

barely exposed

latana

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Lafana

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This is a book of images – visual likenesses of young men and women; impressions of these growing people’s lives in their own words; visions of what they imagine, fear, and hope the world might be for them. Each of the photographs and statements that Latana has collected for this book presents a young person’s life gathered into the expression of a single, embodied moment, and each statement provides the terms according to which that particular young person chose to name and locate him- or herself in the world. The photographs are a warm black and white, sometimes paired with color images; the words are a cold white on black. These contrasts capture the realities of the 21st century world as these young people make their way into it. It is a world connected by technology but fractured by war, opened up by the possibilities of boundary crossing and endangered by pending environmental calamity. It is a world that was created – and could be destroyed – by people working with and against nature, each other, themselves.

The bodies of these young men and women – like their hearts and minds – are open and closed, half clothed, half naked. In their words are hope and hopelessness, inspiration and despair, confidence and uncertainty. Guillaume holds one arm behind his back and encircles his waist with the other – imitating or defying the world he sees as “a cynical clown.” Both Marianna and Montana at once cover and reveal themselves, one speaking of serendipity and the other of silence and purpose. Lee Seung Hoon and Lee Seung Yeob stand with crossed arms and hands, respectively, while, as they put it, “The world goes around without us.” Few of these youth are smiling. But every one of their faces is an invitation to read their carefully held bodies, their solemn expressions.

Latana photographed the young people half dressed and against a black background, removing part of their clothing or exterior, in an effort to get at the essence of who they are. When that approach was not possible, she strove to evoke that essence by focusing on the intimacy of their eyes. *Barely Exposed* relates not only to the youths’ images but also to what they have to say. It evokes the language of photography – within which each photograph varies according to length and extent of exposure. What might we learn from these photographs and statements?

Images of young people rarely strive to represent those young people’s own experiences, perspectives, disappointments, desires. More often they constitute adults’ impressions, interpretations, expectations, impositions. To make young people’s expressions visible in an adult world, to make their voices audible, adults must choose to make spaces, to mediate without appropriating, and youth must trust that by being represented in those spaces, they will have a chance to be heard and seen. Such mediation can be understood as a form of translation – a necessary eliciting and re-rendering of meaning that might otherwise remain obscure. Framed and composed by the photographer with just such translation in mind, the photographs in this collection strive to represent young people’s answer to the question, “How do you see your world?” The young people chose the image of themselves that would be included in the book in an effort to answer the related question, “How do you see yourself?” Underlying this text, therefore, is an effort to create a space within which young people can represent themselves – offer images of themselves and invite a reading that is responsive to those selves. Without such opportunities for representation, invitation, reading, and response, we run the risk of misinterpreting the next generation and missing an opportunity for collaborative meaning making – the only kind that will move us forward.

As someone who has worked with young people within the realm of education to bring to light their experiences and perspectives, I am particularly inspired by this book, which

strives to do the same within the realm of the visual. With her attention and invitations to youth to look at the world and at themselves and to present what they see, Latana endeavors to accomplish with photography what I and others have attempted to achieve within educational research and reform. Our work has in common a commitment to the belief that young people have unique perspectives; that their insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults; and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their lives. Ben’s insight that the world is at once chaotic, unfair, depressing, and beautiful has much to teach us about life’s contradictions and complexities. Tara points to the potential for harmony and healing that respect for difference can create. Jason’s contemplative expression and the portrait of his life he paints with his words remind us that we need to look beyond the appearance of failure for the hope that might hide behind such appearances.

Michael Fielding, an advocate of attending to students’ experiences and words within the realm of education, has argued that youth are typically considered to be the “least able and least powerful members of the educational community” – and one could say society at large. And yet the insights they have and can offer are dazzling. Many people ignore young people’s experiences and perspectives because, as Jean Rudduck and Julia Flutter put it, we do not believe that young people have the capacity “to take initiatives and to reflect on issues affecting their lives.” Latana joins such advocates for attending and responding to young people and insists on changing images of youth, relationships between young people and adults, and the place of youth in conversations about their experiences and their futures.

As we have found in the realm of education, if we pay attention to these expressions, value and take them seriously, we can work with young people to build hope rather than reinforce hopelessness, rouse inspiration and combat despair, build confidence and reduce disabling uncertainty. In the contemporary world, life is constituted by multiple transitional phases, places, and states that overlap as members of a society move from one culture, context, and role to another, often repeatedly throughout a single lifetime. The states in and out of which we pass are more complex and fluid than they have been before, as are the media through which the selves in those states communicate. A book of images offers us a different medium through which to consider the states and the changes of state young people experience and desire.

An image is a representation. It can be a literal depiction, as a photograph is, or it can be a mental impression or an idea. It can be illusory. Or it can be very real. This book offers to the imagination of any reader an invitation to look carefully – at the pictures, at the words, at the world those reflect and anticipate. When we look at these faces and read these words, we are looking at the future of humanity – beauty, strength, vulnerability embodied. The youth Latana has photographed ask us to read carefully what they have to tell us about themselves and ourselves, about the world they perceive and the world they desire – to consider carefully what the images tell and ask of us.

