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[HOME](#)

[CONTRIBUTORS](#)

[INDEX](#)

[ABOUT](#)

[CONTACT](#)



Murphy bed (detail), 20 x 20 inches, 2009

Accompanying Quote: "The term 'mixed' is strictly an outsider observation. It is a term that 'others' would use to define what their eyes see. All couples, gay, straight, summer/winter ... all get reduced to common life themes: time with each other, money, sex, children. All relationships are destined to become ordinary. Most people in 'same/same' relationships would be surprised at how quickly 'different' disappears and you become just two people trying to sustain friendship and happiness." —Cedric

by Sarah Allen Eagen

Yael Ben-Zion is a New York-based photographer who was born in Minneapolis, and raised in Israel. Her work often considers the relationship between the personal and political. Ben-Zion's latest series and published monograph, *Intermarried*, features families from Manhattan's Washington Heights neighborhood, where she lives. This body of work provides a glimpse into personal lives and explores the notion, and questions the implications, of intermarriage.



Frames, Digital C-Print, 30 x30 inches, 2007

Accompanying Quote: "Beatrice Rippy married Carroll Hollister in New York in 1959, one year after Mildred and Richard Loving got married in Washington, D.C. to avoid the anti-miscegenation statutes of their home state, Virginia. New York is one of the nine states in the US that never enacted anti-miscegenation laws."

Eagen: What inspired your project, *Intermarried*?

Ben-Zion: In 2009 a friend forwarded me a [TV ad](#) of the State of Israel that targeted Jews who were 'lost' to intermarriage. While uncommonly explicit in its message, the underlying sentiment behind this ad is not uncommon. Being myself intermarried, this made me think of the many challenges faced by couples who choose to share their lives regardless of their different origins, ethnicities, races or religions.



West Side Story, Digital C-Print, 30 x 30 inches, 2011

Accompanying Quote: "Jeff is Catholic and I am Jewish—that difference has defined us mostly because of the impact our relationship had on our families, who were not supportive of our being together. Indeed, for me, our relationship cost for many years the family in which I grew up. Jeff's family was more passive in their approach to the relationship. When Jeff told them he wanted to marry me, they did not support it and expressed concern that they would have Jewish grandchildren. Unlike my mother and sister, they did attend our wedding. The birth of our daughter, Annabel, has helped the mothers overcome their feelings a bit... The mothers met for the first time in the hospital when Annabel was born." —Ilana

How did you select the couples that you photographed?

I posted a message on the board of the online parent group of Washington Heights, where I live, inviting couples who *define* themselves as 'mixed couples' to participate in my project. The vast majority of the couples who took part in the project are people who responded to my post.



Patterns, Digital C-Print, 30 x 30 inches, 2009

Accompanying Quote: "We come from such strong cultures that define who we are as people –how we think, what we value, how we see the world - within the big umbrella of being 'American.' There is not a lot of sameness in terms of our respective family dynamics or rituals." —Michole

What is the process of working with the other couples involved?

After an initial contact by email or phone I would go to meet my subjects in their homes and have a long conversation with them, which included a bunch of personal questions, before I even took my camera out. Having our conversation at the back of my head, I would then start creating images of my subjects and their surroundings. I usually went back a few times and worked on more images.



The Little Prince, Digital C-Print, 20 x 20 inches, 2013

Accompanying Quote: "We are coming from different countries, France and Israel. Obviously our mother tongues are different, but it goes deeper than this. Our basic cultural backgrounds are different. And since Ben and Daniel were born, we got more opportunities to feel it. It always comes as an amusing surprise when we realize that we both used to watch a similar cartoon or enjoyed the same book. For some reason, I feel that our difference in terms of religion is part of these different cultural bags that we carry, but no more than that. And none of this really matters in our daily life, maybe because we are living in a third country. This is also why, although we have these different backgrounds, I don't really feel that we are a mixed couple... Like any other couple, we are sharing the same ideas and views on what really matters to us, on what defines us as human beings, our core values, so it is hard to feel mixed. Basically, for me, we are a mixed couple per definition, but not much more than this." —Ugo

In what ways is your own marriage considered "intermarriage"?

I am Israeli, Jewish and my Husband is French, Agnostic and we are coming from quite different cultures.

How did this work draw on your own personal experiences? Do you think that your own experiences were reflected in the narrative of this work?

Three of the images in the book reflect on the experience of my own family. Moreover, being intermarried enabled me to approach and connect to my subjects more easily. It made things more personal for everyone involved because the exchange of thoughts and ideas was mutual. While doing this project I realized that although the experiences of each family were different we had a lot in common.



Passing, Digital C-Print, 30 x 30 inches, 2012

Accompanying Quote: *"The discrimination I face as a low-visibility or 'passing' person of color is very different from what visible and dark-skinned people experience, to the point of being incomparable. Racism is a structural social system of inequality with a long, cumulative history and a pervasive psychological effect on the lives and experiences of all people who live within it. As a 'passing' person of color, I am able to avoid the majority of the structural race discrimination in this country. Where I experience racism is in the more internal and interpersonal level. I hold an awareness of myself as a person of color that inhibits my assimilation into racially hostile spaces that may otherwise include me."* —Aja

What did you hope to communicate with this project?

