

# DONNA BASSIN

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*bors série*



## **My Own Witness: Rupture and Repair**





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### **Donna Bassin**

"What is a portrait, if not an acknowledgment of a human encounter: an opportunity to imagine the life of another?"

During the years following the 2016 presidential election, I initiated portrait collaborations between those who – through race, sexuality, gender identity, age, ethnicity, and/or disability – felt they had been deemed invisible and unentitled to their place in this American moment.

I asked my sitters to turn themselves "inside out" and to use pose, gesture, and gaze to express their emotional truths, visually assert their identity, become their own witnesses, and invite the viewer to a visceral face-to-face encounter with their humanity.

While the American flag has become a complicated symbol, some sitters reclaimed and reimagined it to express their defiance and respectful hope for the return of democracy.

As a series, the shared black velvet background and chiaroscuro lighting join each individual in the collective.

Channeling the injuries brought on by the pandemic and the further erosion of democracy, I ripped the original portraits to create "wounds" reflecting individual and collective trauma. Inspired by the Japanese practice of kintsugi, an ancient craft that repairs broken pottery with gold lacquer, I restored the torn portraits with stitching and golden rice paper. Metaphorically, kintsugi honors the acceptance of injury as part of the object's life and gives material form to the history of experience.

We acknowledge and pay attention to our violent past in the future so we don't repeat it.

These injuries are our losses to be witnessed, mourned, and transformed into social justice.



## Testemonies

## Devyn

"My name is Devyn and I am a Latino trans man living my truth. I am proud of my gender identity and am grateful for all the amazing and supportive people I've met and been able to work with because of my visibility. I choose to be visible for various reasons, one of the main reasons being that I want other trans folks, especially trans youth, who are struggling with their gender identity to know that they are not alone and can be their true selves - even though our current political climate is trying to take away our basic human rights and protections. I want America to see that we are all just human beings and deserve to be treated with the same kindness and respect as our fellow straight humans."





## Shino

"Hi, I am Shino. I moved to America from the other side of world decades ago. I received so much opportunity and love. But at the same time, I see many, many people who do not have the same experience and get treated badly instead. I feel lost in-between these worlds. Now, as a resident of America, I want to continue to spread happiness, kindness and compassion in my daily life."





## Tacy

"I am the daughter of Filipino immigrants: my father emigrated in 1928 and waited 22 years for a Filipina- my mom - to arrive in America to marry. Having experienced blatant and nuanced racism, my parents chose not to teach us Tagalog though we learned to celebrate our history and culture through dance, food, music and history. As the first non-white family moving into an inner city blue collar working class neighborhood in Chicago, life was difficult. Now, I am a healer, end of life advocate and a lesbian of color married to a Jewish woman. Together we navigate different world experiences sharing different cultures, religions, skin colors. is showing many of its more fractured sides, I still maintain that in its messiness, it is still the best place for me (us)."







## Chad and James

"When we think about people in photographs together, happiness comes to mind. In both of our cases, we used to think we could never attain that same level of 'happiness.' Despite the legalization of same-sex marriage, we still share the lingering fear of "who can we really trust?" when we meet new people. The thought of having to constantly bear a temporary 'closet' as a married couple or introducing each other as 'friend', just to avoid inciting hatred in the wrong person, is enough to bring us back to thinking that the 'happiness' we thought we finally had is still beyond our reach."





## Sufiyyah

"Living in America has been a bittersweet experience for me. I hate the lack of opportunities and the lack of freedom here in the U.S. Being a black American Muslim I have experienced many unfair and unjust things- being denied jobs because of my race and religion and being profiled by the police. Every day I fight that struggle, constantly trying to prove to the world and society that I am not the "stereotype". Although it is a tiring battle I refuse to give up the fight. My ancestors before me didn't and neither will I."





## Maryam

"When I left my country for the United States six years ago for my education, I thought I would be leaving behind the rampant killing of others solely based upon their difference of ethnicity. Unfortunately, the nightmare I experienced back home has powerfully pervasive here in the United States. I am looking forward to a future where humans are just seen as humans, and not diminished or excepted by their skin color, religion, gender, or their race they are born into or choose to practice."







## Shontel

"My name is Shontel and I love being black. I love everything about being black: the music, our hair and our culture just to name a few. However, it seems like lately America doesn't seem to love black people as much. When we when we try to say our BLACK lives matter - they tell us ALL lives matter. Which is hurtful because of course all lives matter, but black lives are the one being lost everyday at the hands of police brutality. I want America to see to black lives are important and to change it to all lives is silencing our voice."