Alison Cook-Sather

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The references in this text are drawn from Michael Fielding, “Radical Collegiality: Affirming Teaching as an Inclusive Professional Practice,” *Australian Educational Researcher: Curriculum* 26, 2 August, 1999, p. 21, and Jean Rudduck and Julia Flutter, *How To Improve Your School: Giving Pupils a Voice*. (London: Continuum Press, 2004), p.1. For a related discussion see also Alison Cook-Sather, “Sound, Presence, and Power: Exploring ‘Student Voice’ in Educational Research and Reform,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 36, 4 (winter 2006), pp. 359-390.

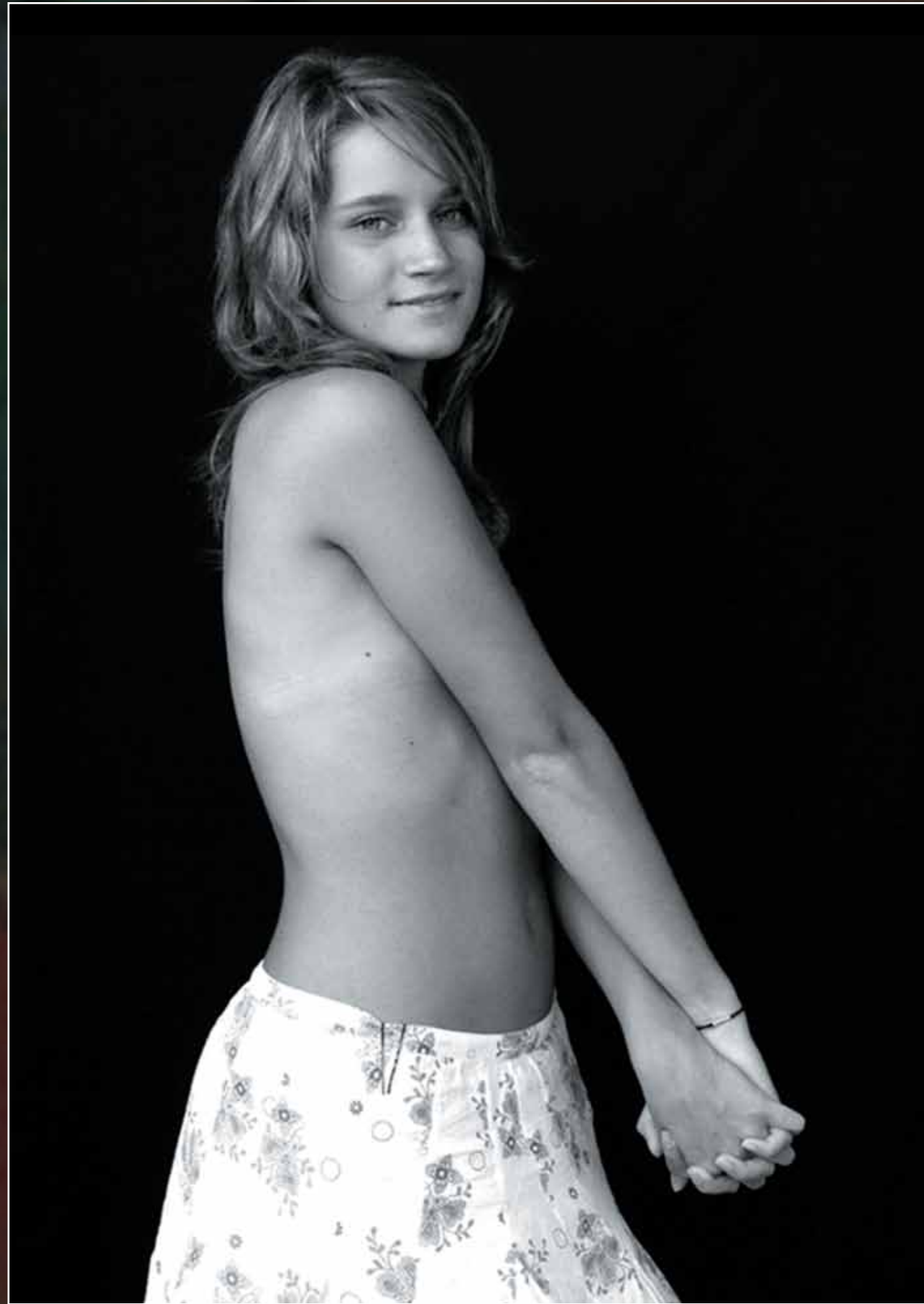
how do you see your world ?



"I fight. Not only with my opponents
but with the demons of doubt.
I fight with my exhaustion,
my past failures, my injuries,
my anonymity and the unrelenting
voice that tells me to stop.
But I am a fighter. One thing is sure.
I shall be victorious." Anonymous

Teano, 20
swiss-french/
kazakhstan -
puerto rican
California, USA





A melange of beauty and war...
...
Un mélange de beauté et de guerre...

Iris, 17
french
Le Bouscat,
France



The world is a song
and
I play it by ear.

