Portfolio

This project, 'L'Enfant Femme,' was inspired by my younger daughter when she was 12. She was changing quite a bit at that point, finding her individuality and all of that.

Rania Matar

Artist's CORNER

RANIA MATAR

In Her Own Words

On photographing women
That wasn't a conscious decision. It's something that started instinctively. I don't know if I'd get that same intimacy with men (as my subjects). I'm not ruling out the possibility of doing something with guys, but at this point, I feel like it's important to me to photograph through the eyes of girls and follow that theme of growing up and growing older. I'm following my instincts, I guess, and where my energy's going.

On her 'L'Enfant Femme' series
I found that pre-pubescent age so incredibly potent in my daughters. As soon as the body was turning into a woman's body, their whole attitude was changing and I wanted to grasp that right away; that period is so short. So I started following the girls as they were getting older, and before I knew it I was — in some way — following a girl's life; from pre-puberty to menopause, I guess.

On shooting to film
It's important, especially with the young girls. They've grown up in a generation of selfies and iPhones. When I tell them I'm shooting to film, they think I'm making a movie. But the fact they can't see the results means they take the photoshoot much more seriously and they have to think about what to do with their hands and their bodies. I use a medium-format camera. It's more deliberate than shooting digital.

On not smiling
I'm trying to grasp a moment that's not being performed for the camera. I feel like we're so programmed, now, to see people smiling for the camera. And at the same time I'm not looking for the deadpan face that is often prevalent in modern photography. I'm not trying to avoid emotion; I'm trying to avoid the manufactured emotion that comes in for the camera.

On shared humanity
I feel like I live between two cultures. I'm equally part of both and it's important to me to show that they're not mutually exclusive. That's something that has guided me all along. It's made me realize on a very deep level — I don't want to sound cliché, but… — there's such a shared humanity. We put up these fake barriers: This person is black, white, Christian, Muslim, or whatever, but biology is happening. Life is happening. All these girls (I photograph) are all going through the same changes, no matter where they're from. They might have different goals, or different lives, but at the core, they're all growing up and growing older and transforming in the same manner. I'm fascinated with all of that.

Soraya and Tala **Yarze, Lebanon 2014** (TOP)
This is the photo that made me realize I was doing the mother-daughter project, for many reasons. For one, it looks almost like a time-lapse; like, this is what the mother looked like 25 years earlier, and this is what the daughter's going to look like much later, right? The other thing is the body language: The mother's almost becoming the vulnerable one, holding herself, and the daughter's come in with the confidence of her age, completely owning it. The daughter was about to leave Lebanon and go to college in the US, so it was very personal for me as well, because that's what made me start that project; my daughter was leaving home.

Mariam **Bourj al Shamali Palestinian Refugee Camp, Tyre, Lebanon, 2009** (LEFT)
This was her first day wearing the hijab, and I think that gave her the confidence of feeling like a grown-up. I photographed her without it, too, and that photo's not nearly so interesting to me. I think that hijab gave her the attitude.

Nour **Beirut, Lebanon, 2017** (ABOVE)
As I was telling you, I'm obsessed with hair and texture. She's someone I didn't know at all. I was having lunch and I saw her at a table in the back and went over to her, like, 'I would love to photograph you.' This project is still kind of in progress, I think my work might be going in a slightly different direction, So it's less of a direct portrait style and attitude. It's still a portrait of Nour, but it's also a portrait of a place, and her relationship to that place. That relationship to the landscape became as important for me to portray.