

Home Truths: Photography, Motherhood & Loss

Friday 11 October 2013 - Sunday 5 January 2014



Four contemporary photographers explore issues of motherhood and loss in an exhibition curated by Susan Bright.

Home Truths presents a series of meditations on maternal relationships that are highly personal, often documentary and that challenge the familiar stereotypes associated with images of motherhood.

Curator Susan Bright has selected work by artists Ann Fessler (b. 1950, USA), Tierney Gearon (b. 1963, USA), Miyako Ishiuchi (b. 1947, Japan) and Annu Palakunnathu Matthew (b. 1964, UK) that encompass film, digital collage, still life, reportage and vernacular photography. Set within the context of the Foundling Museum, these works are at once haunting and engaging.

Shot with a collage of recent video and archival footage of the farms and rivers of the rural Midwest, Fessler's *Along the Pale Blue River* is an autobiographical tale about a young pregnant girl who flees her rural community for a town where she can be invisible, and the daughter who returns forty years later. Through a yearbook picture, Fessler discovers the source of the river from her childhood town and realises it has always flowed from her mother to her.

Gearon came to public attention in the UK when her photographs of her children were exhibited as part of *I Am A Camera* at the Saatchi Gallery in 2001. With *The Mother Project* she shifts her attention to her elderly mother who is both bipolar and schizophrenic. The project, which took eight years to complete, looks at complex familial relationships and raises issues around ageing, mental health and the role of photography, which is used here as a tool to try and connect and establish a relationship that has been lost (or was never there).

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Image: Tierney Gearon, Detail from *Untitled*, 2006
from *The Mother Project* © Tierney Gearon

In her *Mother's* series Ishiuchi, one of Japan's foremost female photographers, shows the objects that she started to photograph after her mother's unexpected death. The objects are delicate and often threadbare and are all treated as an extension of her mother's body. The feeling of loss and melancholy reverberates around the pieces as they act as a material trace of the mother that once was.

For her ongoing series *Re-generation*, Palakunnathu Matthew animates vernacular photographs of her family and friends to show how the dynamic of the family changes over time, as people die and children are born. Without a specific ancestral narrative, the viewer is left to guess at the histories, relationships and dramas revealed by the familiar poses.

Bright says, "My idea for this exhibition is to look how maternal loss can manifest itself in a variety of ways, sometimes in an obvious way like death, but also sometimes it is not known or secret and photography can only give hints."

Home Truths is a collaboration with the Photographers' Gallery, London. The exhibition is showing across the two sites, with artists at The Photographers' Gallery consider motherhood and identity. Artists showing work at the Gallery are Janine Antoni (b. 1964, Bahamas), Elina Brotherus (b. 1972, Finland), Elinor Carucci (b. 1971, Israel), Ana Casas Broda (b. 1965, Spain), Fred Hüning (b. 1966, Germany), Leigh Ledare (b. 1976, USA), Katie Murray (b.1974, USA), and Hanna Putz (b. 1987, Austria).

The exhibition is accompanied by a major publication co-published by The Photographers' Gallery, Art / Books, The Foundling Museum and The Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago.

Home Truths is supported by the Home Truths Supporters' Circle, and the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation.

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Foundling Museum

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Open: Tuesday – Saturday 10:00 – 17:00 and Sunday 11:00 – 17:00, closed on Mondays

Admission: £7.50, concessions £5, National Trust members half price, children free

Tube and train: Russell Square, King's Cross St Pancras and Euston

The Foundling Museum explores the history of the Foundling Hospital, and celebrates the ways in which artists of all disciplines have helped improve children's lives for over 270 years. We do this through a dynamic programme of temporary exhibitions, collection displays, artists' projects, concerts, events and learning activities for all ages.

Supported by



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The Foundling Hospital, which continues today as the children's charity Coram, was established in 1739 by the philanthropist Captain Thomas Coram, as 'a hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children'. Instrumental in helping Coram realise his vision were the artist William Hogarth who encouraged all the leading artists of the day to donate work, and the composer George Frideric Handel who gave annual benefit concerts of the *Messiah*. In doing so, they created London's first public art gallery and set the template for the way that the arts could support philanthropy. The Foundling Museum celebrates their vision and continues their work, by enabling today's artists, musicians and writers to work alongside vulnerable young people and to cast new light on the histories we tell.

Ann Fessler (b. 1950) is a filmmaker, video/sound installation artist, and author. Her work has focused on the stories of women and the impact that myths, stereotypes, and mass media images have on their lives and intimate relationships. Fessler turned to the subject of adoption in 1989. Since that time she has produced three films and written a non-fiction book on adoption.

Tierney Gearon (b. 1963) is a photographer working across fine art practice and editorial commissions. She gained notoriety through *I Am A Camera* at the Saatchi Gallery in 2001 when her works of her children were used sensationally in the press. She is regularly commissioned for The New York Times. She is currently working on an ABC book for children with Steidl publishers for release later this year.

Miyako Ishiuchi (b. 1947) has had over twenty solo exhibitions since 1977. Her photographs can be found in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo; The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; and The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Annu Palakunnathu Matthew (b. 1964) has recently exhibited at Sepia International, New York City, the RISD Museum, Tang Museum, Newark Art Museum and Smithsonian Institute, Museum of National History. Her work can be found in the collections of the George Eastman House, Fogg Museum at Harvard, Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Center for Creative Photography and the RISD Museum among others.

Susan Bright is a curator and writer based in New York. She was formerly Assistant Curator of Photographs at the National Portrait Gallery (London), Curator at the Association of Photographers and Acting Director for the MA at Sotheby's Institute of Art in London. Her exhibitions include *How We Are: Photographing Britain* (co-curated with Val Williams) Tate Britain, London (2007); and *Face of Fashion*, National Portrait Gallery, London (2007). Her books include: *Art Photography Now* (Thames and Hudson, 2005) and *Auto Focus - The Self Portrait in Contemporary Photography* (Thames and Hudson, 2010).

The Photographers' Gallery opened in 1971 in Great Newport Street, London, as the UK's first independent gallery devoted to photography. It was the first public gallery in the UK to exhibit many key names in international photography, including Juergen Teller, Robert Capa, Sebastião Salgado and Andreas Gursky. The Gallery has also been instrumental in establishing contemporary British photographers, including Martin Parr and Corinne Day. In 2009, the Gallery moved to 16 – 18 Ramillies Street in Soho, the first stage in its plan to create a 21st century home for photography. Following an eighteen month long redevelopment project, the Gallery reopened to the public in 2012. The success of The Photographers' Gallery over the past four decades has helped to establish photography as a recognised art form, introducing new audiences to photography and championing its place at the heart of visual culture. The Gallery's Chair of the Board of Trustees is Sir Brian Pomeroy, CBE. www.thephotographersgallery.org.uk

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