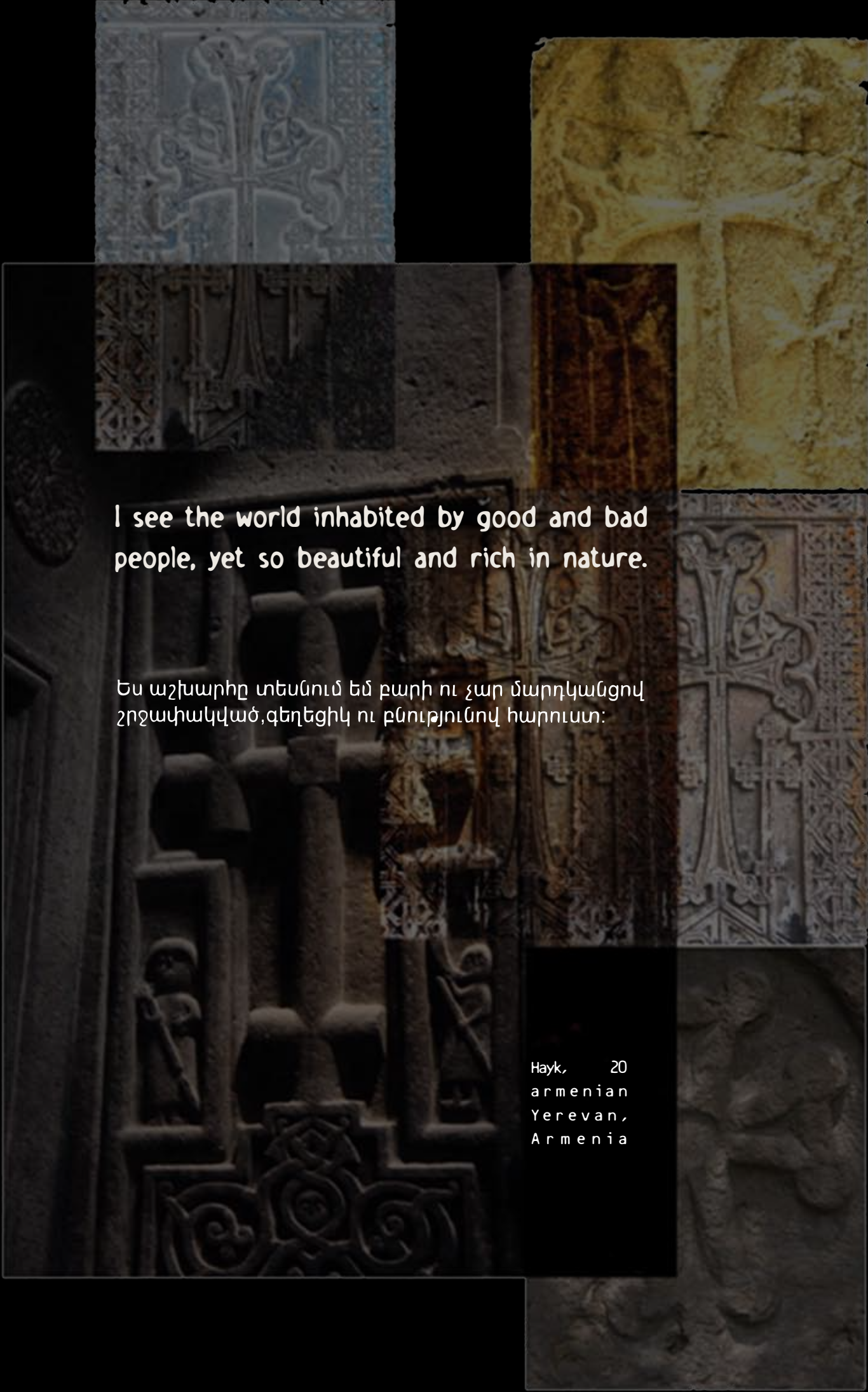
Kharis, 18
puerto rican
french New
York, USA

Mas que una frase tengo una palabra: Serendipia. Su sentido es hermoso; es "la facultad de descubrir fortunas por accidente." Yo siempre he creido en ese "poder magico" que hace que la vida esté llena de encantos. Yo tambien aplico esta actitud a cualquier situación y a cada persona que conozco porque creo que cada uno de nosotros tiene su propio camino, pero cualquiera que sea, siempre guiado por Dios.

About my phrase, I actually have one word..."Serendipity." Its meaning is beautiful and it is all about fortunate accidents in life or the "faculty of making fortunate discoveries by accident." I have always believed in this "magical power" that makes life fill with enchantment. I also apply this attitude towards any situation and any person I meet because I think everyone has his own path, but whichever it is...it is always guided by God.

Mariana, 17
Colombian
Medellin,
Colombia





I see the world inhabited by good and bad people, yet so beautiful and rich in nature.

Ես աշխարհը տեսնում եմ բարի ու չար մարդկանցով շրջափակված, գեղեցիկ ու բնությունով հարուստ:

Hayk, 20
armenian
Yerevan,
Armenia