JT

"For me the project spoke to what it meant to be of mixed ethnicity in America. From the moment I arrived in this country at 5 years old I was teased relentlessly for not knowing English and for having a foreign name. Growing up I was always connected to being Nicaraguan, being Japanese, being Black, connected to these cultures equally but often I was put in a box. I couldn't be all of these I had to choose or the choice would be made for me. Most of the time I was just a "Spanish" kid or a "Black" kid, I suppose because my physical traits weren't overwhelmingly Asian. I've grown up dealing with racial stereotyping and racial slurs, I've grown up living the Black experience while simultaneously living the Brown experience all while feeling equally Asian. I feel that society has tried to make me choose a side, a culture and even if I were to do so I would never be accepted because I wasn't Hispanic enough or black enough or Asian enough.

What I have learned though is I am enough, I am enough of everything I am to be accepted, my people love me and as much as society wants me to choose I will never. I will continue to represent every part of me and I will continue to break out of every box I am put in until they see me for who I am!"





## Estelle

"I am 93 years old. My body is falling apart but my mind is strong. I am the last of my personal generation to be alive. My husband and brother both served in WW2. My husband helped to liberate a concentration camp. We believed war would be over at the time and the sacrifices we made would allow for a future better world. Where is this better world, now? "





## Ron

"My name is Ron EA Powell; my Jamaican parents gave me those initials as a symbol of you reap what you sow. I feel that I express myself and my emotions through my art. Reflecting on the current events and ongoing tensions in our world today, I believe we need to put aside our ego and admit that something is wrong. It may be an issue so simplistic to the core, yet we need to address it together. My self-portrait oil painting entitled, 'torn' reflects the theme and emotions I feel...resistance."







## Sybil

"We can't control what events happen to us, but we can control how we chose to meet them. I was diagnosed with Scleroderma, a rare autoimmune disease, more than 20 years ago and given 5 years to live. Instead of letting the darkness of that diagnosis and its possible outcome rule me, I chose to focus on the present moment. There are times that have been tough and times I did not think I would see tomorrow. But over all my years of dealing with illness, the most important thing I've learned is that you can't let a possible future steal your life, your present moment. Don't let the darkness paralyze you, put one foot in front of the other and you will find the light. You can do it."







## Catherine

"As someone who is multiracial who grew up constantly surrounded by cultures outside her own, it was challenging to know which box I fit in. As a woman, I have had barriers constructed specifically to keep me boxed in. Through "We the People: Portraits of Resistance," I wanted to challenge the societal and social constructs placed upon me and to enforce the notion of exercising our freedom to liberate ourselves from senseless restrictions."





## Philemona

"I am holding in my skirt a bounty of dolls representing children deprived of childhood and adults deprived of hope. All gathered in my skirt seeking safety. I want to protect them from a world that preys on their vulnerability. But they are content to be the cushion between me and the threat to humanity I feel from this precarious time in which we now live."

