

Transitioning from girl to woman

Innocence and worldliness collide in two shows at PRC

By Mark Feeney
GLOBE STAFF

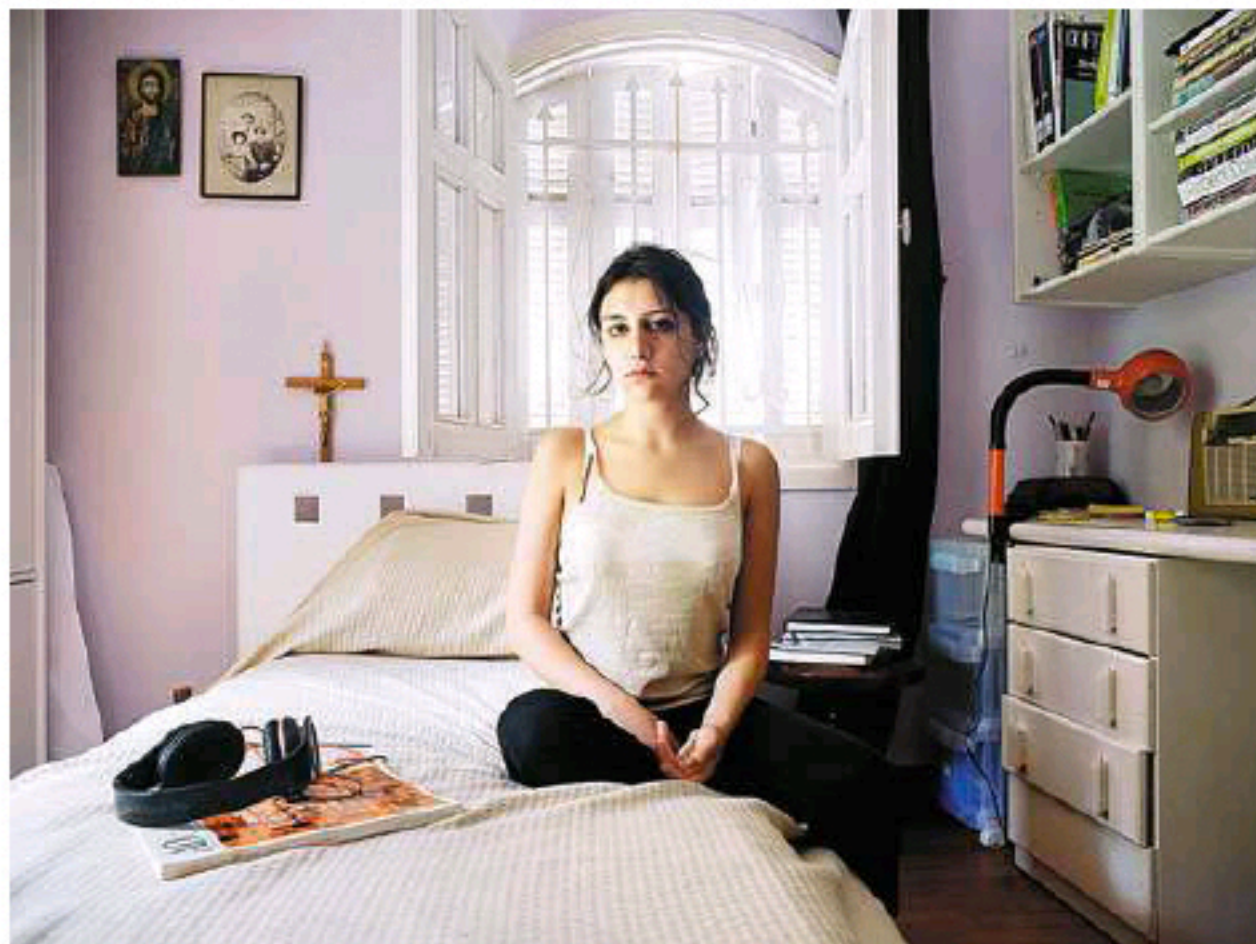
There is a long, and often disquieting, tradition of artistic renderings of girls as they approach (or have just entered) womanhood. The most famous examples we know by character names: Alice, Lolita. Others we think of not as individuals but in terms of an artist: the heroines of some of Flannery O'Connor's short stories, the subjects of photographs by Lewis Carroll (also, of course, Alice's creator), Sally Mann, Jock Sturges.

With some of these girls, innocence predominates. With others, its absence (or apparent absence) does so. The disquiet comes from this inescapable tension between innocence and worldliness. Even more than that, it comes from how aware of the tension each may or may not be.

That tradition inevitably informs the two shows currently at the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University. Rania Matar's "Girls in Between: Portraits of Identity" and Nancy Grace Horton's "Being 13" run through Nov. 3.

