

# A Study of Photographs of Women By Women

Becca Michael

Contemporary Women Photographers:

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## Introduction

The images that I focused on for my study were photographs of women by women photographers. This collection of six photographs, two images per artist, addresses women in different topics of religion, sexuality, culture, and womanhood. Women are making strides in history, yet women photographers are not talked about in depth. The rise in social media has made the access to these artists easier, but a closer look of the work is needed. A variety of approaches are included in this collection, as well as traditional photography. I included these approaches to show that photography is more than an image, but an artwork that is created using photographs.

## Holly Andres

Andres is a female photographer who creates scenarios inspired by her childhood experiences. These scenes are staged to appear to be from a movie in her stylistic approach. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *TIME*, *The New Yorker*, and *The California Sunday Magazine*, while her fine art has been featured in *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *Exit Magazine*, *Art News*, *Modern Painters*, *British Journal of Photography*, *PDN*, *American Photo*, *Oprah Magazine*, *Glamour*, *Bust*, and *Art Ltd*. The two images selected are

from a series called *The Fallen Fawn*. “The suitcase contained everything the woman had left. At nightfall, the sisters ran their fingers through her box of burdens, applied her makeup, their lips kissed by the secrets of the Fallen Fawn” (Andres, n.d.).

- **Nightfall: Belmont House**

The photograph shows two young girls in a bedroom. These girls have applied make-up that can be seen on the vanity in the shot. The girl in the back of the photograph is doing the hair of the one in front. The image is dominated by pinks and greens. The girl in the front appears to be thinking deeply about something while playing with the other girl.

- **First Blush: Elk Rock Island**

The photograph shows the same two girls from *Nightfall: Belmont House*. In this image, the girls are hunched over a suitcase that contains a mirror, high heeled shoes, a mirror, brush, make-up and bras. The story of the suitcase shows the women that they will eventually become, but where it came from is unknown.

## **Amanda Charchian**

This artist creates photographs that focus on feminine sensuality. Charchian attended Otis College of Art and Design to receive a BFA in painting and sculpture. Though she has a background in painting, her work in photography is most noted. Her photographs have been featured in New York Magazine, Vogue Italia, AnOther Magazine, TIME, The Huffington Post, Interview Magazine, L’Officiel ART, i-D, Purple, Jalouse, and Turkish Vogue (Charchian, n.d.).

- **Pragma**

This photograph focuses on two eggs that are being held in front of a nude woman's womb. The eggs represent fertility and the ability of women to carry life. What is interesting about this image is that the leather gloves holding the eggs are bound together by a metal clip. As this photograph shows this ability to carry life, it also shows that women are bound by these expectations.

- **Philautia**

The image shows a woman's torso in bloomer underwear. Curling around the side of the underwear is a snake's tail, with the head above it. The title "Philautia" means "self-love; self-conceit; undue regard for oneself or one's own interests" (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, n.d.). The symbol of the snake may represent sin, or the connection between Eve and the snake in the Garden of Eden. Another interpretation of this snake could be man slithering into the woman's covered private area.

### **Lalla Essaydi**

Essaydi is a photographer who grew up in Morocco. She now lives in the United States where she received her MFA from the School of Museum of Fine Arts/TUFTS University in May 2003. Essaydi photographs Arab females covered in Islamic writing. Her work encourages viewers to resist stereotypes. Her work has been exhibited in Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis, Texas, Buffalo, Colorado, New York, Syria, Ireland, England, France, the Netherlands, Sharjah, U.A.E., and Japan and is represented in a number of collections, including the Williams College Museum of Art, The Art Institute of Chicago, the Fries Museum, the Netherlands, and The Kodak Museum of Art (Essaydi, n.d.).

- **Bullet #3**

This triptych photograph shows a woman laying on a bed, covered in gold accents. Separately, the photographs highlight a part of the female body, while together, they address the whole person. The bed and dress are made of fabric with gold sequins. The wall in the back is decorated with buttons. The woman's body is covered, from head to toe, in Islamic writing. She is staring directly at the viewer.

- **Converging Territories #24**

The image is of a woman's face with heavy eye liner and Islamic writing on the face, the fabric covering her face, the fabric covering her head, and the background. Like *Bullet #3*, Essaydi is addressing the view of Arab women. The four pictures are put together as if looking in a window. This image also uses the model to directly look at the viewer and see eye to eye with them.

## **Kerry Mansfield**

Kerry Mansfield is a photographer based in San Francisco. She attended UC Berkeley to attain a Bachelor's Degree in Photography, as well as studied at the California College of the Arts. Her photographs address time and its changes on the world. Mansfield's work has been exhibited globally and received awards such as LensCulture's Single Image Award, multiple World Photography Organization, PX3 and IPA Awards, and as a Critical Mass Finalist for three years. She has also worked with publications and press from Time Lightbox to the New York Times Lensblog (Mansfield, n.d.). The photographs chosen from this artist are from a series called "Aftermath." This series of photographs are a

visual timeline of Mansfield's cycle of chemotherapy for breast cancer. The photographs show the private aspect of this process that is often not seen by the public.

