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## Lydia Goldblatt

*Text:*

Kate Levy — Daylight  
Awards Interview  
USA  
April 2012

You use the spectrum of extreme shadows and light, and often the most compelling parts of your images reside in the soft glow in between. You employ a similar technique in your range of focus, using a scale of softness and sharpness to project a feeling of the interstitial onto the subject in the frame. How do you pose your mother and father? Can you describe the situation you set up, or look for in the portraits you have produced as part of the All Flesh Is series?

I work differently with each of them. With my father, the search for that space between physical and metaphysical is more acute, placed as he is at the frontier of mortality, and much of my work with him is about finding ways to convey that in visual form. I examine the details of his bodily surfaces and edges as a means to access the physical and psychological thresholds of individual existence. There is also a desire to record something of the everyday routine and passage of time, and the relationship between us that allows for a photographic exchange. Essentially, it is about connecting an exploration of the external world – space, events, and moments – with an internal landscape of experience. I sometimes return to an image I have already made, repeating it over the course of weeks or months. In the repeated forms subtle shifts in mood or expression emerge through the surface of photographic paper, which speak to the mutability of experience and identity, and a questioning of surface and depth.

Photographing my mother is, generally speaking, an experience more rooted in the everyday, which is characteristic both of our relationship, and her own approach to life. It is an exchange, more than a clearly defined process of posing and photographing, in which her active nature allows for play as much as sober reflection. The images that I make of her are often full of reverie, but they also evoke her active pleasure in form and colour, and a conscious reckoning with change.

How have your parents reacted to your examination of their disposition and preparations to cross over the threshold into death? What sort of conversations with your parents have you had around this work?

Making this work stems from a desire to address the inevitable changes raised by the prospect of my father's death, and is in itself, a kind of conversation. My thoughts are expressed through the process of photographing, more than in words, though the subject of death is not taboo in my family. Nonetheless, daily life necessitates more of a practical engagement with the subject, and the act of photographing provides both for me and, I hope, for my family, a very different space, one of extended time and meditation, to grapple with issues of transience and loss.

My father has repeatedly talked about his readiness to die, and indeed much of the time his whole being, his entire energy, seems focused on that process of transitioning from life to death – an effort of labour as intense and concentrated as any other in life. However, during the moments when I photograph him, it often sparks a re-energising towards life, which is an unexpected gift and pleasure between us.

My mother, whose images deal more with the business of daily existence, is remarkably game about our photographing, which I think is based on a pre-existing level of trust and friendship between us. I could not make the images I do, if I were not already close to her. Inevitably, she does not

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always like the images I make, but I think the process of making them, and the objects themselves, sometimes offer an unexpected means of reflection and self-reflection that is valued.

In your artist statement for *All Flesh Is*, you reference that your work on human transitional states is tied to identity and belonging. Can you elaborate on this ideology?

I am not sure if this is an ideology, but rather a recognition that in the work I make, whether my authorial presence is implicit or explicit, there is always a connection between fleeting, individual experience (including my own) and the more enduring arc of humanity. I am interested in the way personal existence reflects and is reflected in a more universal, philosophical context, and it is the turning point between the two that informs my work.

The human instinct, precisely because of our transient nature, is to establish frameworks and structures of identity, meaning and belonging, to carve out individual space that is nonetheless knitted into the fabric of extended networks and relationships. My work engages with that instinct and, in terms of this particular series, explores the imperative to understand our own existence in relation to our parents.

You have a few bodies of work that centralize around religion and identity. How does this interest tie into the work you are doing around transition and impermanence?

Transition and impermanence lie at the heart of any religious, or indeed secular, philosophy of humanity. They are the basic tenets of our existence. I am interested in exploring that existence via the creative impulse of photography, so religion, identity, transition and impermanence are all inevitable sources of inspiration for me. Photographing is a hugely important means to look deeply into the world that we perceive and exist within. It rarely provides logical answers, but can illuminate something of the world's forms and rhythms.

What work have you been developing since being selected as a juror's pick for 2011 Photo Awards?

I have continued the work with my parents, and exhibited this as a solo show in London in October-November. I will also be having an exhibition of this work, including some new images, at the Felix Nussbaum Museum in Germany later this year. Concurrently, I am also developing a new series of work. It represents a complement to '*All Flesh Is*', and a recent shift in my practice towards themes of fecundity and growth. The transient nature of life is still deeply embedded within the work, however I am expanding and developing my charting of cyclical time by incorporating the joyful forms and rhythms of vitality as a necessary correlative of vulnerability.