

# Collectors' nostalgia, with narrative armor



Rania Matar's photograph "Dania, 9, Bourj El Barejneh Refugee Camp, Beirut, Lebanon" at Carroll and Sons;

**By Cate McQuaid**

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

## Girls on the cusp

Rania Matar, whose photographs of girls in their rooms can be seen in "She Who Tells a Story: Women Photographers From Iran and the Arab World" at the Museum of Fine Arts, has an equally delicate and provocative body of work up at Carroll and Sons. Instead of teenagers, she photographs tweens, mostly, capturing their inherently feminine gestures. From girls in headscarves in Beirut to girls in their living rooms in Brookline, the body language is universal.

Some preen before the camera. "Dania, 9, Bourj El Barejneh Refugee Camp, Beirut, Lebanon" poses with disarming ease, hand on her hip, painted toenails peeking from rainbow-striped sandals. Her shirt, frayed at the neck, has a peekaboo neckline that would show off her cleavage, if she had any.

Then there's "Hanna, 10, Norwell, Massachusetts." She stands in a barn, in a neat little blue dress and ballet flats. She looks straight at the camera with an assured expression, but her body is tied in a knot, with arms and legs crossed protectively.

It has long been the lot of girls and young women to be looked at and appraised for their beauty. Some enjoy it. Others struggle with it. Matar explores the balance of power between the looker and the looked upon, which in this equation inevitably factors in sexuality. Some girls take on feminine body language long before they hit 8 or 9. It's often charming and sometimes disturbing. Matar makes us examine what it means for the girls, and for us.

*Cate McQuaid can be reached at [catemcquaid@gmail.com](mailto:catemcquaid@gmail.com).*

## **RANIA MATAR:**

### **L'enfant femme**

At: Carroll and Sons,  
450 Harrison Ave., through  
Oct. 26. 617-482-2477,  
[www.carrollandsons.net](http://www.carrollandsons.net)