people, and how to express that, and how do they fit in."

In "Girls in Between: Portraits of Identity" at the Photographic Resource Center, the Brookline artist photographs teens navigating the transition — here in Boston as well as in Matar's native Lebanon.

In the artist's *A Girl and Her Room* series, subject Sienna's walls are pasted with fashion advertisements featuring scantily clad ladies, green-haired Izzy's arms are scarred from self-inflicted cuts, Rocia hugs her pregnant belly.

Matar photographs them intimately — bedrooms become havens, workshops, boudoirs. "In some of the images, unless you read the captions, you wouldn't know if it were taken in the US or in Lebanon," she says. "I felt that these girls were so much going through similar issues, no matter where they were."

Matar was an architect, pregnant with her fourth child in 2000, when she got into photography by taking a class to learn how to better photograph her kids. Her first major series, *Ordinary Lives*, documenting mothers and daughters in Lebanon, earned her a spot as an ICA Prize finalist in 2008. "In a place like the Middle East," she says, "where there's always one crisis or another — these women didn't ask for any of this. It was inspiring for me how they just get their homes running, raise their kids, and to keep going despite all of that."

The bedroom photos began when one of her daughters turned 15. "She had been such a tomboy, and all of a sudden she was a different person." Matar's newest series, *L'Enfant-Femme*, aims even younger, documenting nine-to-12-year-olds who seem naturally to assume fashion-model postures. Matar asks the girls not to smile (which she finds fake). They appear more guarded, maybe even standoffish, as they age.

We scan the teens' personal snapshots, vampire posters, beauty products, Hello Kitty calendars, stuffed animals, graffiti ("I will never deep throat a penis of cheese"), and furry pink telephones for clues to what signals girls are receiving from our wonderful, afflicted culture — and how they're responding. Matar says, "You can't forget what society expects of you."

"RANIA MATAR: GIRLS IN BETWEEN — PORTRAITS OF IDENTITY" :: PHOTOGRAPHIC RESOURCE CENTER, 832 COMM AVE, BOSTON :: THROUGH NOVEMBER 3