

# The Child Dreams

## Photography Exhibition

**Mother:** Let time stop now, at the height of happiness, for nothing better is to come; Let us three become a still life:

'Parents looking at the child who dreams.'"

From "The Child Dreams – A Play in Four Parts" by Hanoch Levin, 1991

In Hanoch Levin's play, the mother expresses a longing to arrest time and hold on to the perfect moment. But this longing also conceals fear, the knowledge that a still life is death and that life itself exists only in motion. The contrast between the desire to preserve the moment and the need to let it go is the paradox at the heart of the exhibition.

"The Child Dreams" features works by women photographers whose art addresses their dual identity as both mothers and artists. Their photographs of their children offer a maternal perspective, while constituting a charged artistic act: photography is inherently a tool for observing growth and change; in the hands of these artists, it becomes a tool for sensing and researching, seeking to hold onto the maternal space and make it present in the artistic discourse.

The bodies of work on display were created using various photographic practices. In some of them, the boundaries between the biographical and the fictional, the personal and the symbolic, are deliberately blurred. In others, the distinction between the time of creation and everyday life is undermined. As in a psychoanalytic process, photography freezes a moment and gives it substance. The ability to discern the subtleties of facial expressions and body language, which is an integral part of the maternal experience, is condensed here into a fraction of a second and transformed into a charged image that stands exposed before the viewer and before the broader visual history from which it has evolved.

Photographing children in their sleep or in the familial, domestic sphere echoes two seminal photographic traditions: the first is post-mortem photography, which emerged in the early days of the medium, presenting the "last sleep" as a state of peaceful rest in a final gesture of love. The second tradition is family photography, which documented family highlights and became one of the most popular photographic genres. The former genre attempts to overcome death, while the latter seeks to immortalize life and hope and endow them with emotional and symbolic value. Despite the contrast between them, both express a common urge: the desire to stop time and leave a trace where both body and the moment perish. Both thus embody a universal human angst about the transience of existence.

While classic family photography tended to hide tensions, pain, and secrets, the artists in this exhibition choose to reveal the cracks. They allow ambivalence, doubt, and vulnerability to

penetrate the frame. The photographed children are not presented merely as objects, but are active partners in forming the weave of photographic relationships, in combining intimacy with distance, play and gentleness. In the hands of these photographers, the camera serves as a transitional object, a tool mediating between the inner world of the mother-artist and the world of the child. The result is the formation of a new space that is neither the child nor the mother, but the space between them. The photographers move between motherhood as an existential condition and photography as a practice of documentation, interpretation, and critique, offering an alternative to the perfect album: a complex and sincere human document.

The dramatic sequence of events that has transpired in recent years has intensified the collective sense of physical-existential anxiety, adding to the inherent anxiety of parenthood. This anxiety raises profound cultural questions in a society where motherhood is often perceived as a social and political project rather than a private, personal experience. Throughout history, many women artists have been required to repress or reject their maternal identity in order to gain legitimacy as creators. In this exhibition, motherhood is not an obstacle but rather a creative force, offering raw material, a source of inspiration, and a space for exploration.

The exhibition **The Child Dreams** invites viewers to enter this space and observe the interweaving of love and anxiety, memory and loss, body and image, reflecting on it and observing it up close. The photographed moment is an emotional space – one marked by the symbiosis between parenthood and creation, a sphere where motherhood ceases to be an observed object and becomes the experience of a creative subject, articulating itself and its world through the camera lens.

**Participants:** Sofie Berzon MacKie, Zoe Grindea, Avigail Horowitz, Naomi Leshem, Anat Ofri, Angelica Sher, Tamar Shalit-Avni.

**Curators:** Nava Romano-Danon and Celine Izbornitsky

### **Naomi Lashem, born in Jerusalem, Israel**

In the series "**Sleeping**", Leshem presents portraits of adolescents in their sleep. While in the subjects' rooms, she captures a moment in which the physiological state and consciousness shift to a different phase. The photography, revealed by a flash, exposes a fragile condition. This act confronts the viewer with the tension between an innocent maternal gaze and the intrusion and exposure of light. The portraits, defenseless and unmasked, appear pure. Leshem's photographs grapple with the dissonance between teenage vigor and the palpable anxiety that shut eyes invoke in the viewer. In her work "**Trust Me**", Leshem creates crumpled and folded alterations of printed photographs. In the image of her daughter walking up the military cemetery on Mount Herzl, the photographer orbits the figure. The folds deliberately conceal parts of the image from the viewer's eye.

Leshem opts for concrete sites of transformation, loss, and disappearance, of what is hidden and what is revealed, set against the eternity of the frozen moment.

