



Rania Matar, *Jessica, Rabieh, Lebanon*, 2010. Courtesy the artist / Carroll and Sons, Boston

We asked **Glenn Ruga**, founder and director of *SocialDocumentary.net*, to tell us about a picture that meant something to him, and why.

A photograph for me is many things. First, it is a piece of paper with color, tonality, forms, line, and surface texture. It is also a reference to content and therefore a signifier of a complex world of human emotions and psychology.

*Jessica*, this extraordinary photograph by Rania Matar of a Lebanese teenage girl in her room, is a compelling portrait with masterful control of gaze, lighting, and composition. Jessica's beauty is only slightly diminished (or perhaps enhanced) by knowing that she lives in a small country that was once the jewel of the Middle East. Since the mid 1970s it has experienced a horrific civil war, two wars

with Israel, and now it is facing a sea of refugees from neighboring Syria and a new wave of sectarian violence in its wake. Contrast Jessica to any one of the American girls in Matar's monograph, *A Girl and Her Room*, and the similarities are extraordinary, as are the differences. One lives in a nation in constant struggle. The others live with political security but tremendous personal insecurity.

The details in the end make all of Rania's photographs so special. In *Jessica*, we see a cross and a religious painting on a lavender wall, headphones and a design magazine on her bed, a book by Robert Doisneau (known for the most romantic kiss in photographic history) on her bookshelf, and that funny red goose-neck desk lamp clamped to her bureau. The meaning of these signs are open and left to us, the viewers, to decide.