


Face To Face

Images by Olivia Gay;
Comment by Ellen Feldman

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 where 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. 

All photographs © Olivia Gay; www.oliviagay.com



Yuleisy; from Gay’s series “*Jineteras, Prostitutes of Havana*”; Havana, Cuba 1998

Ellen Feldman is WRB’s photography editor, a photographer, and the creator of *We Who March: Photographs and Reflections on the Women’s March, January 21, 2017*. More about her work can be found at www.ellenfeldman.net and www.WeWhoMarch.org.

Olivia Gay received the prestigious Prix HSBC for photography (Prix Joy Henderiks) in 2018. Her work has appeared in solo exhibits throughout Europe and in Brazil, in venues including Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, 2018 and Fondation Mast, Bologna, 2015. Gay lives and works in Normandy, France.



Cumba; Kolonbimba, Mali 2009

“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