

# hous projects

## BULL FIGHT

In late summer of 2006, I went to Madrid in order to photograph some of the female matadors—*toreras*—I had only recently become aware of. I was curious to meet the few tenacious young women who have upended centuries of tradition by penetrating the antiquated, machismo world of bullfighting. The courage and perseverance of these women was an inspiration for BULL FIGHT, a series that helped me explore my own notions of the masculine and feminine, and to more broadly meditate on the *corrida*—the dance of love, life and death within the ring.

Ernest Hemingway once stated: “Bull-fighting is . . . presented as an art heightened by the presence of death and, if the spectator can project himself into the matador's place, in the terror of death.” Many artists I’ve admired, such as Picasso and Goya, also viewed the bullring symbolically. Their work ingeniously evokes the violent, dramatic, religious, and political pageantry of the fight. In battling the bull, the *toreras* not only represent the ancient, ages-old war between man and nature, but something much more deeply buried in our collective unconscious: the war between a civilized self and the feral savage we carry within.

I first worked with Mari Paz Vega, the premier female matador competing today, in Zaragoza, Spain, and within hours of meeting her I was thrown into the mix with her *cuadrilla* (crew) in the outer ring as they prepared her before and during her *corrida* that afternoon. My experience with the bullfighting world was minimal, having attended bullfights only a few times at Las Ventas when I was living in Madrid in 2000. As I became more intimate with the sport and its rituals, I was struck by two contrasting responses within me: an appreciation for the graceful artistry of the *toreras*; and an inescapable awareness of the palpable presence and smell of death.

Bullfighting inspires a wealth of different emotions, from the aficionado’s to the activist’s. Witnessing this blood sport firsthand, I was both intrigued and horrified, curious about the bullfighters’ motivations, and fascinated by the strength and character they brought into the ring. Working with *toreras* in Spain and Mexico over the past five years, I sought to capture, in a raw and vital form, the noble quality of their stillness, the rhythms and choreography of their sensual movements in the ring, and the sudden, explosive violence of the final kill.

“Each *corrida* is a delicate dance,” Lupita Lopez, a Mexican *torera* explained. “It’s facing our primal fear and creating art.” BULL FIGHT is an exploration of the tension between sublime beauty and brutality represented by these exceptional women.

– Gina LeVay, *New York City, April 2011*