

# LENSCRATCH

Monday, April 23, 2012

## Success Stories: Rania Matar



I first met Rania Matar many years ago at a portfolio review. She was was sharing work created in the middle east and I liked her immediately. She was approachable, smart, and real. Since that review, her work has been well celebrated and exhibited. Her resume and website reflect an amazing trajectory that comes from hard work, a rarified eye, and most importantly, an ability to look at the world with curiosity and thoughtfulness. Her new monograph, *A Girl and Her Room*, has been reviewed and applauded throughout the photo and documentary world, and I'm thrilled for her success.

Rania was born and raised in Lebanon, moving to the United States in the 1980's. Her work focuses on women and girls both in the Middle East and the US. She has won numerous awards and her images are in the permanent collections of museums worldwide. *A Girl and Her Room* was a Top 50 Winner at Photolucida's Critical Mass in 2009 and 2010, won the 2011 Legacy Award at the Griffin Museum of Photography and received a 2011 Massachusetts Cultural Council artist fellowship. *A Girl and Her Room* is her second book, published by by Umbrage Editions with essays by Anne Tucker and Susan Minot. Matar's first book *Ordinary Lives* was published in 2009. She teaches at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design.



Loubna, Beirut Lebanon 2010

*As a mother of teenage daughters I watch their passage from girlhood into adulthood, fascinated with the transformation taking place, the adult personality taking shape and a gradual self-consciousness replacing the carefree world they had known and lived in so far. I started photographing them and their girlfriends, and quickly realized how aware they were of each other's presence, and how much the group affected the identity they were portraying to the world. From this recognition the idea of photographing each girl alone, by herself, emerged.*

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\*NEW\* Lenscratch Exhibition Opportunities

*Lenscratch* is a blogzine that explores contemporary photography and offers opportunities for exposure and community.

Considered one of the 10 Photography-Related blogs you should be reading by Source Review, Wired.com, and InStyle Magazine.

Founded and Edited by Aline Smithson

Submissions are closed at this time.

Anonymous comments will not be posted.

For Private Tutoring, and/or Workshop information, contact [alinesmithson@gmail.com](mailto:alinesmithson@gmail.com)

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Aline Smithson on PDN



Seven at Finch & Ada







Mollie 12, Brookline MA 2011



Maryam 9, Beirut 2011



Juliette 10, Arlington MA 2011

Alan W. George

Alejandro Cartagena

Alejandro Maureira

Alek Lindus

Alex Arzt

Alex Kisilevich

Alex Leme

Alex MacLean

Alex Prager

Alex Prager

Alexander von Rechwitz

Alia Malley

Aline Smithson

Alison Turner

Alix Perry

Alix Smith

Allison Grant

Amanda Friedman

Amanda Keller Konya

Amber Shields

Amber Sowards

Amy Anderson

Amy Eckert

Andrew Buurman

Andrew Miksys

Andrew Sanderson

André França

Andy Adams

Andy Hurvitz

Andy Hurvitz

Anette Nordskog

Angela Bacon Kidwell

Angela Bacon Kidwell

Angela Bacon Kidwell

Angela Cappetta

Ann Mitchell

Ann Pallesen

Ann Summa

Anne Berry

Anthony Goicolea

Arianna Sanesi

Arlene Gottfried

Arno Rafael Minkkinen



And finally, what would be your perfect day?

Any day that goes by, when I can manage to juggle my family life (I have 4 kids) with my work, with the balls still in the air, is a great day.



