

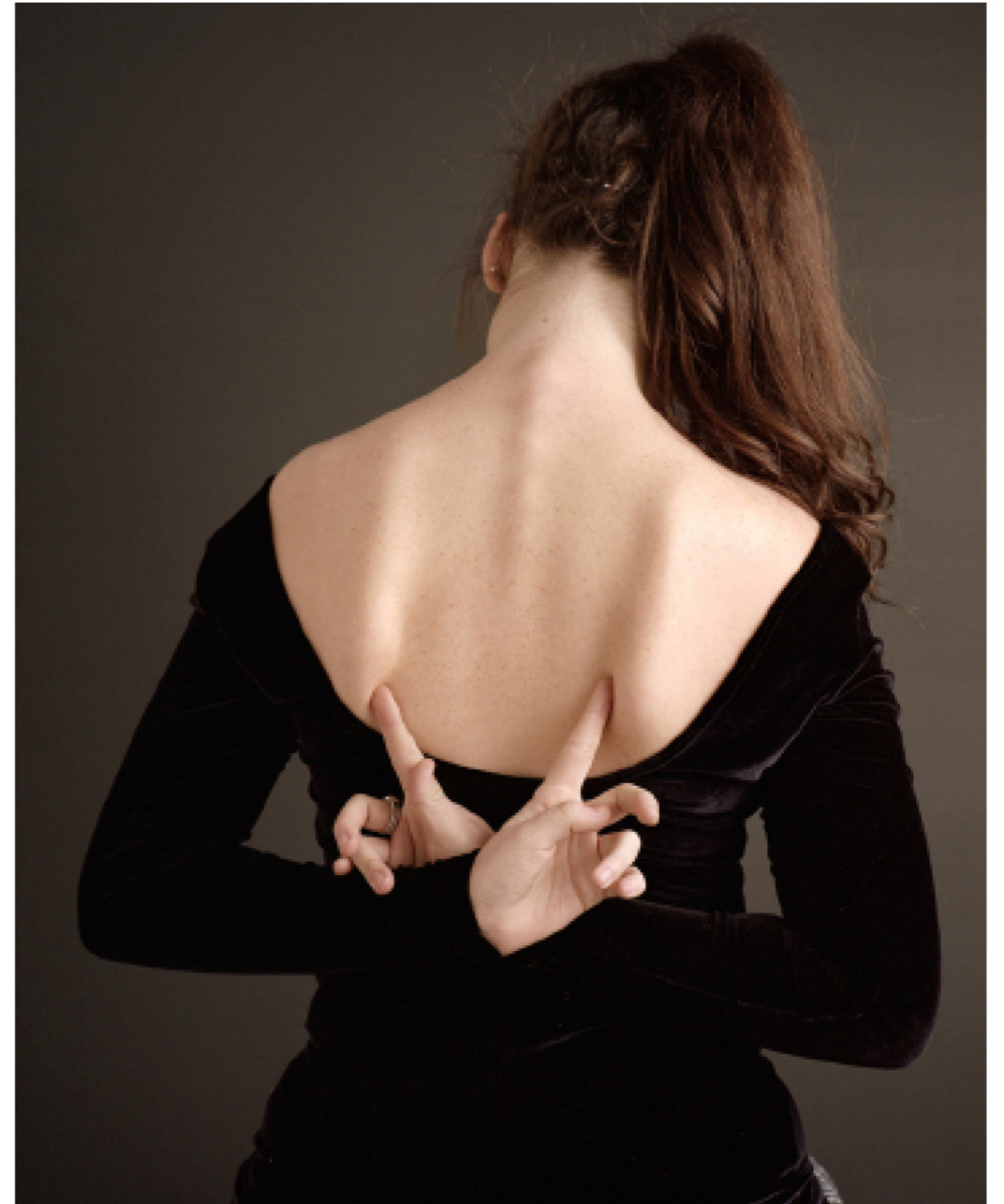
PAM CONNOLLY

In Conversation With Freddy Martinez

Gone Home

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, a present life becomes memory. The here and now is never firm. Long stretches of time join the unseen just as suddenly as they appear: every new moment is a giving away. In *Gone Home*, a series of photographs made by Pam Connolly, the evanescent signs of time's passing are made visible. "I want to remember right now," Connolly said. "By capturing that essence in a photograph, the moment is saved and never lost."

Started the summer before Connolly's youngest daughter left to college, the series pulls together portraits of her daughters with still lifes of her home. An uneasy recognition shrouds the photographs. In the frayed seams of an armchair, worn from years of dedicated use, or in the branching tear on a door screen, Connolly finds evidence of time's cool thrashing. Seized from the familiar, these markers of time point to her daughters' soon complete absence. The photographs allow one more full look. They affirm life while acknowledging its inevitable, certain undoing.



