

raw

I was 20 years old when, for the first time, I saw my ear as it looked when I was born. As far as I know, this photograph from the hospital archives is the only picture of my black ear. In it, the head is turned to the side, and I am under general anesthesia, undergoing the first in a series of operations to transform this “stain” into a large scar. This portrait of me, sleeping, is the heart of this project. All of the other photographs orbit around this one. At the time, chloroform was used both as a surgical anesthetic and to preserve meat.

Thirty years after this photo was taken, a traumatic memory resurfaced; an assault just before the photo was taken. The child in the photo was terrorized, anesthetized and inert in the studio, with the camera and lights aimed at her face. The animal still life photos are a strange echo of that experience. I was an adult when I took those photos, but I was an adult with amnesia. I didn't remember the assault, and I didn't grasp the meaning of the images. During that same time, I photographed a skin graft operation in the hospital. This time, I was there for the operation; I was able to observe it. I was a witness, or maybe an investigator, because I wanted to photograph everything, to document everything. Each time the shutter clicked, I felt a deepening sensation of emptiness, as if I had missed something. When I took these photographs, I was looking for my own memory without realizing it. I was looking for what the hospital portrait was hiding.

This project also includes photographs that my friends and family took of me. In most of them, I'm smiling. Something strange happened when I had my picture taken, and my smile always morphed into a forced grimace. That mask reveals the uneasy feeling of being in front of the lens. I feel like I'm waking up after a long, drugged sleep. The landscape photos are the final photographs that I took for this project, and the only ones that I took after the amnesia had lifted, after this memory came crashing back. They are a journey from sleep to consciousness, from forgetting to remembering.

Raw. An honest and direct way of speaking. It is sincere and somewhat brutal.
“Crue”, the word for “raw” in French, is also the past tense of the verb “to believe.”
The word refers as well to uncooked food. Raw is where the obscene meets our beliefs.
This project is dedicated to all the survivors of sex crimes.

Juliette Angotti, August 2022, Boulder, Colorado.