Danielle, Boston MA 2010



Devin, Winchester MA 2009



Stephanie, Beirut Lebanon 2010

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Bernd Reinhardt

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Bertil Nilsson

Beth Kientzle

Betsy Schneider

Bill Chapman

Bill Finger

Bill Miller

Bill O'Donnell

Bill Vaccaro

Bill Vaccaro

Billy Hunt

Birthe Piontek

Bjorn Sterri

Blake Andrews

Blake Andrews

Blake Odgen

Blue Mitchell

Bobby Davidson

Bobby Neel Adams

Bojune Kwon

Boo Ritson

Boosty Holler

Boosty Holler

Boris Austin

Brad Buckman

Brad Moore

Brad Moore

Brad Wilson

Brad Wilson

Brandon Juhasz

Brian Kaplan

Brittany Lynne Jones and Mitchell Scott Rouse

Bronwen Hyde

Brooks Jensen





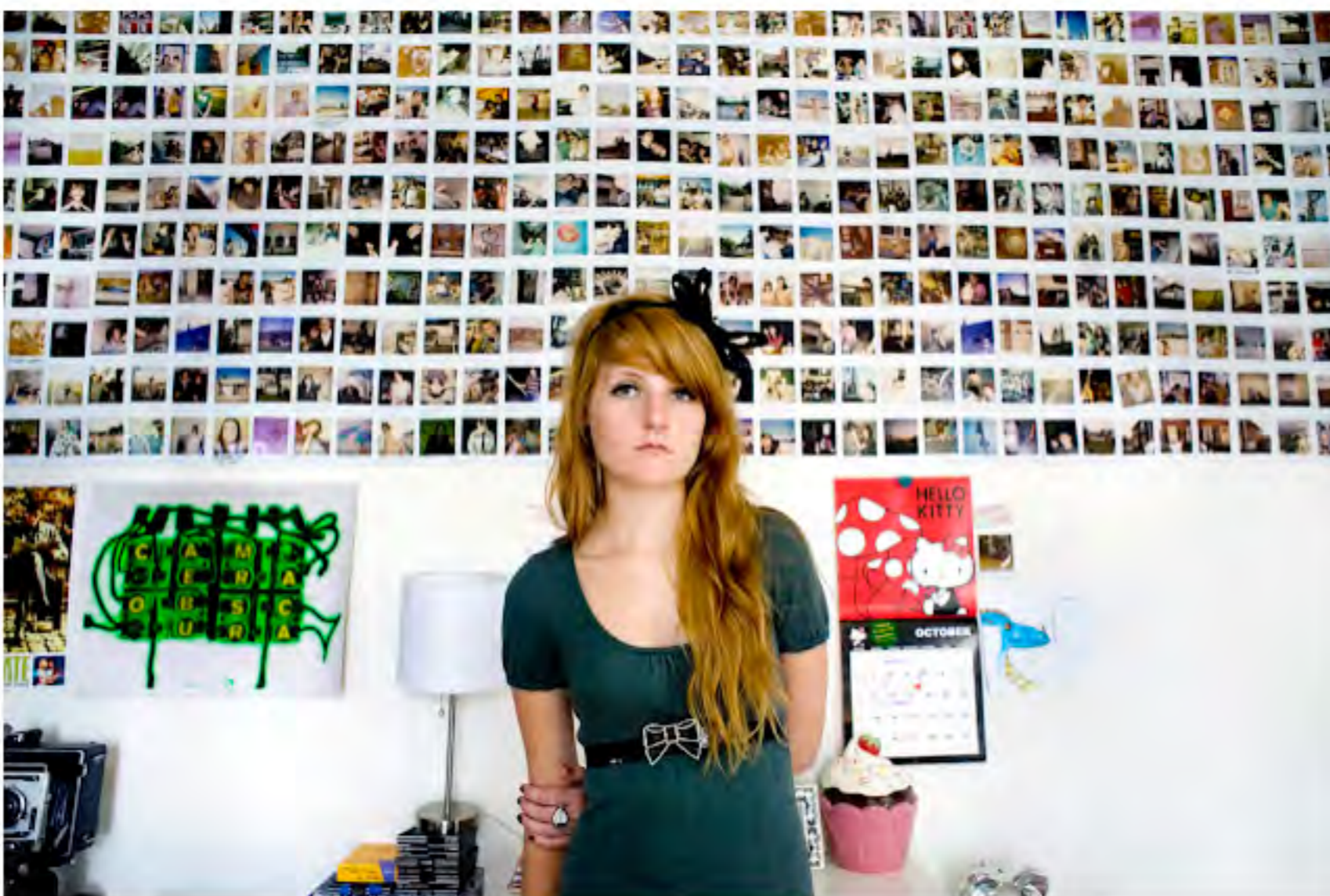
Becca G. Winchester MA 2011

*In the beginning I asked the girls to chose where they wanted to be photographed. A number of them chose their bedrooms, and it was then I realized that was the nexus of a project. The room was a metaphor, an extension of the girl, but also the girl seemed to be part of the room, to fit in, just like everything else in the material and emotional space.*



Becca P. Brookline, MA 2009

*While I started this work with my daughters and their friends, and with daughters of my friends, I eventually moved away from only photographing girls that I knew well. I enjoyed discovering new girls and building with them a photographer/model relationship with no expectation or holding back from either of us. It allowed me to meet girls from all different backgrounds and different worlds. I always spent time with each girl, so she was comfortable with me and eventually the photography session became a beautiful and intimate collaboration. I was discovering a person on the cusp on becoming an adult, but desperately holding on to the child she barely outgrew, a person on the edge between two worlds, trying to come to terms with this transitional time in her life and adjust to the person she is turning into. Posters of rock stars, political leaders or top models were displayed above a bed covered with stuffed animals; mirrors were an important part of the room, a reflection of the girls' image to the world; personal objects, photos, clothes everywhere, chaotic jumbles of pink and black make-up and just stuff, seemed to give a sense of security and warmth to the room like a womb within the outside world.*



Ellice, Jamaica Plain MA 2011

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LENSCRATCH EXHIBITIONS

The 2012 Animals Exhibition

The 2012 Lenscratch Love Exhibition

The 2011 Holidays Exhibition

The 2011 Favorite Images Exhibition

The 2011 Masks, Costumes, and Halloween Exhibition

The 2011 Visual Pranks and Puns Exhibition

The 2011 Self Portrait Exhibition

The 2011 Summer Exhibition

The 2011 Father's Day Exhibition

The 2011 Mother's Day Exhibition

The 2010 4th of July Exhibition

The 2009 Thanksgiving Exhibition

The 2010 Family Exhibition

The 2011 Luck Exhibition

The 2009 Favorite Images Exhibition

The 2010 Favorite Images Exhibition

INTERVIEWS WITH PHOTOGRAPHERS

Alia Malley

Angela Bacon Kidwell



I initially started this work focusing on teenage girls in the United States and eventually expanded the project to include girls from the two worlds I am most familiar with, the two worlds I experienced myself as a young woman: the United States and the Middle East. This is how this project became very personal to me. I became fascinated with the similar issues girls at that age face, 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 this may be.



Shannon, Boston MA 2010

Being with those young women in the privacy of their world gave me a unique peek into their private lives and their inner selves. They sensed that I was not judging them and became an active part of the project. Their frankness and generosity in sharing access was a privilege that they have extended to me but also to all the viewers of this work and this book. The beauty and strength, the aspirations and dreams of these young women from different backgrounds, different worlds, are deeply moving and I have tried to be the invisible mirror of those qualities here.

My deepest hope for this project is that we help them achieve the fullness of their promise.



Siena, Brookline MA 2009

#### **INTERVIEW WITH RANIA MATAR**

The media and photo world has been buzzing about your new book, *A Girl and Her Room* for months now...I'm so thrilled for you! But let's start at the beginning. Tell us about finding your way into photography.

I have been a photographer since 2000. I was originally trained and worked as an architect. In college, I took many art classes including painting, drawing, printing but not photography. I always enjoyed photography but did not formally start doing seriously till 2000. I took many workshops starting in 2000 at the New England School of Photography and fell in love with the medium instantly. I loved being in the darkroom and seeing the images come to life. I was originally mainly photographing my children, and doing portraiture, nudes and still lifes while still working as an architect. In 2002 I was in Lebanon and went with a cousin of mine to a Palestinian refugee camp. I was shocked to see how people were living so close to where I had grown up and more shocked by the fact that I had no idea. I just started photographing people in the camps, and fell in love with the ability to tell a story through photography, the ability to capture life and to freeze the beauty of those simply mundane moments of life into a permanent image. Everything I had previously done and been somehow felt like it led me to this. I never went back to doing architecture. I felt that my architectural training, my love for art and painting, my being as a woman and a mother, my growing up during the war in Lebanon, my current life in the US and my love the Middle East all combined to make this feel so right. I eventually took more workshops at NESOP and then with the Maine Photographic Workshops in Oaxaca, Mexico with Constantine Manos and Stella Johnson in 2005. Costa became a mentor to me.

Beth Yamelle Edwards

Bruce Haley

Cole Thompson

Elaine O'Neil

Elliott Wilcox

Ferit Kuyas

Gloria Baker Feinstein

Gordon Stettinus

Harvey Stein

Jennifer Shaw

Jessica Ingram

John Chervinsky

Julia Dean

Julia Kozerski

Julia Kozerski

Kathleen McLaughlin

Ken Rosenthal

Kerry Mansfield

Michael Kirchoff

Michelle Sank

Priya Kambli

Rania Matar

Simone Lueck

Susan Burnstine

Tami Bone

Tom Chambers

Yaakov Israel

#### **SITES TO EXPLORE**

Zreportage

Zone Zero

you thought we wouldn't notice

Words without Pictures

Women in Photography International

Women in Photography

What's the Jackanory

We Can Shoot Too

Waterfall Magazine

wan.der.lust.ag.ra.phy

Wallspace Gallery

Wall Space/The Flat File

Voices from Italy

Visura Magazine

Visual Overture Magazine

Visual Culture Blog

Visual Candles

Vewd

Verve Photo

Vaso De Agua

Urbanautica

Uppercase Magazine

Unless You Will





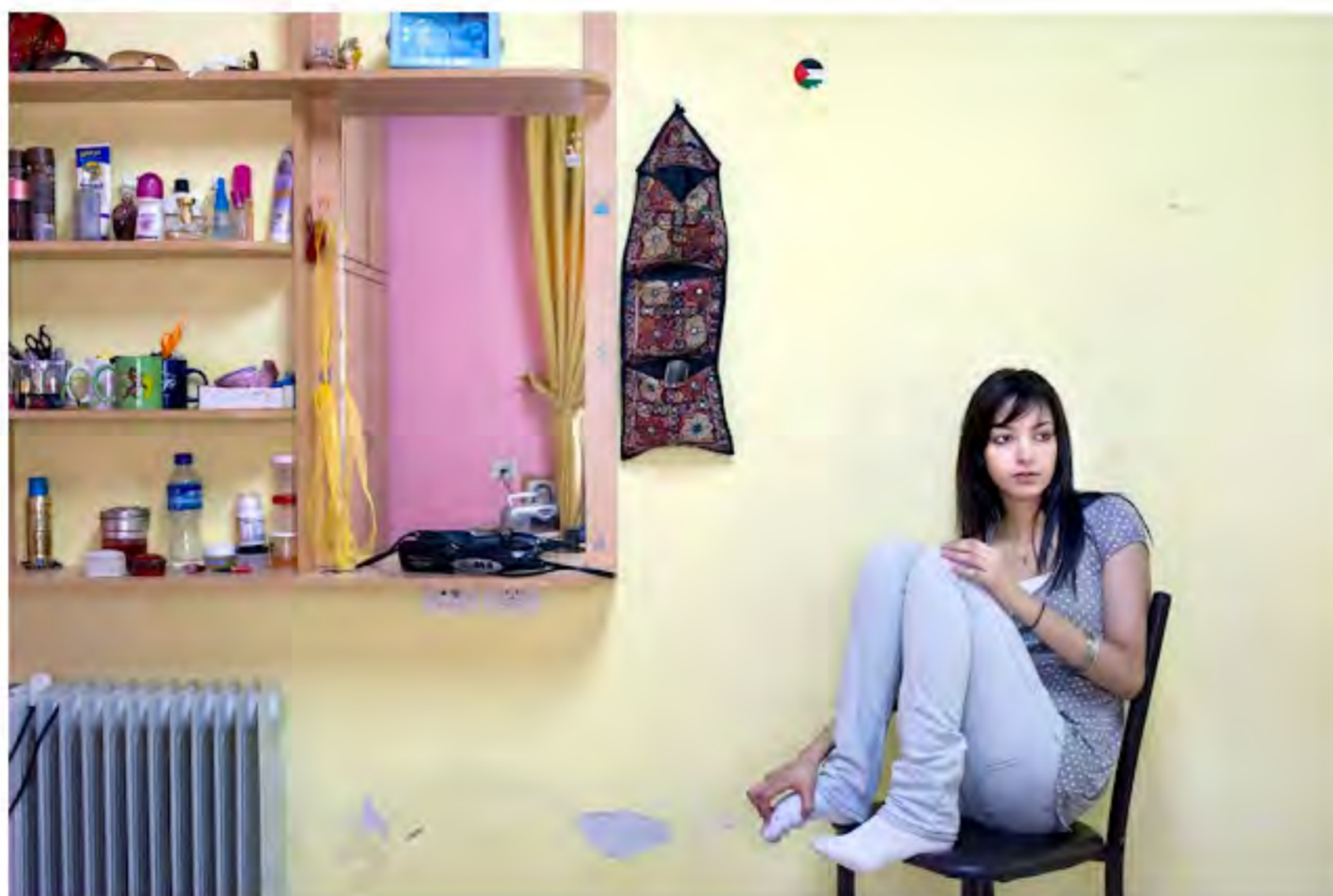
*Reem, Doha Lebanon 2010*

**Your work has revolved around two worlds—your personal exploration of family and the broader platform of women's issues, particularly in the Middle East. I imagine that participating in both worlds keeps you rooted. Because of these interests, do you find the connections between daily life and what you witness in other cultures to be more profound? In some ways, this speaks to your idea of being on the edge between two worlds (though with *A Girl and Her Room*, it's more about the edge of adolescence and adulthood)....**

My being from 2 worlds and simultaneously belonging to 2 cultures definitely has shaped my photography. In my earlier work, I felt that being originally from the Middle East and understanding so well the culture I was able to photograph it with an understanding and an affection that is very personal to me. Living in the United States, I was able to convey my perception of my world over there to my world here, at a time where the news were very focused on a lot of negativity coming from the Middle East.

What I knew was different and I wanted to make sure my audience in the US saw that Middle East I knew and was discovering further through my photography. Photography led me to areas of Lebanon I had never been to before and introduced me to people I would have never met. And I found that regardless of religion and political affiliation, people were just people. They were warm, welcoming, and resilient; they kept their dignity and their humanity despite all they had lived through. They trusted me and opened their doors to me with a humbling hospitality. I wanted to convey that through my work. Now my being a woman and a mother definitely shaped my work as well.

When I started photographing in the camps and in the Southern Lebanon, and I started showing my work here, people always asked me "where are the men in your images?" In the beginning, I was very upset at the fact that I could have ignored such a large part of the population! Then I went back to photograph and realized that I was interested in photographing women and children. I am a woman and a mother myself and my instincts had led me in that direction. I had an "YES" moment, right then: I was photographing women and children in the Middle East. This was what defined my work and made it personal. Once I owned that fact, my work moved very consciously in that direction. It was liberating. And years later, I am still photographing girls and young women.



*Bisan, Bethlehem West Bank, 2010*

[Uinter Magazine](#)

[Two Way Lens](#)

[Triple Canopy Magazine](#)

[Toy Camera](#)

[Too Much Chocolate](#)

[Through-the-Lens](#)

[Thoughts on Photography](#)

[This Is Diversity](#)

[this is a photo blog](#)

[Thiaps](#)

[The Year in Pictures](#)

[The Ten](#)

[The Sartorialist](#)

[The Sad Red Earth](#)

[The Photography Post](#)

[The Photographs Not Taken](#)

[The Photographic Dictionary](#)

[The Photo Exchange](#)

[The Photo Book](#)

[The Online Photographer](#)

[The Landscapist](#)

[The International Photographer Index](#)

[The F Stop](#)

[The F Blog](#)

[The Digital Journalist](#)

[The Curator Ship](#)

[The 37th Frame Magazine](#)

[Super Massive Black Hole Magazine](#)

[Subjectify](#)

[Stellazine](#)

[Square Magazine](#)

[Spotch Magazine](#)

[Source Photographic Review](#)

[Social Documentary](#)

[Singular Images](#)

[Shots Magazine](#)

[Share Magazine](#)

[Self Portrait Gallery](#)

[See Saw Magazine](#)

[Seconds 2 Real](#)

[Rooms Magazine](#)

[Romka Magazine](#)

[Raw File](#)

[Purpose Magazine](#)

[Private](#)

[Prison Photography](#)

[Positive Magazine](#)





Raissa, Medford MA 2009

**A Girl and her Room is a wonderful ringside seat into adulthood. How did the book come about?**

When my earlier work got published into a book (*Ordinary Lives*), I felt ready to move to something closer to home. By then my older daughter was 14 and she was transforming before my eyes. She had been such a tomboy whose passion was soccer and she was turning into a new person I didn't quite recognize. I decide to start photographing her and her friends and wasn't sure what angle to give the work yet. I photographed them mainly in group situations and realized how much they were performing for each other, so I decided to photograph each girl by herself. I started by asking the girl to choose where she would like to be photographed. After a couple chose the bedroom, I realized I had a project. It just felt right. Another of those YES moments, I was referring to above!



Lilly, Brookline MA 2009

**What did you learn about being a teenage girl that you had not considered before?**

This project made me understand my own daughter so much better. It definitely made me more tolerant and understanding in general. It reminded me of myself as a teen. I truly felt how vulnerable most of those girls were. They are all trying to deal with this transition in their lives in the best way they know how to and in their rooms, they could just be themselves. I ended up enjoying photographing mostly girls I didn't previously know as I felt that were no expectations or preconceptions from either of us. The relationship we built was a model/photographer relationship. Even though I could have been their mother, I was not, so the girls let their guards down. They knew I was not judging them, and that this work was about them. They understood the project, and the process became beautifully and intimately collaborative. I couldn't have it without them willingly bringing their voice into the images. I built a pretty intimate relationship with each of them and I realized how trusting and open they were with me. It showed me that teens are often willing to talk and open up. Often we, the adults, don't know how to let them do this. I truly felt very fortunate to have been allowed into their private world. Diane Arbus said: "the more specific you are the more general it will be". This quote really rings true to me for the particular project.

- Positive Magazine
- Posi+ive Magazine
- Portfolio Review
- Pixels and Prose
- Pix Feed Blog
- Pix Channel
- Pictory Magazine
- Photographer's Speak
- Photoeye Blog
- Photoeye
- Photo Wings
- Photo Induced
- Photo Booth
- Phaidon Edit
- Phaidon Agenda
- Out of Contxt blog
- Our Magazine
- Orion Magazine
- Organic Chemistry
- Only Diptychs
- One One Thousand
- NYMPHOTO
- New Landscape Photography
- Mrs. Deane
- Modern Art Notes
- Milk Bar
- Mary Virginia Swanson blog
- Making Room
- LVP Magazine
- Lunatic Magazine
- Lunatic
- Lucida Magazine
- love-pictures
- Love-Issue
- Los Angeles League of Photographers
- Liz Kuball
- Little Birdy B
- Light Leaks Magazine
- Lenswork Magazine
- Lens Culture Magazine
- Lens (NYTimes)
- Lay Flat Magazine
- LA Photo
- La Lettre de la Photographie
- La Fototeca Guatemala
- Julia Dean Photo Workshops
- JPG Magazine
- Journal
- It'll Happen Magazine





*Brianna, Winchester MA 2009*

**Were there remarkable differences between the two cultures of girls that you were photographing?**

There were more similarities than differences. For me photographing in both cultures wasn't about comparing cultures, even though some people cannot help but do it. For me it was more about really showing the similarities and the universality of being a teenage girl and the similar issues that girls go through. I initially started this work focusing on teenage girls in the United States and eventually expanded the project to include girls from the two worlds I am most familiar with, the two worlds I experienced myself as a teen and a young twenty-year old: the United States and the Middle East. This is how this project became very personal to me. I became fascinated with the similar issues girls at that age face, regardless of culture, religion, and background, as they learn to deal with all the pressures that arise as they become consciously aware of the surrounding world, wherever this may be. I chose to photograph both in the US and the Middle East because those are the 2 cultures that define my daughters and me.



*Lucy, Chestnut Hill MA 2011*

**How did your daughters feel about the project, and how do they and their friends react to seeing themselves and their worlds in print and on the walls?**

My daughters had fun with this project, but not while I was photographing them. In that instance I was their mother and not the photographer, and this was not as easy... But they did it anyway – they realized they would not be happy if they were not in the book after all! However they have been pretty involved helping me edit the work. They have their favorite images and by now they refer to most images by the young woman's name, even if they never met her before. This work was exhibited at my older daughter's school. I loved that it was also used for educational purposes. In the creative writing class, they would ask the students to each pick a girl and write an essay pretend to be that young woman in the photo and write her story, or in the theater class, each student had to study a young woman, her body language, etc. and then act the interpretation of that person on stage. I thought those were great exercises and my daughter was happy to be part of this. It validated me in front of my older kids and as a mother, this was huge (I also have a teenage boy).

- It'll Happen Magazine
- Indie Photo Book Library
- Incandescent Zine
- ILOVETHATPHOTO Photography Magazine
- If These Streets Could Talk
- I Thought I Was Alone
- i shot myself, they did too
- I Love That Photo Magazine
- I Heart Photograph
- Humble Arts Foundation
- Huh. Magazine
- Here in Van Nuys
- Heather Morton Art Buyer
- Guernica Magazine
- Ground Glass
- Go Tread Go
- Gloria Baker Feinstein Blog
- Gatochy
- Fuzion Magazine
- Future Shipwreck
- From Here to There
- Fraction Magazine
- Foward Thinking Museum
- fourteen-nineteen
- Fototazo
- Fotonomous
- FotoEvidence
- Foto 8 Magazine
- Fortoritim Magazine
- Focal Point Daily
- Foam Magazine
- Flak Photo
- Finite Foto Magazine
- Filmwasters
- File Magazine
- Female Persuasion
- Feature Shoot
- Fantom Magazine
- Fabrik Magazine
- F Stop Magazine
- EYEMAZING Magazine
- Eye Curious
- Exposures
- Exposure Compensation
- Expiration Notice
- Every Photo Tells a Story
- Dodge and Burn
- Diffusion Magazine
- Design for Mankind





*Hiba, Shatila Refugee Camp, Beirut 2010*

**When you think back to your own teenage bedroom, do you see significant similarities or differences?**

I wish someone photographed it for me then so I can tell you what was in it! It was similar in the sense that it was my own space and I decorated it anyway I wanted with stickers and posters. I probably wasn't as creative as some of those rooms though. I know it was orange, and I did have my huge Teddy Bear and my posters of rock stars (my favorite was Johnny Halliday, a French rock singer....). I had a very loved collection of vinyl records and cassettes and... a very unique collection of shrapnel and bullets (courtesy of the Lebanese civil war)!



*Kate, Boston MA 2010*

**What advice can you give emerging photographers, especially on presentation, on networking, on consistently producing excellent work?**

Work hard and photograph something you LOVE and are passionate about. Treat the people you photograph with respect. Your passion, commitment to the subject and work that comes from the heart will shine through. Other photographers are your friends. It is important to help each other and give each other feedback. Present your work with the respect it deserves. Look at life around you. You don't need to go to far away places to take great photographs and make a great project. Once you start looking, you will see the beauty in life around you.

Design for Mankind

Deep Sleep Magazine

Daylight Magazine

Day Four Magazine

Dark Sky Magazine

Daily Routines

Culture Hall

Conscientious

Claxton Projects

Chambre Noire Magazine

Carla Girl Photo

Canteen Magazine

Camera Obscura

Burn Magazine

Boooooom Magazine

Blur Magazine

Blue Eyes Magazine

Blind Spot Magazine

Bite Magazine

Back Flash Magazine

Awkward Stock Photos

Art Blogging Los Angeles

American Suburb X

Ain't Bad Magazine

Ahorn Magazine

Afterimage

aCurator

Actual Colors May Vary

A photo Editor

A Photo A Day

5B4

591 Photography

500 Photographers

1000 Words Magazine

01 Magazine

(Notes On) Politics, Theory & Photography

Photographers Who Give Back

Kenro Izu

Collect.Give

Julia Dean

Blue Earth Alliance





*Arielle, Dedham MA 2011*

#### What event took your work to the next level?

Probably a collection of events... Portfolio reviews were very helpful to me in terms of introducing me to all sorts of people in the photo world: reviewers and photographers alike. In the beginning I was mainly looking for feedback and those reviews were so helpful to improve my work originally. Eventually I met people who made a difference in my photography career: museum curators, gallery owners, magazine writers, etc, and once again great photographers who became close friends and whose feedback and friendship over the years were very important to me as a person and as a photographer. One event however did make a difference in my life. In 2007, I submitted work to the New England Photographers' Biennial. I received a first prize, started working with my gallery in Boston and got me nominated for the Foster Prize where I became a finalist and was offered an exhibition at the ICA, Boston. In the same year I received a Massachusetts Cultural Grant. I feel that a combination of hard work, good work and some luck are important.



*Maddie-Chloe, Cornwall NY, 2010*

#### Are you working on a new project?

I am now working on a new project titled l'Enfant-Femme photographing the younger teen where the focus is now on the girl, her body language and the details, instead of the space around her. It was simultaneously a natural transition from A Girl and Her Room and an inspiration from my younger daughter who at 12 was transforming from a child into a little woman.

Blue Earth Alliance

Sara Terry

Gil Garcetti

Gloria Baker Feinstein

Kate Orme

#### Where I'm at: Interviews and Articles about me

Camera Obscura

The SIP Blog

Photo Radio Blog

NYMPhoto

Lenswork Interview

Rangefinder Radio

Inside Analog Radio

Fraction Magazine

Visura Magazine

Through-the-Lens

Two Way Lens

Ciao, Chessa!

NYMPhoto

Area of Design

Thoughts on Photography

Source Review

Plates to Pixels

MIAD-FA382

Fraction Magazine

Too Much Chocolate

#### Blog Archive

Blog Archive ▾

#### Photographers Featured on Lenscratch

Aaron Hobson

Aaron Hobson

Aaron Hobson

Aaron Huey

Aaron M. Cohen

Aaron Ruell

Abelardo Morell

Abelardo Morell

Adam Knott

Adam Panczuk

Al Davalle

Alan W. Goerne





*Mollie 12, Brookline MA 2011*



*Maryam 9, Beirut 2011*



*Juliette 10, Arlington MA 2011*

- Alan W. George
- Alejandro Cartagena
- Alejandro Maureira
- Alek Lindus
- Alex Arzt
- Alex Kisilevich
- Alex Leme
- Alex MacLean
- Alex Prager
- Alex Prager
- Alexander von Reiszitz
- Alia Malley
- Aline Smithson
- Alison Turner
- Alix Perry
- Alix Smith
- Allison Grant
- Amanda Friedman
- Amanda Keller Konya
- Amber Shields
- Amber Sowards
- Amy Anderson
- Amy Eckert
- Andrew Buurman
- Andrew Miksys
- Andrew Sanderson
- André França
- Andy Adams
- Andy Hurvitz
- Andy Hurvitz
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