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# Home Truths: Photography, Motherhood and Loss

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A 'home truth' can be simply understood as a fact that is somehow discomfoting to acknowledge or may cause embarrassment. The work in this show may do all of those things. The title is there to be taken literally, or ironically. The concept of truths in parenting and photography are there to be questioned.

The work featured here aims to challenge long held stereotypes and sentimental views of motherhood. Set against the backdrop of the absent mother within the foundling story, the work here attempts to respond to that history and give the mother a voice, but also illustrates how her role can have haunting contemporary continuums.

Loss is not necessarily articulated by a death, but can be experienced through the search for birth mothers, as seen in the film by Ann Fessler, or by seeking closeness with a mother who suffers from mental illness, as Tierney Gearon does. Annu Palakunnathu Matthew traces maternal lines across generations and Miyako Ishiuchi attempts to heal her grief by photographing her deceased mother's belongings.

As a subject often overlooked in contemporary art making, the work here is highly subjective and personal. *Home Truths: Photography, Motherhood and Loss* is also a comment on the changing nature of photography as family photographs are increasingly being replaced by digital images. The photographic object – be that an album or a studio photograph – has become a treasured belonging infused with loss.

Artists: Ann Fessler, Tierney Gearon, Miyako Ishiuchi and Annu Palakunnathu Matthew.

*Home Truths: Photography, Motherhood and Identity* is showing at the Photographers' Gallery and features work by Janine Antoni, Elina Brotherus, Elinor Carucci, Ana Casas Broda, Fred Huning, Leigh Ledare and Katie Murray.

Supported by the *Home Truths* Supporters' Circle and the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation.



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# Tierney Gearon

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*The beautiful thing about my mother is that she has this spark for life. She will see a black-eyed Susan in a field of weeds, and she'll ask me to bring it home with me. That is what she will notice. In all this rubble of grass in her front yard, she finds this one little flower. I want to celebrate that.*

Tierney Gearon, 2006

These works are from a series titled *Daddy, Where are you?* and are set in upstate New York as Gearon (b. 1963, USA) tries to connect with her mother who suffers from increasing mental health issues. The inter-generational connections spin throughout the series as her young children interact with their grandmother – sometimes relishing her unconventional character and other times becoming frightened by her. It is a story of two mothers connecting, battling, loving and accepting one another despite the fact that conventional roles have collapsed.

Here there is no place for maternal judgments. Photography plays a vital cathartic role in bridging gaps that may have occurred between the two women. Shot with a combination of orchestrated set up scenes and intuitive moments, it's a tender and complicated piece that questions traditional maternal roles.

Based in Los Angeles, Gearon has exhibited at many prominent galleries and museums including, Gagosian Gallery, New York; Yossi Milo, New York; Ace Gallery, New York; The Parrish Art Museum, New York; and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.



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# Miyako Ishiuchi

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*What I have now are only the things my mother left behind for me. I bring them out into the light one by one, to seal their image onto a photograph, as a farewell to her.*

Miyako Ishiuchi, 2002

Miyako Ishiuchi's (1947, Japan) *Mother's* series (2000–2005) consists of photographs of her mother's possessions, taken after her unexpected death in 2000. Her mother died from the Hepatitis C she contracted from a blood transfusion she received for severe burns 20 years before.

Their relationship was a conflicted one, and had only started to mend just before her death. In memoriam and grief, Ishiuchi attempted to come to terms with her loss through photographing her mother's remaining possessions – some images of which are on show here. These objects act as an extension of her mother's body and comment on the fragility and eventual disintegration of the body.

Ishiuchi represented Japan at the 2005 Venice Biennale. During her prolific career, she has published over 20 monographs, including *Yokosuka Story* (1979), *Endless Night* (1981), and *Mother's* (2002).



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# Annu Palakunnathu Matthew

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*Old family photographs remind us of our past and where we have come from and the silent stories that these photographs insinuate. When flipping through a family album, we become more cognizant of the histories and memories of our own and other families.*

Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, 2013

For her series *Re-Generation* Annu Palakunnathu Matthew (b. 1964, Britain) digitizes vernacular photographs, specifically photographs of a family of three or more generations, and collapses them together to make short films. For each film she concentrates on the maternal line.

They show the changes in photography, be that in the objects they are printed on or the relaxing of studio styles. As one now thinks of digital photography as something instant, quick and disposable Palakunnathu Matthew uses digital technology to do the opposite, turning analogue photography into an object that is able to warp past and present in a slow and repetitive loop hinting at the histories that repeat themselves within families and how traditions are passed down. *Open Wound*, presented within a 1947 Britannica Book of the Year, is a continuation of *Re-Generation*, and concentrates on families affected by the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.

Annu Palakunnathu Matthew is Professor of Art (Photography) at the University of Rhode Island in Kingston, Rhode Island and is represented by Sepia Eye, New York City and Tasveer Gallery, India.



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# Ann Fessler

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*I have always been interested in revealing the gap between recorded history and lived history – history as written and visualized in authoritative texts, photographs and film, vs. that same history as experienced by those who lived it. Yet, I had accepted the conventional story when it came to adoption.*

Ann Fessler, 2013

*Along the Pale Blue River* (2001) is a short experimental film based on a personal experience. Made up of collage, video and archival footage of the farms and rivers in the Midwest of America, the story is told in voiceover by Fessler (b. 1950, USA). Her hypnotic tones recount the story of a young woman (her biological mother) who runs away from her small rural town when she discovers she is pregnant.

Forty years later the artist seeks out her mother's photograph in a school year book. She drives to the farm where her mother grew up as if in a dream, but she no longer lives there. During the process of the journey she realizes that the source of the river that flowed through her hometown when she was a child sprung from her mother's town – symbolically and metaphorically joining the two women as yet unknown to each other.

Fessler is the author of the award-winning book *The Girls Who Went Away* (2006) and the feature length documentary *A Girl Like Her* (2011). Her work is in the collection of the Whitney Museum, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.