

## Melania Comoretto\*

(Turin, 1975)

In order to create the series of photographs *Alexis*, 2005-2006, Melania Comoretto spent a great deal of time at Gleason's Gym, befriending the women who frequent it. "I am interested — says the photographer — in understanding how human beings, and women in particular, manage to redeem themselves from their circumstances, to overcome their physical, psychological, and social limitations. Boxing is one of their tools." In this sense, the photographs in the collection can be interpreted above all as a series of individual portraits. Thus the image of a woman straining to lift barbells, or one of a girl indefatigably pushing herself in the ring, or again one of a woman engrossed in her stretching exercises, are the interpretation offered by Comoretto of a series of individual stories. The physical fatigue, concentration, and extreme tension that emerge from many images are metaphors for the path undertaken by each woman, toward the sometimes extremely difficult attempt to move beyond personal histories of abuse and violence. In this regard, Comoretto mentions the concept of "resilience," associating materials' properties of resistance to external stresses with the ability of human beings to survive difficulties and traumas. In several images, even when bodies are hidden in workout clothes or their heads are forced into boxing helmets, the femininity of the subjects encountered still comes through. "The determination of these young women," she says, "many of whom are physically fragile and extremely young, to want to go beyond their own physical limitations, to want to enter that 'gray zone' where gender no longer matters, to want to disguise their sensuality, has almost the opposite effect: it makes their identity even more fascinating and prominent, precisely because it is unconscious and ineliminable, despite every attempt to emulate masculine stances and gestures."

Interested in using the camera as a means of social investigation, Comoretto often organizes her work in series, concentrating on women and on the various expressions of their identity. (MB)

## Additional Works in the Collection

*Alexis*, 2005-2006, ten color photographs, 4.96 × 7.53 inches