for more than two decades, Olivia Gay (b. 1973) has photographed women who work as waitresses, cashiers, prostitutes, nuns, factory workers, domestic workers; women living in refugee camps; women in prison. She takes her time, often seven years or more—allowing mutual respect, trust, and understanding to deepen. And from that process the photographs emerge.

Her latest project is called Envisagées, or Envisioned, referring to the process of rendering visible what has been invisible. The French word also contains the word “visage,” or face, often the locus of Gay’s attention.

Gay’s interest is not to capture the most vivid gestures. Instead, she and the woman she is photographing face each other with all that they have gained in their shared experience. Gay waits for the moment when the face or a gesture conveys ambiguity or a depth of feeling; for instance, do we see in Yuleisy’s eyes melancholy or resignation? Does the rest of the image—her strong body settled back in the bright red chair, equally bright red-and-white striped pants, the shabby surroundings—complicate the emotional life presented here?

Gay makes certain that women neglected by society are seen, delivering a powerful form of justice.
“This project is not just work; it is my life, and I will continue doing it as long as I live.”

— Olivia Gay

Above: Othmana; Quadoura refugee camp, Ramallah, Palestine 2016

Left: Visitor to a lace manufacturer; Calais, France 2010

Right: Domestic worker; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 2013