

**REAL
ART WAYS**

56 ARBOR STREET
HARTFORD CT 06106
860 232 1006
REALARTWAYS.ORG

This exhibition is a result of Real Art Ways "Next" competition in 2005, which requested proposals from emerging artists living in New York or New England. "Next" was juried by Nicholas Baume, Chief Curator, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston and Holly Block, Executive Director, Art in General, NYC.

The exhibition was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.



REAL ART WAYS, founded in 1975, is a nationally recognized, alternative multi-disciplinary arts organization that presents and supports contemporary artists and their work, facilitates the creation of new work, and creatively engages and informs audiences and communities. Real Art Ways is an active presenter of different art forms, including music, performance, spoken word, film, video and visual arts. Real Art Ways has a particular commitment to supporting the work of emerging artists.

Margarida Correia



Installation view of Paula and Adrienne (left to right) at Real Art Ways

Margarida Correia

By Mary Frey

A pair of eyeglasses, an oxford shirt, a prom dress—these ordinary items take on new meanings in the work of photographer Margarida Correia, opening doors into the past and into the souls of her subjects. The Portuguese word, **Saudade**, the title of Correia's ongoing photographic project, describes a sadness caused by the absence or disappearance of people, things, states or actions and is steeped in nostalgia and memory. To quote from Pablo Neruda's poem of the same name, "Saudade is to feel what no longer exists."

It is Margarida Correia's intention in her recent work to illustrate this idea by asking her contemporaries to share items that they have inherited or saved, and the family photographs that picture an ancestor wearing these items. Informed by her own impulse to obsessively collect things—an activity that she describes as being "very Portuguese"—Correia joins copies of family snapshots, photos of treasured objects pictured in these snapshots and portraits of their "collectors" wearing the various clothes or accessories depicted in them, into engaging triptychs. The result is a hybrid form of documentary image that considers, at once, the nature of still life, narrative and portrait photography.

Margarida Correia earned her MFA in Photography and Related Media at the School of Visual Arts in NYC, and a MA degree in Painting from the Faculty of Fine Art of the University of Lisbon in Portugal. She has exhibited her work in NYC at A.I.R. Gallery, Camera Club of NY, and Debs & Co. Additional venues include the Griffin Museum of Photography in Winchester, MA; the Weatherspoon Art Museum in Greensboro; the Photographic Center Northwest in Seattle, WA; the National History Museum in Lisbon, Portugal, and the 1999 Biennial of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean in Rome, Italy. Correia received the Aaron Siskind Award in 2003 and was an artist-in-residence at the Center for Photography at Woodstock in summer 2005. Following her exhibition at Real Art Ways, she will have another solo show at Gallery Monumental in Lisbon, in January, 2006.

**REAL
ART WAYS**

Her approach is simple. She solicits family, friends and strangers for photographs that may contain items that they have collected or saved over the years. Oftentimes these images depict significant family events—private moments made public and preserved through the act of photography. She then re-photographs the snapshots, carefully rendering the tears, creases and stains of every image with painful accuracy. The slight shadowing beneath each photo, together with the printing of each to their original size, creates a strangely illusionary effect, drawing attention to the physicality of these old photos. Correia claims that replicating them so accurately allows her to “start from a real thing”. This is important for her as she seeks to move from the concrete to the conceptual in her pieces.

It is, however, the collected objects themselves that give Correia the most pleasure and provide her with inspiration. She delights in discovering the “odd attachments and hidden secrets” of people she barely knows. Carefully chosen for their visual qualities (she studied painting and drawing, as well as photography) they seduce us with their timeworn beauty. Photographed in a studio setting against a black background with clean, direct lighting, these objects display their colorful surfaces and textures with a lush sensuality.

Alexis, 2005, C-Print, 20 x 30, 11 x 14, 14 x 17 1/2, 1 of 5 + 2 A.P.