Freddy Martinez: Does the camera allow you to cherish time more, or allow you to see more of what is lost?

Pam Connolly: Children are markers of time. They are perpetually changing and becoming more of who they are every day, particularly when they are very young. Many people say, “they grow up so quickly; it goes by so fast”, and in a way I can agree with that, but I also experienced time in relationship to the raising of my daughters as moving quite slowly. Particularly when they were little, a day or even a morning seemed to go on indefinitely.

This project began the summer before my youngest daughter left for college. It seemed like a momentous point in her life and mine, worthy of recording. A photographer and mentor suggested that I photograph her throughout this transition. “They change so quickly once they leave.” I began photographing her and her two sisters during their frequent visits home over the next two years.

Photographing my daughters at this juncture, as they leave the nest is a way for me to cherish them as they begin to make their way out into the world without me. It’s a last look while they are still mine. They are on the cusp and I want to remember right now. By capturing that essence in a photograph, the moment is saved and never lost.

FM: How would you describe their absence in your home?

PC: I was not prepared for how quiet and empty our house would feel without the daily presence of kids. It was jarring to return at the end of

the day to a dark house where there was no one waiting. Beyond that the house itself looked very different without the clutter of teenagers. The light moved through the rooms unobstructed and gave the spaces a distinctly different look. I was in unfamiliar territory.

FM: Did your daughters grow up with a camera always around them? What do they think about your relationship with photography?

MFI: My daughters have grown up with a camera always in the periphery. As is the case with many photographers’ kids, their childhoods’ have been well documented! Except for a period of time when they were young teens, they have been open and generous in allowing me to interrupt what they were doing, look at me, and allow me to take a few photos.

My daughters’ involvement in this particular project went deeper. They were actively committed to making these portraits. When we would get together, they came to expect that part of that time would be spent making pictures. Two of my daughters are artists, and the third a talented photographer, so they understand the need to create. I think they also enjoyed the individual attention and the act of giving me something that was important to me. I think they are proud of what I do.

FM: Did you direct your daughters to pose, or was it more collaborative and improvisational?

PC: The making of these portraits was most definitely collaborative. Sometimes I would direct







them to wear a particular article of clothing or to sit in a certain chair, but more often I would be moved by the way they were playing with their keys or holding their hair and I would ask them to hold it. I think that making the time for the photographs to happen allowed the rest to follow quite organically. I often had the feeling that the sessions were like an offering from them to me, and vice versa.

FM: Although you're nearly absent from the project—there is only one self-portrait—your presence can be inferred from your daughters' reactions to you and your camera. Did you ever consider including more self-portraits in how you sequenced the series?

PC: There is one portrait at the very end of the book of my husband and I together. We are mostly absent from the project, but not completely. This project has been edited a couple of different ways. Initially my husband and I were featured more prominently in the story, as well as our dog, Joey. At some point I felt that it was too confusing—there were too many narratives going on at once. I wanted to concentrate on the girls and the way the house looked and felt in their absence. I do think that I exist in the girls' reaction to me, and the camera. There is a trust and intimacy that can be read in their expressions. I feel that my husband is well represented by his unworn clothing and his shadow on the wall.

FM: How different are the goals of a photographer and a mother? How did you negotiate between seeing your daughters as