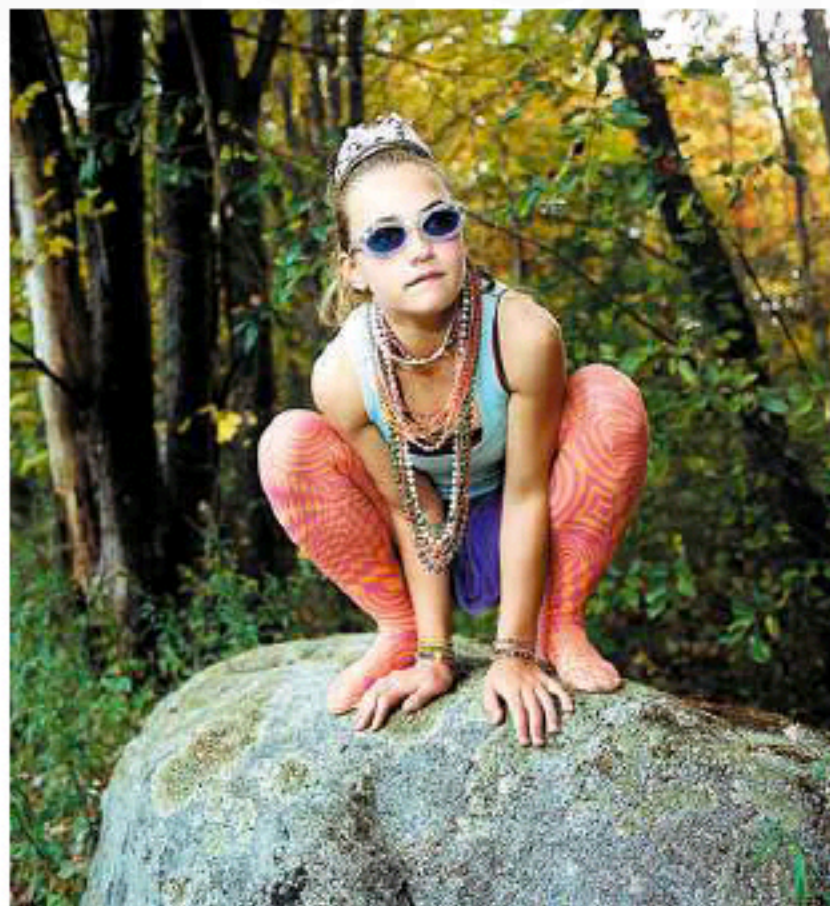
The 29 pictures in the Matar show, all of them in color, come from two series, "A Girl and Her Room" and "L'Enfant-Femme" (The Child Woman). The former consists of portraits of teenage girls in their bedrooms. Most are from Greater Boston (where Matar has lived for more than two decades), some from the Middle East (she was born and grew up in Lebanon). The latter consists of portraits of slightly younger girls outside the confines — and security — of their bedroom. These, too, have subjects from both Greater Boston and the Middle East.

What's most striking is how much these adolescent and pre-adolescent girls, whether from



LANIA MATAR; NANCY GRACE HORTON (BELOW)

Above: "Jessica, Rabieh, Lebanon" from Rania Matar's series "A Girl and Her Room." Below: Nancy Grace Horton's "Being 13, Spirit Week."



Brookline or Dorchester or Beirut, have in common. Partly, that's the common currency that is global popular culture. Even

more, it's the universality of the circumstances these young females have to face: biological, social, cultural.

many of the images: teddy bears, tattoos, makeup, bulletin boards, posters, and so on. None of them fears the camera. How much of that is owing to Matar — and how much to all the posing they've been doing for their friends and family (and, most important, themselves)?

In her adjoining show, Nancy Grace Horton restricts herself to a single subject, her stepdaughter, Zoe. Thirteen is a deeply freighted age: the start of being a teenager, usually the first year at middle school, and, of course, it's a number associated with bad luck. "As one moment of childlike behavior juxtaposed itself with the look of a mature girl," Horton writes, "I became visually aware of a transforming subject, catching glimpses of who she was becoming and whom she was leaving behind."

No less than Matar's subjects, Zoe seems completely comfortable with the camera (which may, of course, owe something to the fact of a family connection to the person operating it). The chameleon changes that define her age are readily apparent. Lolling on a couch, she gives a look that's almost come-hither. In another photograph, she's all dolled up in tiara and sunglasses and many (many) strands of beads and bracelets — and also wearing goofily patterned leggings as she squats on a big rock in a Spider-Man (Spider-Girl?) pose.

In the first photo, she could be 13 going on 25 — in the second, 13 going on 6. She's at a pivot point in her life, the one moment, perhaps, where the inexorable advance of age produces such a visible elasticity of self. Some things, though, are definitely inelastic. In one of the photographs, Zoe peers out from behind a shower curtain, and one thinks with a shudder of Janet Leigh, in "Psycho." Could Horton have intended this? Not that it would bother Zoe: as if any 13-year-old nowadays would ever sit through a black-and-white movie!

PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

LANIA MATAR:
Girls in Between:
Portraits of Identity

NANCY GRACE HORTON:
Being 13
Photographic Resource
Center at Boston University,
832 Commonwealth Ave.,
through Nov. 3,
617-975-0600,
www.bu.edu/prc

"I became fascinated with similar issues girls in their pre-teen and teen years face," Matar writes in an artist's statement, "regardless of culture, religion and background, as they learn to deal with all the pressures that arise as they become conscious and aware of the surrounding world wherever they may be."

Each of the girls is clearly an individual, yet there's also a sense of interchangeability (and incongruity) in the elements in

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