- **Self-Portrait, Chemo 1<sup>st</sup> Cycle I, January 2006**

We see Mansfield directly in front of us as we look at the photograph. She has had her left breast removed in a mastectomy procedure; she covers her remaining breast with her arm. Her hand has bandages from the procedure and is placed on her chest. Mansfield has a downcast gaze with eyes closed. The background of blue tile looks like a bathroom or a hospital.

- **Self-Portrait, Chemo 6<sup>th</sup> Cycle II, March 2006**

Two months after *Self-Portrait, Chemo 1<sup>st</sup> Cycle I, January 2006*, Mansfield uses the same background, but this time her face is now showing. In other photographs from around the same time, she has no hair from the therapy. The arm is flexed showing strength and power through this battle with chemotherapy. Her hospital bracelet showing with her clenched fist. The removed breast is partially shown with the scar from surgery.

### **Karen Miranda Rivadeneira**

Miranda-Rivadeneira is not only a woman photographer, but an Ecuadorian-American. In 2005, she graduated from the School of Visual Arts. Her photographs include indigenous communities as well as her relatives (Miranda-Rivadeneira, n.d.). The two images selected are from the series "Rowing Chants." This series of images have a photograph of nature on the left, a photograph of people or a person on the right and are accompanied by text at the bottom.

- **Poner Aceite**

The image on the left of the piece looks to be a natural formation of rock or sand that has piled up over time. The image on the right is of a woman who appears to be crying. The interpretation of this piece is enhanced by the following text:

put oil in the eyes

put oil in the lips

put oil in the nose

put oil in the ears

so vision becomes important

so eyes light up the fire

fire that stimulates the cells in the brain

fire that talks to the people and all of the sudden

this pain is not so scary anymore.

-carrying a wound is like carrying wonder (Miranda-Rivadeneira, 2019a).

From reading the text, it can be assumed that the formation on the left is a mudslide that has hardened, much like the flowing liquid from the woman's face. Both are wounds in a sense, but the text calls to block out all senses except sight to see the beauty that is there.

- **El Puerto**

The images in this piece are a tangle of tree branches on the left and a woman kissing the neck of another person. At first glance, this piece looks to be about relationships between two adults, but after reading the text, the meaning is changed. The text in it says the following:

There are places in the body that protects inner power

this is how I was taught to bless newborns and made relations,

standing behind them

moving the hair that covers their neck

kiss the back of their neck

and there,

whistle life into them

love into them

strength into them

and say

may your breath be sovereignty

may your mind be the lowest voice

may your heart be a home for those who seek (Miranda-Rivadeneira, 2019b)

The interpretation has now changed to be about a woman and a child. The description of the woman does not say if it is the mother of the child or not, leaving this up to the viewer to decide. The text shows the power that the woman has to not only give life to a child, but to bestow power to the child.

### **Abbie Trayler-Smith**

Abbie Trayler-Smith is a photographer based in London. She gets to know the personal lives of her subjects to learn about what issues they face. Trayler-Smith spent eight years as a photographer for The Daily Telegraph but decided to become a freelance photographer in 2007. She now works with Time, The Sunday Times, The Independent Review, Marie-Claire, Tatler, Monocle, Vice, Oxfam, Save The Children, IRC, UNICEF, Sony and BBC worldwide (Trayler-Smith, n.d.).

- **Midwifery School, Yemen**

This photograph is part of a series called, “Mothers of Yemen.” The image shows women who with covered faces intently listening to someone talk. The women have notebooks and are learning how to be a midwife. The interior of this room has pink tablecloths and a rug that matches. The patterns on the cloth have leaves that are connected by vines. This is echoed in the background of the room by the flower garland that is strung together on the wall. This image is interesting because the women are covered but are learning about a very intimate process of giving birth.

- **Fleeing Mosul**

This photograph comes from the series, “Women In War: Life After Isis.” The young girl is shown looking out a dirty window of a dirty bus. The girl is being brought to safety after a battle had occurred in northern Iraq. The image was taken outside of Hasan Sham camp, a camp that is for displaced people in the area (Brown, 2017). She looks out the window at her new, hopefully safe, home at the camp. Trayler-Smith’s photographs in this series show the powerful impact that groups like Isis have on the people of the area, especially the women.



## **Artists**

Holly Andres. <http://www.hollyandres.com/>

Amanda Chrchian. <https://www.amandacharchian.com/>

Lalla Essaydi. <http://lallaessaydi.com/3.html>

Kerry Mansfield. <http://www.kerrymansfield.com/>

Karen Miranda Rivadeneira. <http://karenmiranda.com/>

Abbie Trayler-Smith. <http://www.abbietrayersmith.com/>

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