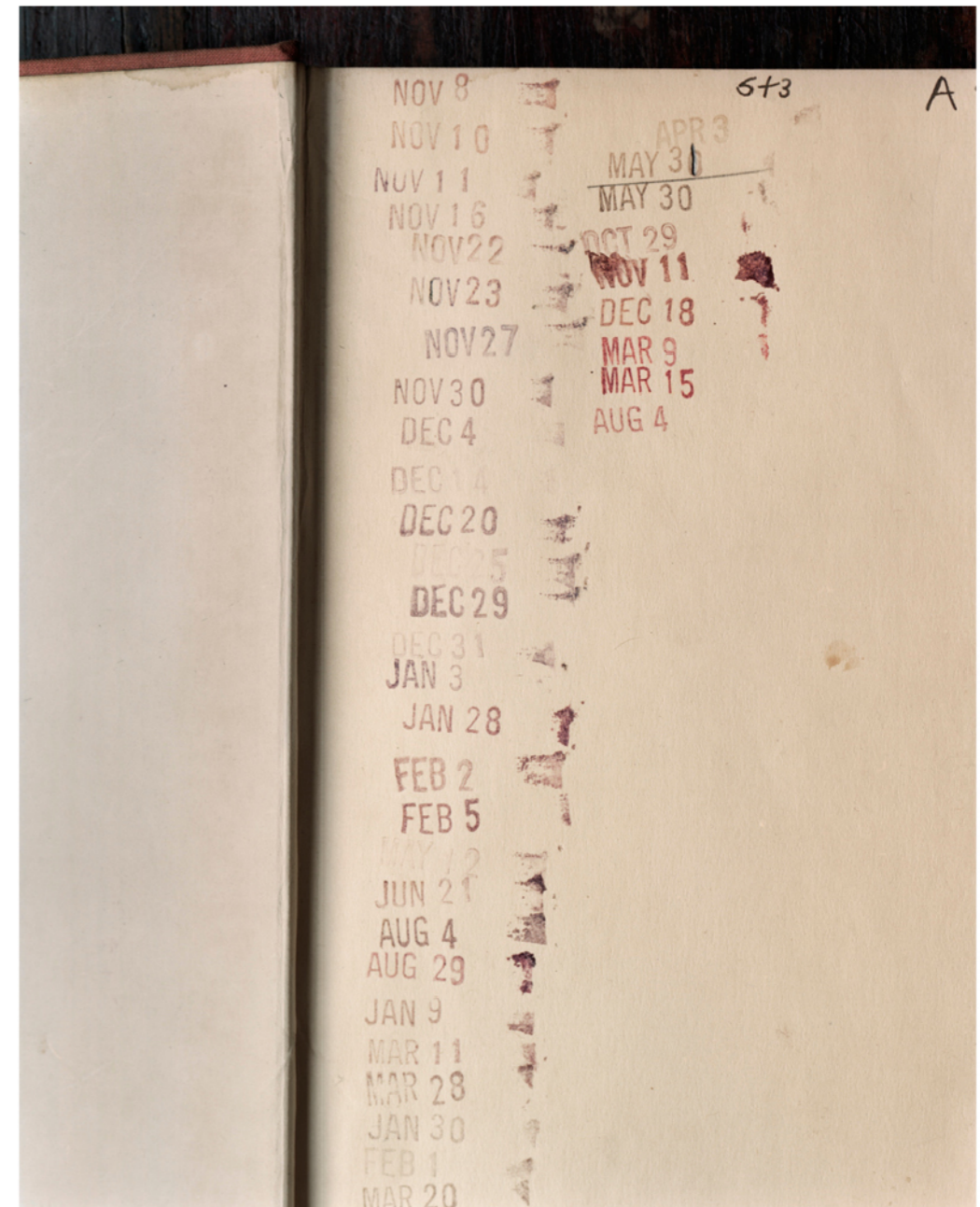
another photographer would and seeing them as a mother? Is there a distinction?

PC: During the two years that I was working on this project my eyes were pretty much always seeing photographs when I was with my daughters. I was so enamored with looking at them and photographing them that I think the two roles were combined for that period of time.

There was one session that involved photographing my two older daughters in the studio together which was quite painful and emotional. Although it seemed like the situation had some potential photographically, I had to stop. They were too upset. I was able to make an image of them together at a later time that relays their complicated relationship, but not in a way that inflicted pain. I guess there is a line that I draw between photographer and mother.

FM: Taken as a whole, your photos left me with a sharp feeling of mystery. It seems, as though at the edge of every photo is a feeling that the unknown can penetrate all things, even the things that we keep around us and hold dearly... I sense uneasiness.

PC: Many people have commented that there is a heaviness and solemnity that runs throughout my work. I can't help it-- this is how I see the world! In this case I think that there is a sense of mystery in what lies ahead for all of us. The future is unknown. This causes us to hold on to the things we love, such as the hairbrush and the yellow chair. In these photographs they are beautiful and sad and isolated. The marks and



patina on their surfaces move me deeply. These are the objects that will remain behind as these young women leave home.

FM: I also want to talk about the text that introduces the project. Its tone mirrors the tone of your photographs, and I'm sure it colored my reading of your portraits. Which came first, the text or the photos? Whom was the story written for?

PC: I think most photographers would agree that the hardest part of creating a body of work is writing the artist statement to go along with it! I wrote this story after the majority of the photos were made. It greatly helped me to edit the work to capture the essence of this time--emptiness, love and longing, and a sense of not knowing what comes next.

FM: Does your early life influence your photography? Do you think acknowledging love is important to creating great art?

PC: My own late adolescence/ early womanhood was difficult. I did not feel seen by my mother, who was primarily concerned that I find a husband, as soon as possible. I do think that there is an element of desire on my part to re-write my story. My younger self would have liked to be recognized as beautiful and beloved in the way I am trying to acknowledge my daughters.

I think art is an expression of love. It is how we describe the people, places, moments that we cannot part with; the things we want to keep forever.