Isabel, 2004, C-Print, 20 x 30, 11 x 14, 14 x 17 1/2, 1 of 5 + 2 A.P.

A blue velour beach hat from the 1970's (*Paula 2005*), a lime green prom dress from the late 60's (*Alexis 2005*) or the red and gold leaf splattered silk lining of a lambs wool coat Circa 1942 (*Adrienne 2004*) are beautifully rendered yet appear sadly deflated when isolated in a photographic space and disconnected from their original purposes. As with the snapshots in which they appear, Correia is careful to acknowledge the ravages of time on these items. Lost buttons, snags, and stains are important details to reveal and reflect upon. Correia places great emphasis on these collected objects, imbuing them with an almost mystical significance. They become, at once, relics of past histories and empowering talismans for their contemporary owners. This is apparent when we view the portraits of the owners wearing their items. Although Correia directed her subjects to “think about past memories” as they posed for her camera, the resulting images offer no evidence of this nostalgic introspection. Instead, they wear their artifacts with authority—directing their gazes at either the camera, their own reflection in a mirror or off in a vague distance—with an air of absolute confidence.

In *Isabel 2004*, the vintage photograph of a young woman in her wedding dress conveys a childlike innocence as she

demurely poses for the camera. The still life of the gown, photographed from a centered, flat position appears small and specimen-like as it floats in the black studio space. These two images stand in stark contrast to the photograph of Isabel herself. Positioning her camera from below, Correia accentuates Isabel's stature as she stares defiantly into the lens. Dramatic lighting draws attention to the full-figured Isabel as she wears her mother's wedding dress, instilling it with a corporeal intensity that is thoroughly contemporary. As her piece suggests, the connections between past and present, who we are and how we perceive ourselves are complex. In her essay, “The Image World” from the book *On Photography*, Susan Sontag sees the photograph as “not only like its subject, a homage to the subject. It is part of, an extension of that subject; and a potent means of acquiring it, of gaining control over it.”¹ And Margarida Correia's photographic works do just that. By juxtaposing the photographic evidence of two generations she is able to imagine the past as she contemplates the present and empowers the future.

Her photographer's “eye” is evident in much of her work, as she weaves the images of her triptychs together with subtle visual connections. The neutral palettes of the three photographs in *Adrienne 2004* are interrupted by the red lipstick sported by the young woman in the present-day portrait providing a visual complement to the red leaves in the lining of her grandmother's coat. The predominately black and white images in *Karen 2005* make the fleshiness of Karen's skin seem even more vulnerable and we follow with fascination the journey of a mother's blue velour beach cap in *Paula 2005* as it moves from its original functionality as protection to its mysterious position as turban-like headdress atop the daughter's head. Oddly, due to the faded nature of the snapshot, the color of the cap attains a new vibrancy (and life) when it reappears in the studio and portrait images.

Relationships between mothers and daughters have been longstanding subject matter for visual artists, and Margarida Correia's images are no exception. In *Alison 2004* we discover an awkward youngster seated with her mother staring blankly at the camera. After donning her mother's shirt she suddenly appears purposeful, even heroic, when depicted in Correia's

portrait. The goofy, oversized eyeglasses worn by the mother in *Sims 2005* take on a newly found significance when worn by the daughter. Much to Correia's credit her images are engaging, open-ended and allow her subjects to transcend their traditional roles, suggesting multiple readings for each piece. In the end, it is these qualities that give this unassuming work its great promise.



Sims, 2005, C-Print, 20 x 30, 11 x 14, 14 x 17 1/2, 1 of 5 + 2 A.P.

Mary Frey is currently a professor of photography at the Hartford Art School of the University of Hartford. Frey has received numerous awards for her work, most notably a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1984 and two photography fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1980 and 1992. Her work has been exhibited extensively and is part of many public and private collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Chicago Art Institute and the International Polaroid Collection.

¹ Susan Sontag, “The Image World” in *On Photography*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1973