

In Her Image

Photographs by Rania Matar

BORN AND RAISED IN LEBANON, RANIA MATAR studied art and architecture at the American University of Beirut before moving to the United States in 1984 due to the increased difficulty of pursuing her studies during the Lebanese Civil War. She transferred to Cornell University and graduated in 1987 with a degree in architecture. Matar was a practicing architect until 2000 when, pregnant with her fourth child, she began taking photography workshops at the New England School of Photography in Boston. She continued her training with Constantine Manos of Magnum Photos at the Maine Photographic Workshops in Oaxaca, Mexico,

and eventually transitioned her career from architecture to photography.

Matar's work addresses issues of personal and collective identity through photographs mining female adolescence and womanhood.

This December, the Amon Carter will present *In Her Image: Photographs by Rania Matar*, the artist's first monographic exhibition at a

museum in the United States. The fifty large color prints on view are drawn from three series—*A Girl and Her Room*, *L'enfant Femme*, and *Unspoken Conversations*—each of which depicts various stages of female development.

In the first two series, Matar photographed pivotal stages of a girl's life from early to late adolescence. *A Girl and Her Room* depicts teenage girls in their bedrooms surrounded by the material artifacts that form those critical parts of their emergent identities as women. Bras hang from doorknobs; magazine pages depicting fashionable models poster a wall; makeup, nail polish,



and jewelry litter every surface; clothes lie heaped on the floor or bulge from closets. Amidst these immediate assertions of growing up, traces of childhood remain in the stuffed animals, school backpacks, and photographs of friends, reminding the viewer that these young women are not yet adults.

L'enfant Femme also consists of individual portraits of girls, but at an earlier age. In these photographs, Matar presents girls who are transitioning out of young girlhood. Centered within the picture's frame, each girl poses for the camera with a sense of awareness of her developing sexuality, some donning lacquered nails and lip gloss, others dressed modestly in play clothes and frocks. Matar also re-photographed some of her subjects



from *L'enfant Femme* a few years later after they fully transition into their teens. Pictured in the same location as the earlier photographs, the young women in the later portraits bear the temporal disjuncture marking the distance between them and their previous selves.

Unspoken Conversations is a more recent project, placing mothers and daughters together in the same frame. Each picture offers a glimpse into a private bond that is marked by the varied and often vexed dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship. Sometimes there is tenderness and familial resemblance; at other times, there is competition and distance. In spite of the particulars of each relation, the images place into sharp relief the pressures of aging that mark both sides of a woman's life as she enters and exits her years of reproductive

fertility, poignantly capturing both the pleasures and uncomfortable realities of growing up and growing old.

Matar aims to transcend respective biases through her work, maintaining the particulars of each individual she photographs. Whether wearing a hijab in a Palestinian refugee camp or a bikini top in Boston, the women in her pictures share traits common to all women regardless of background. Together, the photographs offer a powerful image of how female identity is shaped not only over time but across cultures. ■

On view December 23, 2017, through June 17, 2018.
In Her Image: Photographs by Rania Matar was organized by Joy Kim, assistant curator of photographs at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art.

This page:
Rania Matar (b. 1964)
Molly 12, Brookline, Massachusetts,
2011
From the portfolio *L'enfant-Femme*
Inkjet print
36 x 28 1/2 in.
© Rania Matar Photography

Opposite page:
Soraya and Tala, Yarze, Lebanon,
2014
Inkjet print
From the portfolio *Unspoken
Conversations*
28 1/2 x 36 in.
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