

Barriers and Connections

Quarantine portraits reveal beauty and humanity.

Mia and Jun, Allston, Massachusetts



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

When the COVID-19 pandemic required people to quarantine inside their homes early in 2020, Lebanese American photographer Rania Matar began taking photographs of her friends and family. Because of social distancing protocols, the portraits were always taken from the other side of a window or glass door at the subject's home.


Matar shared the project on social media. Soon strangers began approaching her about having their portraits taken as well. Over a period of weeks, Matar established a connection with her subjects and eventually photographed more than 100 people ensconced in their homes.

All the while, Matar says, she “found that sometimes difficult moments bring beauty and humanity to us all.” A selection of 27 pandemic-era portraits are on view through May 9 at *Rania Matar: On Either Side of the Window*, an exhibition at the Cornell Fine Arts Museum at Rollins College.

Evocative and insightful, the photographs capture a moment of “connecting across barriers” that emphasizes the collaboration between photographer and subject. As the quarantine continued, Matar noticed, her subjects began to become more active participants in the sessions.

For example, one portrait is of a woman who chose to pose in her wedding dress because the pandemic caused her to postpone her marriage ceremony.

“Each image tells a story of that particular person and how they experienced this event,” says Curator Gisela Carbonell. “I love how the artist captured the human aspect of this tragedy.”

Admission to the museum — known for its eclectic permanent collection and its thought-provoking traveling exhibitions — is free, but visitors must register in advance. Check rollins.edu/cornell-fine-arts-museum for hours of operation and registration information or call 407.645-2526. 

—Julia Tilford



Lebanese American photographer Rania Matar (left) photographed people ensconced in their homes while under quarantine due to COVID-19. By necessity, that meant most of the images were captured with the subjects behind windows and doors. The effect was unexpectedly powerful, says Matar, who “found that sometimes difficult moments bring beauty and humanity to us all.”



Austin, Boston, Massachusetts (above) and Loretta and Camilla, Newton, Massachusetts (below).



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