The main idea behind *Intermarried* is to create a platform for thinking and talking about issues that are very personal but have vast social and political implications. I think that the project gives an opportunity to talk about sensitive issues that most people usually don't talk about with people they don't know well, and encourage viewers to rethink their preconceptions about interfaith and interracial marriages and the connection between the two.

How has this body of work been received? Have there been any unexpected outcomes from this series?

The project has been received very well. It has been shown in New York and got a lot of press, and the reactions of viewers and readers have mostly been very positive and encouraging. The most unexpected outcome from the project till now has probably been a gallery visit with a group of 15 Orthodox Jewish male students from Yeshiva University and their sociology professor. We had a fascinating conversation around the images and the work. That has been a very rewarding experience for me.



Family, Digital C-Print, 20 x20 inches, 2011

Accompanying Quote: "You have to understand that my mother and Lazaro's mother cannot communicate. My mother doesn't speak Spanish and Lazaro's mother doesn't speak English. This bothers my mother greatly. She gets greatly offended if we speak Spanish in front of her. What she doesn't understand is that sometimes I have to speak Spanish to Lazaro because he doesn't always understand everything in English. The same thing applies when we are in Santo Domingo and he has to explain things to me in English because I'm not understanding the language there. But otherwise, at this point in our relationship, our families see that we love and are committed to each other...and they respect that. And of course, they all love our son." — Jennifer

The photographs capture private moments shared between people, and still lives that are influenced by their experiences. Each photograph provides a glimpse into a family's life. Can you talk about the decision-making process concerning what to photograph and what photographs to include in the series?

As I mentioned earlier, I started photographing after talking to my subjects and had their story in mind while creating the images. Initially I photographed whatever caught my eye at my subjects' apartments, including candid moments and still lives. In some cases, I collaborated with my subjects on an experience or idea I wanted to visualize. The images themselves were never fully constructed though, but somewhere in between.

When it came to editing the work, the two guidelines that I followed were that the image had to be visually compelling and that it had to tell something – often subtly – about the subjective experience of the people I photographed. The next stage was to sequence the images – not by family but according to a loose narrative, based on both concept and form. This is the stage where for me the whole project came together.



Family Photos, Digital C-Print, 24 x30 inches, 2009
Accompanying Quote: "We were both concerned about approval from our families and were aware that we might encounter some disapproval from society. We were also aware that our child might experience some tension growing up." —Vanessa and Rick

Your book includes quotes from the people photographed about the experience of intermarriage. These quotes add moving insights into the daily lives of these families. Can you discuss this process?

In order for my subjects to feel comfortable, I did not record our conversations. Instead, following our first meeting I sent them a questionnaire that I asked them to fill out in detail or as loosely as they wanted, knowing that their answers may become part of the work. Excerpts from these questionnaires indeed ended up in the book and exhibition.



Morena and Blankito, Digital C-Print, 24 x30 inches, 2013
Accompanying Quote: "Joselin and I would walk in our neighborhood and would run into some of the Dominican women in the neighborhood. They would tell her that she 'really improved her race' by marrying me. That shocked me, as I certainly didn't think that way and neither did Joselin." —Shawn

What is next for your work?

I have been collaborating with the sculptor Peter Bulow in a project about Holocaust survivors and I've been working on a few other projects that are still not ready to get out to the world.



Sketches, 20 x20 inches, 2011

Accompanying Quote: "We started talking and once I heard his accent I had to know where he was from... On basis of [our] common interest in furniture design the conversation took off and soon he was jotting my number down on a scrap of paper... When people come from different places and cultures it is important to keep in mind we react to same things in different ways. It is an added layer of differences between men and women, older and younger, coming from poor or well-off families, having one partner working and the other staying home and all kinds of different ways which in a way make any relationship intermarriage-like." —Ewelina

Yael Ben-Zion (b. 1973) was born in Minneapolis, MN and raised in Israel. She is a graduate of the International Center of Photography's General Studies Program. Prior to taking up photography, Yael had a diverse legal career, which included pursuing LL.M. and J.S.D. degrees at the Yale Law School. It was at Yale that she took her first formal photography class. Yael's work has been exhibited in the United States and in Europe. In 2007, her photograph *Crash* was selected for the cover of *American Photography* 23. Yael's first monograph, *5683 Miles Away* (Kehrer, 2010), was selected as one of *Photo-Eye's* Best Books of 2010 and for the *PDN Photo Annual* 2011. It was also a nominee for the German Photo Book Award 2011. *Intermarried*, her second monograph, has recently been published by Kehrer and featured, among others, in the *NY Times Sunday Review*, *PDN Magazine* and *The Forward*. She lives and works in New York. Yael Ben-Zion's work can be seen at YaelBenZion.com.