

Melissa Shook: *Krissy's Present*

From **December 8, 2023** to **January 20, 2024**, MIYAKO YOSHINAGA is pleased to present *Krissy's Present*, featuring 30 black-and-white photographs made between 1965 and 1983 by the late American artist Melissa Shook (1939-2020). The opening reception will be held on Friday, December 8, 6-8 PM with Kristina Shook, the artist's daughter and the subject of this body of work.

In the mid-1960s Shook, a single mother, began photographing her mixed-race infant daughter Kristina – “Krissy.” Krissy recalls she could think of no other way to have grown up with her mother, holding the camera and photographing her all the time. “My earliest memories are of being photographed with my friends on the Lower East Side of Manhattan—running naked on the street or playing games in my friends’ apartments. My mother Melissa chasing after us—not interrupting us –clicking away with her camera, an extension of her.”

Shook later realized that taking her daughter’s images constantly was an obsession to make up for her lost childhood, given that her mother died when she was twelve, and she had amnesia regarding her mother and her entire childhood. Although photographing family members had been a universal practice, few photographers before Shook explored the depth and complexity of motherhood and childhood as artistic subjects from the photographer’s firsthand experience. From an infant girl with curly hair playing with toys to a young woman wearing a dressy veiled hat, Krissy was meticulously recorded growing over time, finally becoming independent and leaving her mother’s care and protection.

In the beginning Krissy’s images were often an extension of the photographer’s self-image, but later as “a little person” who had her own ideas and opinions, Krissy became Shook’s collaborator, particularly in the artist’s *Daily Self-Portraits 1972-1973* series when mother and daughter appeared together in front of the camera making spontaneous acts, gestures, and performances. When Krissy became a teenager she permitted her mother to make formal portraits of her as a holiday present when presents were minimal and often handmade. Every year in December, Shook shot Krissy each day for a few weeks. The exhibition includes those December portraits from 1973, 1975, 1977, and 1979.

For Shook, the turning point came in 1977 when Krissy was twelve, the same age when Shook lost her mother. Shook, then thirty-eight years old, was working as a photography teacher in Boston. She wrote “I was no longer haunted by the inability to remember. She (Krissy) also began to take more control of her life and her image. I was no longer given tacit permission to photograph her at any time, but I was allowed an occasional portrait. By then something internal in me had healed and my work took a more outward direction. I had reconstructed enough of a person to be able to look outside myself and my immediate family.”

(over, please)

When Krissy turned eighteen and told her mother to stop photographing her, Shook put an end to the Krissy series. Shook had fixed her daughter's growth in photographs so that her childhood would not be forgotten, but she also admitted this act was a way for her to create a bulwark against death. Yet she hoped the Krissy series would go beyond that to celebrate life.

Melissa Shook was born in New York in 1939 and studied at the Bard College and Art Students League of New York. She taught at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Creative Photo Lab in 1974, and at the University of Massachusetts Boston from 1975 to 2005. Besides her earlier subjects of herself and her daughter, Shook left remarkable photo/text documentary on homeless women in shelters and other marginal members of her and other communities.

Shook's work is in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the Center for Creative Photography, and Moderna Museet (Stockholm) among others. Currently, Shook's work is featured in "Ken Ohara & Melissa Shook: Autoportraits au Quotidien" at La Patinoire Galerie Bach in Brussels (until December 22). Next year, Shook's work will be featured in the three-person exhibition "In the Right Place: Photographs by Barbara Crane, Melissa Shook, and Carol Taback" at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (January 27 - July 7, 2024). In spring/summer, Shook's first museum solo exhibition "To Prove That I Exist": Melissa Shook's Daily Self-Portraits, 1972-1973" will take place at Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (March 9 - August 4, 2024).

Recently, Shook's daily self-portrait series in the 1970s was published by TBW Books with a concluding essay by Sally Stein, and the article on the series by Lucy McKeon will appear in the Winter 2023 issue of the Aperture Magazine.

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