

Art Statement

My Own Witness: Rupture and Repair

Donna Bassin



This portrait of Aya is from my photographic series, *My Own Witness: Rupture and Repair*.

Donna Bassin, M.P.S., Ph.D. is an art therapist, clinical psychologist, psychoanalyst, filmmaker, and fine-art photographer. She is an Adjunct Clinical Assistant Professor at the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis, where she teaches "Mourning as transformation: the creative edge of traumatic and ordinary loss". She has published books, book reviews, and journal articles on gender, motherhood, community activism, mourning, and memorials, exhibited her fine art photography in museums and galleries, and screened her two award-winning full-length documentaries, *Leave No Soldier* and *The Mourning After* at professional conferences. These documentaries tell the stories of U.S veterans as they explore and share the impact of P.T.S.D on their lives and the use of art and community in their "coming home."

I am a lens-based artist and trauma psychologist/psychoanalyst. Both of my practices are motivated by my disquiet over social and environmental injustices and my desire to affect change. I engage my sitters (volunteers and not my patients), in a deep process of finding their way to summon their acts of witnessing, even as they make witnesses of the spectators of these photos. In this series of physically altered portraits, the "practices" of the consulting room merged with the "art" of photography, co-creating images that compel and insist that the imagined viewers/spectators connect with the gazes of my sitters.

These are dark and broken times. In the future, mending will occur, but we will be marked and scarred by the injuries to our democracy, planet, and mental health. We have and will continue to confront the inhumanity and injustice towards those who have been deemed invisible and unentitled to their subjectivity through race, sexuality, gender identity, age, ethnicity, and/or disability. 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 change.

I tear archival pigment photographs to create wounds of our individual and collective suffering and subsequently heal them. I back the rips with golden rice paper and patch them up with haphazard stitches of golden thread. Inspired by the Japanese practice of kintsugi, an ancient craft that repairs broken pottery with gold lacquer, the areas of damage are illuminated and not covered over. Metaphorically, kintsugi honors the acceptance of injury as part of the object's life and gives material form to the history of experience.

Through pose, gesture, gaze, and occasional props, my portrait sitters find their narratives, restore some agency, and invite others to experience them in their full 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 to the collective.

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