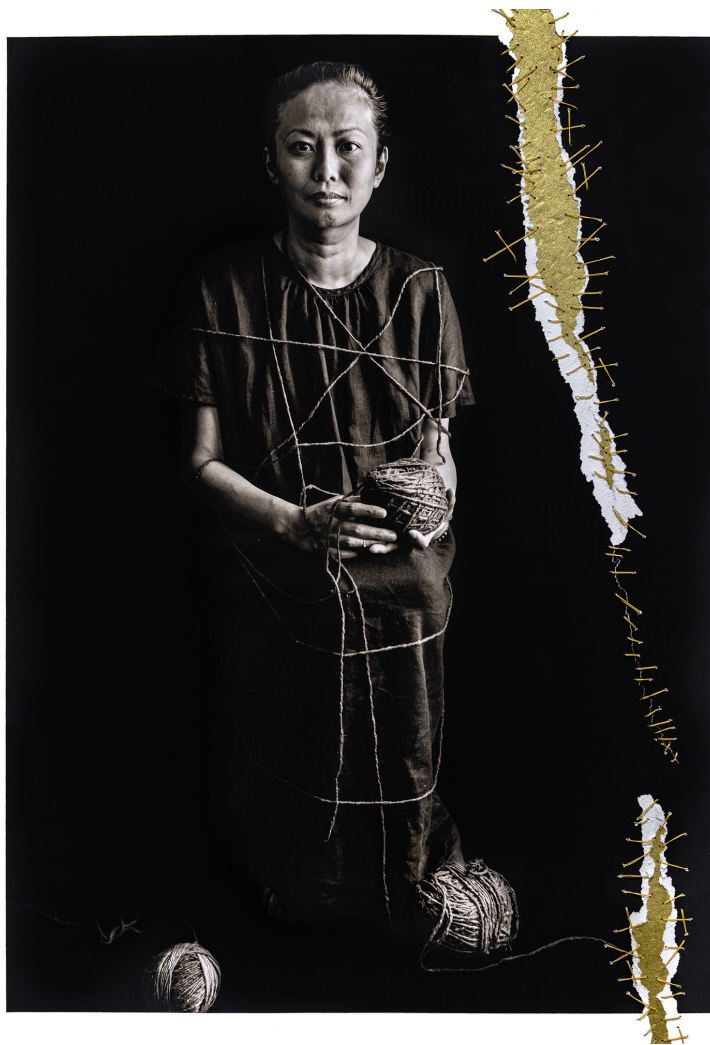




## Aya

"I was born in Japan and now live in America. One of the things that attracted me to America was the diversity of people and cultures. I think it's a big part of what makes this country great. My hope is for this diversity to continue to inspire us, and those around the world, and show that we are stronger when we're united."





## Danielle

"I'm a soft-spoken woman; mother of three, educator and self-identified lesbian. An Afro-Cuban, Polish-Jew, Filipino in America. As a visual artist, I choose to explore and connect the intertwining relationships between social justice, equality, human and women's rights, police brutality, femininity, modern day slavery and culture. I use my art as a conduit for bold, fearless, thought-provoking, unapologetic issues. My current body of work is similar to this powerful project. It draws attention to others purposes, journeys and experiences in America. The image conveys a timeless truth; as a woman of color, I feed the nation."







## **Pandy Cruz**

"My message for others is that I won't be erased. I am a gay man living as a man, woman, or whatever I feel like living as; if I feel like a man, then I'm a man – if I feel like a woman, then I'm a woman."





## Walter Zimmerman

"Knowing that I'm not one of those lucky humans whom the camera seems to 'like', I wanted to confront my own self-conscious discomfort, by preparing, if necessary, to disrobe completely - to remove anything that could serve as a disguise. I also wanted to include pieces my blown glass - like me, not photogenic, but as priceless as if they were my own children. I was drawn to the black mesh, because, as in a favorite fairy tale, it both covers and reveals - I could become less a person, and more like a three-dimensional graph of a person. By the way, if there is such a thing as reincarnation, I'd like to come back as a geometric theorem."

