Cover Art Concept

Born and raised in Lebanon, Rania Matar moved to the United States in 1984. Her work focuses on creating awareness and a dialogue between the two cultures, with an emphasis on identity and universality. Matar's work has been widely published and exhibited at galleries and museums worldwide, and her images are in the permanent collections of several museums, institutions, and private collections. She has published three books: *L'enfant-femme* (2016), *A Girl and Her Room* (2012), and *Ordinary Lives* (2009).

Matar received several grants and awards including a 2017 Mellon residency at the Gund Gallery at Kenyon College, a 2011 Legacy Award at the Griffin Museum of Photography, Massachusetts Cultural Council artist fellowships in 2007 and 2011, and first-place prizes at the New England Photographers Biennial and Women in Photography International. In 2008 she was a finalist for the Foster Award at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, with an accompanying solo exhibition. A midcareer retrospective of her work will be exhibited at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in a solo exhibition, *In Her Image*; her work will also be exhibited at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris from September 12 to November 13, 2017, as part of the Biennale des Photographes du Monde Arabe Contemporain.

A Girl and Her Room

This body of work was inspired by my daughter when she was fifteen. As I watched her passage from girlhood into adulthood, I was fascinated by the transformation taking place, the adult personality taking shape and a gradual self-consciousness replacing the carefree world she had known and lived in so far. I started photographing her with her 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 by herself emerged.

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.

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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 worlds I experienced myself as a young woman: the United States and the Middle East. This is how this project became personal to me: I had been one of those young women twenty-five years earlier, in a different country and culture and at a different time. I became fascinated with the universality of growing up, with the similar issues girls at that age face, regardless of culture, religion, or background. — *Rania Matar*

Editor's Note

Rania Matar's visually striking photographs in the series *A Girl and Her Room* intimately speak to the theme of this issue, the gender and sexuality of borders and margins, in several distinct ways. The girls portrayed in the series are on the cusp of adulthood; their bodies and subject positions do not fit neatly into any one category but instead occupy the margins of both adolescence and adulthood. Their becoming occurs and is manifest in their most intimate spaces, their bodies and their rooms. Their carefully assembled outfits and rehearsed poses send the message of embodying the border between girlhood and womanhood. Matar's photographs powerfully communicate the angst and joy of living in this border.

This series also invokes margins and borders in the way the photographs place the girls in their rooms. The rooms are the spaces that the girls have made their own, even though they may be shared and used for other purposes. Matar describes the girl's room as so intimate that it is "an extension of the girl." The profound relationship between a girl and her room becomes evident in the photographs — her room is a crucial space for her formation and becoming. Thus the series calls into question the border between a girl's body and embodied subjectivity and her room. And her room itself constitutes the border between her and her worlds.

In the series, the photographs portray the very different worlds girls construct for themselves — the similarities are powerful in the girls' poses, facial expressions, and postures. But the differences among them are also captivating. These differences cannot be easily mapped onto the United States versus the Middle East because many of the most striking differences are among girls who live in close proximity, in the same location, sharing culture and perhaps religion.

In the *JMEWS* cover photo, Mariam sits in her one-room home in the Bourj al Shamali Palestinian Refugee Camp in Tyre, Lebanon. Matar met Mariam and took this photograph in 2009. The photograph of Mariam depicts a space within the family room that she has claimed as her own. Her name is written on the wall behind her; her modest belongings and those used by other family members hang there as well. Her gaze is direct. Despite the starkness of the room and her stare, Mariam and her room are similar to many others in the series in capturing affective dimensions of the gendered and sexual borders of girlhood and womanhood and occupying the margins of both. — *Banu Gökarıksel*