



## A Lebanese Photographer Takes Cross-Cultural Portraits of Girls on the Brink of Womanhood

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*Madi 10, Watertown MA 2013, 2013*

Pictura Gallery

[Rania Matar](#) is a woman of two worlds. Born in Beirut, she moved to the U.S. in 1984 to escape the Lebanese civil war. She originally trained as an architect but found her true creative calling as a documentary photographer. Her powerful work often focuses on [Skip to Main Content](#) id their precarious journeys into adulthood.



*Anna*  
Pictura Gallery

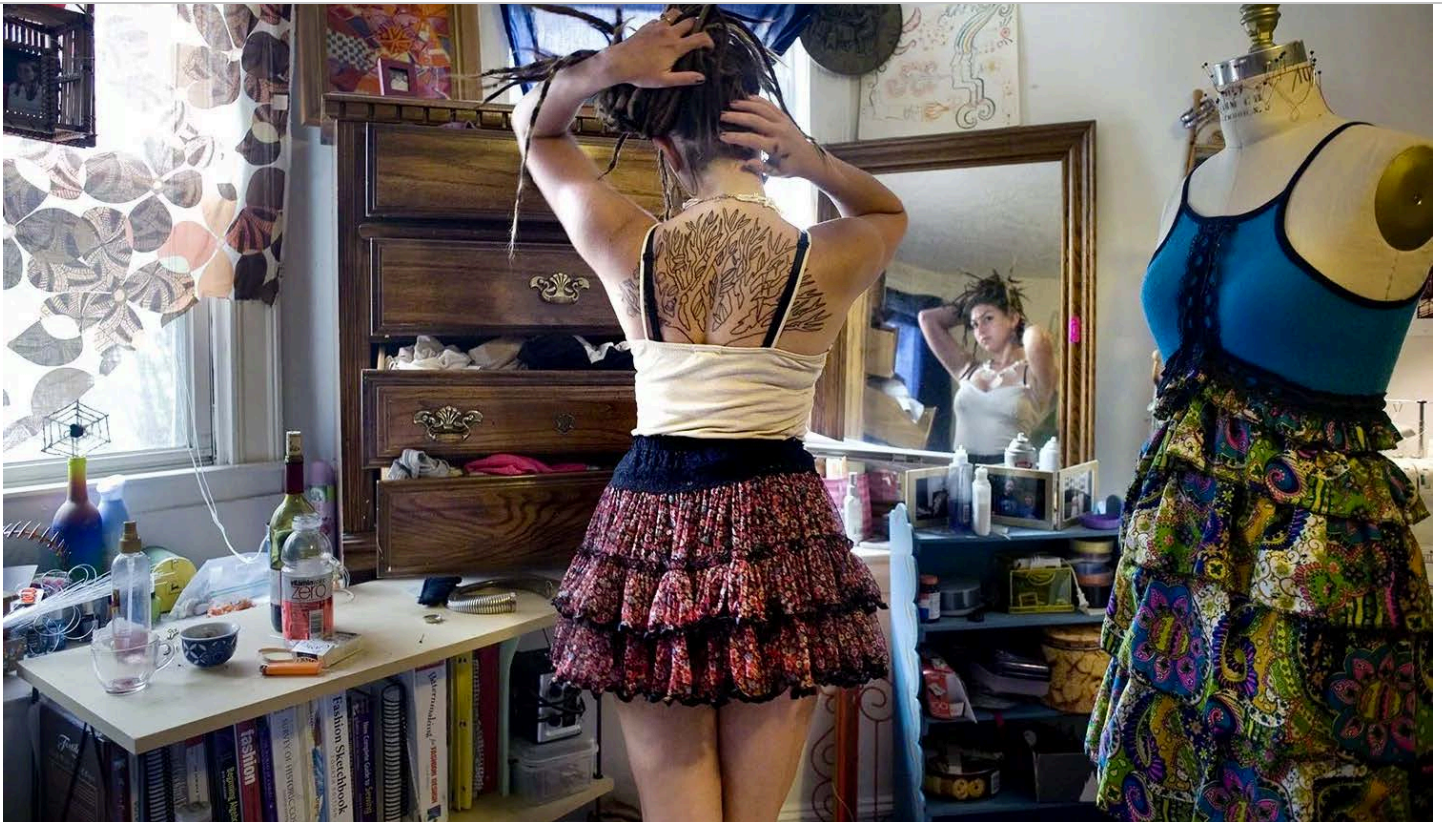


*Juliette 11, Beirut 2012, 2012*  
Pictura Gallery

Yet, as Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan said of Matar's subjects, "They are not simply American; they are not simply Arab; neither are they simply Muslim, Christian, nor Jewish. These girls are simply girls—but much more besides. These are images of girls at the point where they are beginning to become women—a powerful combination of youth, womanhood and beauty."

Queen Noor's words graced Matar's third published collection, *L'Enfant-Femme* (2016), her follow-up to *A Girl and Her Room* (2012) and *Ordinary Lives* (2009). This fall, [Pictura Gallery](#) in Bloomington, Indiana, will host a selection of Matar's timely, revealing work.





Rania Matar  
*Shannon*  
Pictura Gallery

The Lebanese photographer has proven herself to be a keen observer of daily life and private realms. For her 2012 series, Matar photographed her female subjects in their bedrooms, be they in the U.S. or Lebanon. Some rooms were neat and orderly; others, chaotic. All were rich with bric-a-brac and colorful details—books, nail polish, stuffed animals, religious icons, rock star posters—that revealed deeply personal aspects of the girls' varied lives.



Rania Matar  
*Christilla*  
Pictura Gallery

In some cases, there were clear divisions between girls from the East and girls from the West. A few of the Lebanese girls wore hijabs, covering themselves in the privacy of their relatively austere bedrooms. In contrast, one American girl had a hot pink pushup bra hanging from a doorknob; another girl smoked a cigarette in front of her graffiti-covered bedroom walls.

Taken as a whole, however, the photographs convey more about the subjects' similarities than their differences. Whether from the U.S. or Lebanon, they're all on the strange, arduous journey from girlhood and womanhood.





*Christina 10, Beirut 2012, 2012*  
Pictura Gallery



Rania Matar  
*Lindsey 10, Needham MA, 2013, 2013*  
Pictura Gallery

Matar returned to the theme in her 2016 series, *L'Enfant-Femme*. Though the collection was finalized just a few years after *A Girl and Her Room*, there had been monumental shifts in technology and the visual representations of young women. Now that we're in the age of the selfie, it can be assumed that most of Matar's adolescent subjects are accustomed to taking their own portraits and applying an array of filters. Matar approached that reality with tactics of her own: Instead of a digital camera, she shot on film with a medium format camera. She also asked the girls not to smile.



*Chase 13 #2, Brownfield Maine 2013, 2013*  
Pictura Gallery



*Samira 12, Bourj El Barajneh Refugee Camp, Beirut 2011, 2011*  
Pictura Gallery

Rather than the practiced glamour of a selfie, we get a different angle—a raw, contemplative view of girls on the edge of transition. Once again, Matar's subjects may be separated by great distances, both geographically and culturally, yet their ventures into womanhood unite them.

—Bridget Gleeson

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