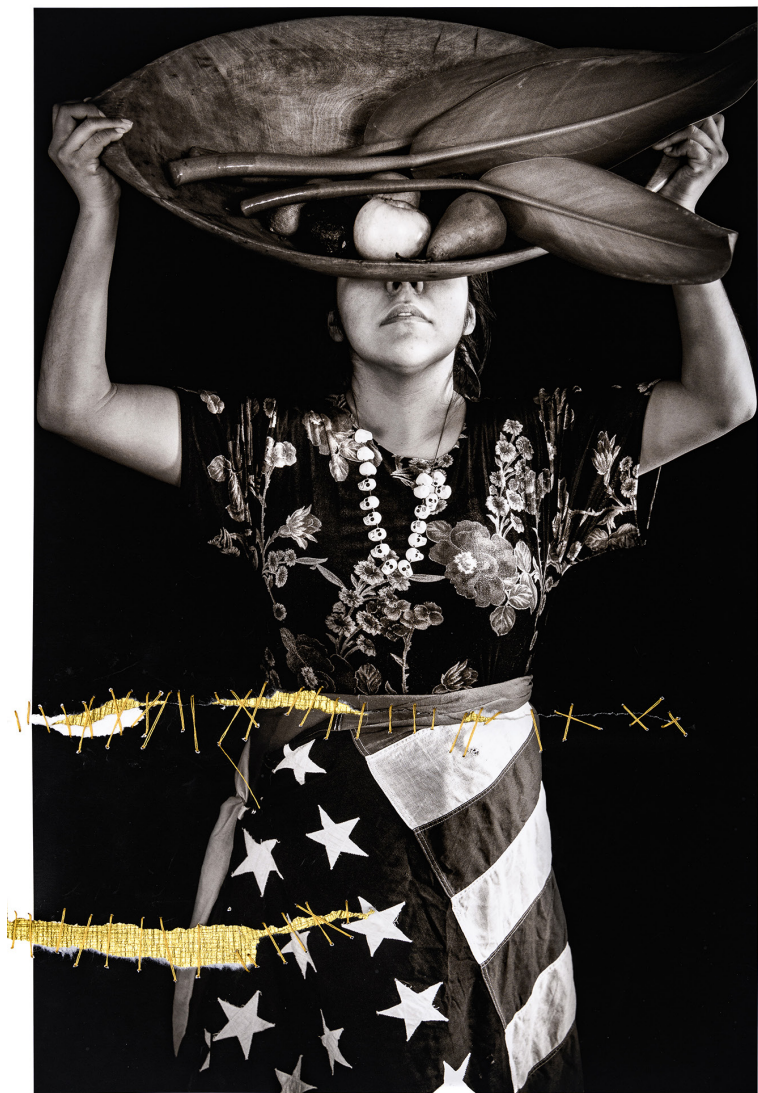




## **Dulce Avila Romero**

"The resulting image reminds me of how a lot of young girls and boys go through the same identity crisis growing up. I'm not seen as an American because of my skin tone and I'm not a Mexican in my family's homeland because I was not born there. I'm proud to be Mexican American, I however long for the day everyone realizes there's only one race with many beliefs."





## Messiah Webb

"No comment."









**Bio**

Donna Bassin, Ph.D is a photo-based artist, filmmaker, psychoanalyst, trauma specialist, professor, and published author who was born in Brooklyn, U.S.A and now living in New Jersey, U.S.A. The death of her younger sister when she was ten years, and her family's difficulty mourning have motivated and shaped her clinical and art practice. Her long-term projects respond to the grave injuries and losses of contemporary life, such as the aftermath of September 11, coming home after the war, racism, social injustice, and, most recently, the destruction of the environment. Those pursuits have resulted in two award-winning documentaries, two solo museum exhibitions, publications in various art and culture periodicals, public installations, book covers, inclusion in private and museum collections, a billboard in Brooklyn, and participation with other artists in curated group shows.

The Afterlife of Dolls, a solo exhibition at Montclair Art Museum, was featured on PBS' State of the Arts. Tricycle, Fotonostrom, Grazia, and Lens Magazine have published her work. Her photo-based installations have appeared at the Jamestown Arts Center, Smack Mellon, Mills Reservation, Jersey City, and the Montclair Art Museum. She received the 2021 New Jersey Council on the Arts Fellowship in Photography, was honored as a Showcase artist for Art Fair 14C in Jersey City, and was recently chosen as one of the top 50 photographers for Critical Mass 2022.

EDITIONS 2023 **PEDRO CABRITA REIS** <sup>4/2</sup> **LUISA COSTA GOMES** <sup>1/4</sup>

**JOÃO BOTELHO** <sup>3/6</sup> **ANTÓNIO PIRES** <sup>5/8</sup> **CARLOS MARTINS** <sup>2/9</sup>

**NUNO CARINHAS** <sup>4/11</sup> EDITIONS 2024 **PAULO MOURA** <sup>3/2</sup> **PEDRO**

**MIGUEIS** <sup>3/3</sup> **RUI CHAFES** <sup>1/6</sup> **RUI COELHO** <sup>7/9</sup> **PEDRO SENNA**

**NUNES** <sup>2/1</sup> 1 HORS-SÈRIE 2023 **DONNA BASSIN** <sup>12/5</sup> **LES FLEURS**

**DU MAL** <sup>20/10</sup> Books for sale in: Teatro do Bairro / [incubatorgallery.com/](http://incubatorgallery.com/)

## Acknowledgments

This book was launched on May 12, 2023 at the time of the III Psirelacional Journeys held at the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Lisbon.

Donna Bassin held the closing conference for the Journeys.

Donna Bassin and the Incubator Photo Gallery would like to thank Psirelacional - Associação de Psicanálise Relacional for all the support they have given to us and which made possible not only the publication of this book but also the exhibition of photographs by Donna Bassin, which took place between the 12th and 25th of May at the ACMP Espaço d'Artes, in Lisbon.

Extended thanks to the Auto Club Médico Português for providing the space for the exhibition of photographs as well as to Teatro do Bairro/Ar de Filmes, for allowing us to use the space of the Theater to carry out, on May 17th, the exhibition of the video of Donna Bassin followed by a conversation conducted by the writer/journalist Paulo Moura his guests and, the least but not the last, thanks to Paulo Moura.

And our most profound appreciation to the portrait sitters who courageously asserted their identity and invite the viewer to a visceral face-to-face encounter with their humanity.

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