

**DONNA FERRATO**

American, born Lorain, OH, 1949

*Margo, Unbeatable Woman, Mt. Tamalpais, San Francisco, CA, 2010*

Pigment inkjet print, 20 x 24 inches

Gift of David Kieselstein KGSM '88, 2016.16.15

---

Donna Ferrato's *Margo, Unbeatable Woman, Mt. Tamalpais, San Francisco, CA* is part of a series of photographs begun in 1981 and revisited in the 2010s that creates narratives to humanize those who have experienced domestic violence. While much of her work offers a window into the deeply disturbing and gendered terrain of intimate partner violence, her photographs also demand that we take notice of the complexity of survivors' experiences. As shown in this photograph, Ferrato connected with many of her subjects to capture them on the other side of their crisis moments. Some of them are alive, healing, and full of hope, as reflected in Margo's smile here. According to the artist's caption for this work, Margo tells her own story as one of triumph for herself and her daughters: "After the great escape across the country to California, [she] knew she did the right thing." Yet, in another photograph in the series, Ferrato does not allow us to break our gaze when she captures the humanity of a murdered mother and daughter from their coffins. We are forced to confront the reality that their lives have been cut short.

Earlier in the series Ferrato used the institution of law enforcement as her literal vehicle into a horrific world of interpersonal violence. She was permitted to accompany police officers and to take photos as they responded to calls of domestic violence. From this embedded position, Ferrato exposes the limits of the police force: the laws they are charged with enforcing do not prevent domestic violence or repair relational disharmony. Ferrato's work allows us to bear witness to the inadequate institutional responses to persistent and violent forms of masculine power and its aftermath. The acute responses of the police do not offer healing to those who have been harmed nor rehabilitation for those who have harmed, but often uphold dominant forms of societal violence that undergird the interpersonal forms of violence seen in her project. Ferrato's work, then, is most hopeful in its capacity to activate her audience as a caring and engaged community, which must exist beyond institutions in order to create the safe world we all deserve.

—Sekile M. Nzinga

Director of the Women's Center and Interim Chief Diversity Officer,  
Northwestern University, 2017-21

Chief Equity Officer, Office of Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker