

ROOM TO GROW

WHETHER IN BEIRUT OR
BOSTON, A TEENAGE GIRL'S
ROOM IS ALWAYS A PLACE
FOR SELF-EXPRESSION.



THE GENESIS FOR Rania Matar's *A Girl and Her Room* photography project was a series of photos she took of her own teenage daughter, as well as some of her daughter's friends. Matar wanted to capture something of the self-consciousness of teenage girls during their transition into adulthood, but she felt this first set of images was not quite successful.

"There was always the fact of our relationship – that I was my daughter's mother – between us. When I began to photograph girls I did not know, I was much freer and the girls were much freer. I wasn't associated with the role of the mother – just as a photographer."

In early 2009, Matar, who is based in Boston, decided to expand her circle of subjects and start photographing teenage girls alone in their own personal space. She even started approaching teenage girls between the ages of 15 and 20 on the street and asking for permission to photograph them. Later that year she expanded the project to the Middle East, photographing girls in Lebanon, where she herself grew up. There she found subjects through family friends and, for photographs taken in the Palestinian refugee camps, through connections built with families and non-government organisations during previous photographic projects.

In terms of material things, Matar is more interested in the similarities between the girls than any differences. "It's an age where all these girls are discovering how to live in the world... But I found nearly all of them had stuffed animals on their beds and were still kids in so many ways. They also had adult bodies and they were very much aware of that, and of being women."

For Matar, the collaborative nature of the project is a major aspect of its success. "Every single time, the girl really understood the project and [became] fully part of it. Sometimes they would ask me afterwards: 'Can I change my clothes? Can I include something else in the picture?' They were willing to show me their real selves."

Matar's photographs capture not only the vulnerability of her subjects, but also a sense of barely contained exuberance. The girls' poses might sometimes be guarded or self-conscious, but the colourful decorations, the bright bedspreads, the clothing, make-up, computers, posters and accumulated novelties reveal an appetite for life and enthusiasm for the world. Posing in their bedrooms, we see expressions not only of teenage desire and anxiety, but also of industry, optimism and creativity.

by **Sophie Quick**

» *A Girl and Her Room* was published as a book in May 2012. For more information visit raniamatar.com.

THIS PAGE, TOP KRYSTAL, BROOKLINE, MASSACHUSETTS, US 2009
CENTRE NOHAD, BOURJ AL BARAJNEH PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMP, BEIRUT, LEBANON 2010 **BELOW** HELEN MEI, ROXBURY, MASSACHUSETTS, US 2010

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LUBNA, BEIRUT, LEBANON 2010 **BELOW** ELHAM, SHATILA PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMP, BEIRUT, LEBANON 2009





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CONTENTS
#425

FEATURES

16 DUSTIN TIME

COVER STORY After 46 years of on-screen success, the once angry and insecure Dustin Hoffman reveals why he is now a happy man.

20 INSIDE LOOKING OUT

Enticing Japanese hideaways out of seclusion.

22 STILL STANDING

For some would-be politicians, winning isn't everything. In fact, it isn't anything. A campaign journal.

24 ROOM TO GROW

ROVING EYE In their own personal spaces, teenage girls reveal their true identities – and similarities with their peers.

28 A GROWTH INDUSTRY

Coming clean on a dirty job.

30 BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Conversing with members of Converge, an American band that defies categorisation.

32 LOVE AND LOGIC

Australian author Graeme Simsion talks about his 'awkward romance' novel, *The Rosie Project*.

34 STATE OF PLAY

The Oscars are coming, and it's gonna get political.

REGULARS

- 07** VENDOR PROFILE
- 09** STREETSHEET
- 10** HEARSAY
- 12** YOUR SAY
- 13** MY WORD
- 14** LOOBY
- 15** RAZER
- 29** CULTURE POLICE
- 37** SELECT
- 38** FILM
- 39** DVD
- 40** MUSIC
- 41** BOOKS
- 42** MEDIA
- 43** OINTMENT
- 45** PUZZLES
- 46** QUICK FIX

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