

Melissa Shook: *Early Self-Portraits 1972-1973*

September 8 — October 15, 2022

MIYAKO YOSHINAGA is pleased to announce our representation of the estate of **Melissa Shook**, an American photographer, artist, writer, and educator who passed away in 2020 at age 79. From **September 8 to October 15, 2022**, the gallery will feature a solo exhibition by Shook, presenting compelling black-and-white self-portraits she created in the early 1970s. The exhibition will be accompanied by an online catalog with an introduction by Kristina Shook, the artist’s daughter and the subject of her *Krissy* series. **The opening reception** will be held on **Thursday, September 8, 6-8 PM**. Concurrent with this exhibition, **University of Massachusetts Boston**, where Shook taught photography for 31 years, will hold a retrospective of her work in various mediums **“Melissa Shook: Inside and Out”** including photographs, drawings, artist books, and sculpture. (September 6 – October 29, 2022).

“Photographs are memory, a way of tricking fate..., talismans against loss, a bargain with death,” wrote Shook in her essay for *Camera Arts* in 1981. This exhibition examines her early photographs haunted by the unreliability of memory. Having lost her mother at 12 and only retaining vague memories of her childhood, Shook began photographing her biracial daughter when she was one year old. As she struggled with her own fragmented identity as a single mother, Shook, at age 33, embarked on the daily self-portrait project in December 1972.

The *Daily Self-Portraits 1972-1973* series is a pioneering project exploring intimate female identity in photography. Shook captured herself in a simple setting in her downtown New York loft against an empty wall space. Over the next 8 months, Shook developed a personal landscape, taking control of her attractive body while feeling shy, playful, melancholic, tired, or intimidated. With potted avocado plants often by her side, Shook posed wearing worn-out jeans, a wrinkled chintz robe, bath towels, etc.

Featuring 25 images, the exhibition highlights Shook’s critical series in several segments: a transition from everyday scenes in December to posed portraits in January and February; torso close-ups capturing the beauty of feminine features in March; face portraits with eloquent hand gestures from March to April; dance-like movements of her naked body with childlike playfulness in May. In addition, the exhibition features 6 reclining nudes (circa 1973) which Shook appeared to have worked on in parallel to her daily photographs.

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After she stopped photographing herself, Shook moved her focus to her daughter as a continuation of the same theme and went on until the daughter turned 18. However, later in her life, she revisited daily self-portraits several times, notably in 1992/93, 2002/03, 2008/09, and 2014/15, in which Shook's deep-rooted obsession with memory became increasingly entangled with the issue of aging.

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. Best known for photographing herself and her daughter, Shook also wrote and photo/video documented marginalized members of her community in Boston. Her photographs have been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including "Pictures by Women: A History of Modern Photography" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 2010, "Reality Revisited: Photography from Moderna Museet Collection" at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden in 2009, and "Photography in Boston: 1955-1985" at DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts. Her work is in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Center for Creative Photography, Moderna Museet (Stockholm) among others.

In honor of her Legacy, University of Massachusetts established **The Melissa Shook Documentary Photography Award** for students who demonstrate exceptional skill or promise in photography, especially documentary photography.

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