

# GAIL REBHAN | THE HYPERCONCIOUS COCOONING OF TIME

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Gail Rebhan. My Father With Golda Meir, Prime Minister Of Israel, And Pope John Paul II (2004). From *Gail Rebhan, About Time* Ed. By Sally Stein (Mack, 2023). Courtesy Of The Artist And Mack.

At seven years old, I woke up beneath a sea of stars. The cosmos glittered over the New York City skyline. Further away, NASA launched its next mission to establish a colony on the now-defunct Pluto. It was at this moment, beneath this fantasy world rendered in chalk on my bedroom wall, that I gained consciousness—my first taste of existentialism, the first thought in my noggin. This site of intellectual germination’s development has finally come to a head at 25, and my consciousness has given way to a hyperconscious dread. That hyperconsciousness, developed and beaten into me overtime, understands now why my mom, even when she was drawing pretty pictures on the wall, would tell me, “you’re going to thank me when you’re older.”

Gail Rebhan isn’t necessarily looking for thanks, however. In the new book, *Gail Rebhan: About Time* (Mack Books), editor Sally Stein and photographer Gail Rebhan collaborate to showcase Rebhan’s work and its prescience over the last four decades, which they will also exhibit at American University in Washington, DC. It is exciting to see “unexpected diversity and variety in how she was approaching questions, both about image-making and questions of time and history. Be that the various investigations of how things both stay the same and change,” remarks Stein on the exploration of Rebhan’s oeuvre.

*About Time* begins with Rebhan’s investigations of the motions of her family. Rebhan compiled several photographs of her new husband Mark, his mother Lill, his grandmother’s home, and various sites of domestic labor in *Sequential Still Life* and *Family Sequences*. These are works that captivated Stein when she met Rebhan at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY. “Gail’s work really stopped me cold,” recalls Stein, continuing, “she’s working in kind of a snapshot mode, but instead of just finding one snapshot, she was working in sequences, and essentially stopping time so that one could examine family relations, like what kinds of interactions happen over time.” In *Mark watches the Olympics with his son, Andy, and mother, Lill*, Mark reaches over, engaging with his infant son, only to return back to watching the Olympics, while Lill holds Andy, consoling him, offering him love. Beyond the seven photographs in this sequence, perhaps Lill feeds Andy, changes him, or puts him in new clothes.



Gail Rebhan. Lill Serves Mark Another Cup Of Coffee. From *Gail Rebhan, About Time* Ed. By Sally Stein (Mack, 2023). Courtesy Of The Artist And Mack.

Those beginning sequences led to *280 Days*, in which Rebhan photographs herself throughout the pregnancy of her first child. In *Mother-Son Talk*, she captures the conversations she had with her sons. In *Aging*, she documents her father’s declining health. In *Room*, she photographs her younger son Jackie’s room on a visit home from college. In all of these works, time prevails as a guiding force, but beneath it all, notions and critiques of labor bubble to the surface. “In the *Aging* work that I did, it sort of talks a lot about the unrespected and non-acknowledged care-giving that many people do that is unpaid work. A lot of my earlier work is about mothering, which again is very similar,” recalls Rebhan.

Rebhan’s father rose the ranks in trade unions during her teens, eventually representing United Auto Workers (UAW) in the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF), priming her for the ideas she would later toy with in her photographs. It was then, in 2009, that Rebhan looked beyond the home and her family and began her “Cultural History” work, examining histories, forgotten and hidden, in Washington, DC, where she has called home since.

In the essay on Rebhan’s “Cultural History” work, Stein recalls Rebhan saying, “Facts...are really, really powerful.” Is Rebhan uncovering some truth in her work? Can a photograph be true? Paraphrasing Stein’s husband Allen, Rebhan says, “people question the truth of photography, it’s not truthful but it’s not completely made up” Stein responds, saying, “people completely disregard the truthful possibilities of photography.”

A quarter into my own life, now reflecting on the time that has gone by, Rebhan’s work recalls those moments of caretaking. My mother wiping pudding off of my face, blowing up an inflatable pool in the backyard, helping me understand the instructions to a Lego set. Rebhan’s work lays bare those domestic, and later civil, processes, pushing them further to the front of our collective hyperconsciousness.

