

Timely | LaToya Ruby Frazier, Nerves of Steel

CULTURE | By ALIX BROWNE | FEBRUARY 10, 2012, 9:22 AM



Ero Jacket, \$2,594. Go to etro.com. Theyskens' Theory dress, price on request. Go to theory.com. Diamond in the Rough bracelet, price on request. Go to diamondintherough.com. Photograph by Cameron Krone. Fashion editor: Andreas Kokkino. Fashion assistant: Alex Tudela. Hair by Nelson Vercher for Redken Rita Hazan at Agent Oliver. Makeup by Valery Gherman at Defacto using Dior Beauty.

“If the individuals and families most affected during the Great Depression had photographed themselves instead of being shot by government-commissioned photographers,” asks the artist LaToya Ruby Frazier, “what would their own self-representation look like?” For the past 10 years, Frazier, 30, who grew up in the blighted steel town of Braddock, Pa., has sought to answer that question, photographing her family — her mother and grandmother in particular. Next month’s [Whitney Biennial](#) will include a series of intimate, unflinching self-portraits Frazier took in her grandmother’s house, where she helped care for her step-great-grandfather (a former steelworker who suffered from multiple, chronic illnesses) and which is now abandoned. “I witnessed his body decay an crumble,” says Frazier, drawing a powerful metaphor for her hometown. “Without financial resources or better access to health care, I did what came natural. I documented it.”