

**Susannah Bielak**

**Artist Statement: Flowers for People We Know and Do Not Know  
(2007)**

**Project Description**

*Flowers for people we know and do not know* are portraits exploring idiosyncratic approaches to the act of dedication. The project consists of photographs and accompanying frottage drawings.

For the project, I asked friends in San Diego to consider public figures for whom they have strong feelings, and then use gesture and the Language of Flowers to relay those feelings. The concept behind the project was to bridge the divide between personal lived realities and the realm of public figures, combining notions of public monuments, flowers as ceremonial gestures, and flowers as intimate gestures. The resulting photographs are of ordinary people engaged in an act of translation and dedication.

**Artist Statement**

Hyacinth, white jasmine, lavender. Nasturtium, gladiolas, red columbine. Daisy, white clover, geranium. Eglantine.

Benevolence, amiability, mistrust. Patriotism, ready armed. Anxious and trembling. I share your feelings, I promise, I engage you for the next dance. I wound to heal.

Beginning most notably with Charlotte de Latour's *Langage des fleurs* in 1816, symbolic codes of flowers were developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in France, England and the United States to ascribe personal qualities and states of mind to particular flowers. Inspired by the Oriental tradition of selam, the Language of Flowers was purportedly created to reveal hidden 'truths' that lie behind surface diversities. Far from an exact science, these dictionaries were created based upon emblematic clichés and folk beliefs. According to these languages, flowers relay complicated and often conflicting meanings. The beauty of the flower can function as a ruse, a foil (imagine a death threat in the form of a sweet-smelling bouquet).

Flowers are loaded decoration. What propels me is what's under the surface.