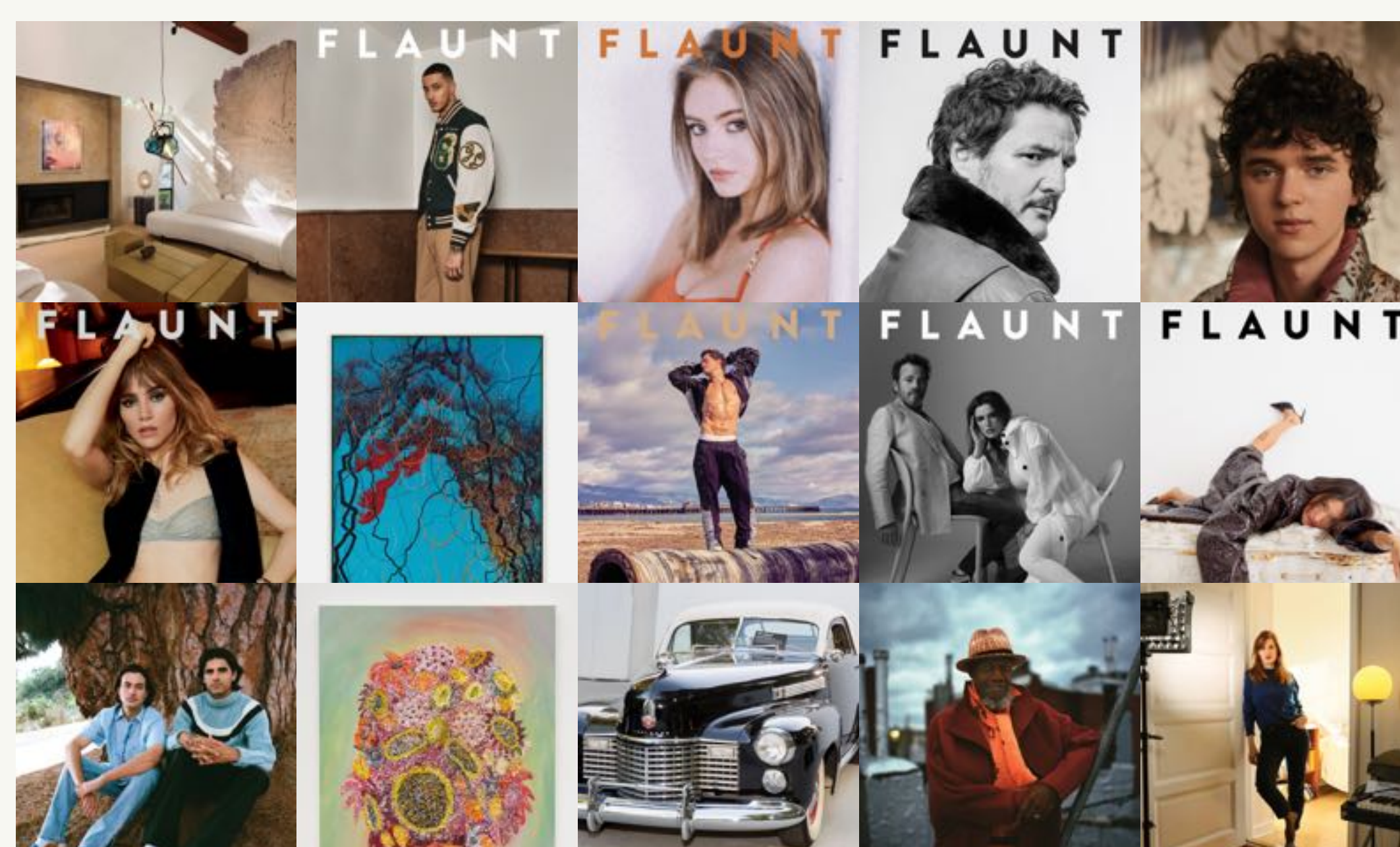


Gail Rebhan. Younger Cousins Watch Television. From *Gail Rebhan, About Time* Ed. By Sally Stein (Mack, 2023). Courtesy Of The Artist And Mack.

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