### **Tamar Shalit-Avni, born in Pardes Hanna, Israel**

The exhibition features photographs from the series "**Two Women**". It is the first series in The Great Circle project, which began shortly after the birth of the artist's youngest daughter, a moment that prompted a reexamination of her changed role as a mother after raising two sons. In this series, Shalit-Avni places pairs of mothers and daughters in a studio, detached and neutralized from everyday life. The subjects are aware of the camera's presence yet attempt to behave naturally. They choose their own poses, but the artistic setting exposes a gap in which authentic physical and emotional presence meets the camera. Body language, gestures, and expressions become a collection of situations that allows the photographer to examine, through a kind of future mirror, the relationship between a mother and her daughter.

The "**Great Circle**" encompasses six pairs of mothers and daughters from the year 2000, the daughters' bat mitzvah year, into the present, and will continue into the future. In each decade, Shalit-Avni opens an additional aperture through which the relationship is illuminated, along with the ways culture both shapes and is reflected in it. Each decade forms a distinct series.

The video "**Spring Ritual**" (National Asset) is drawn from a series of photographs and a short story documented over five years at the Reception and Classification Base (Bakum) at Tel Hashomer. It begins on the day of the eldest son's enlistment and concludes with the final photograph, taken in the year the youngest daughter is

drafted. During their time at Bakum, the family undergoes a transformation in which the children leave the domestic, private sphere and become a national asset<sup>1</sup>. The separation of the recruits from their families and friends is portrayed in the video as a ritualistic ceremony, part Jewish and part pagan, in which many families in Israel take part.

Shalit-Avni's photographic practice emerges from personal and familial events and develops into an ongoing, multilayered visual investigation. It is a journey that allows her to look inward and outward simultaneously, at herself, at those she photographs, and at the culture in which these relationships exist.

### **Abigail Horowitz, born in Jerusalem, Israel**

Horowitz photographs her final moments of quiet before her children awaken. She moves through the bedrooms, immortalizing the light as it slowly seeps into the house. The silence and the stillness of the child's body grant her a moment of her own, a brief interval in which she can be a photographer, just before she is summoned again to the role of mother. A moment in which she can observe, preserve, protect, and arrest time.

The children are exposed. They are devoid of awareness, perhaps asleep, composed like still-life photographs through the body of a child. Scenes unfold between dream and reality. Touches of light resemble brushstrokes, rich in sensuous textures, that generate a sense of estrangement within the everyday space are accompanied by feelings of unease and fear. Horowitz hovers above them, or they above her, capturing faces floating in an indeterminate space, at times revealed by light and at times swallowed by darkness.

### **Zoé Grindea, born in Paris, France**

Grindea co-photographs with her children as sleeping angels and primordial, wild creatures. The staged scenes are part of a shared experience in which the children play an active role. They learn how to build sets, dress up as creatures, and transform life itself into a playground of illusion and imagination.

The photographs, marked by a dreamy and ritualistic appearance, were inspired by the children and by Grindea's own childhood memories, shaped by the aesthetics of the Catholic Church. Together with her children, she weaves a space of fantasy. In her photography, their summer holiday games shift from an act of play into a confrontation with reality, a dreamtime in which photography not only captures a frozen moment but also becomes an additional, interpretive layer that enables the processing of their shared world.

### **Angelika Scherr, born in Lithuania, former U.S.S.R.**

Scherr observes her children as they are born and later grow into a troubled world from which one must seek release. Through staged photography, she processes questions of motherhood, family, and identity, exposing concern and anxiety wrapped in a heavy envelope of beauty and seduction.

Scherr draws upon classical art, church paintings, and images of the crucified Christ and the birth of the sacrificial victim, imagery that formed part of her childhood landscape. These references appear in her photographs of children whose presence feels mature beyond their years, rendered in dense, somber colors. Within these images, she constructs suffocating, oppressive situations that grapple with past and present through conflicting messages of allure and sorrow, emphasizing the drama of life and death.

Scherr's gaze examines the nation's cultural, social, religious, and historical values into which her children are being raised, set against her family's culture of origin. Her photographs of children and family convey unease. She observes the pains of growth and maturation in her children while simultaneously attempting to preserve and let go.

<sup>1</sup> \* "National asset" is a code designation that requires immediate reporting from any location.

### Anat Ofri, born in Jaffa, Israel

In her work, Ofri captures moments of reality and shapes a space in which photography and memory are intertwined. The process is ignited by interpretation, association, and an invitation to the viewer to engage with the image while embarking on a visual journey through the photographer's eye.

With a delicate yet precise gaze, she leads the viewer into the landscapes of their own childhood. The subjects emerge from darkness or are absorbed back into it. Children appear confined within physical spaces or within meticulously constructed frames. Ofri seeks magic within everyday reality, and the photographic moment becomes akin to sculpting in time, a pause, a deep breath, and a turning toward emotion, compassion, and love.

### Sophie Barzon MacKie, born in Israel, lives in Kibbutz Be'eri

Barzon is engaged in a search for truth through fiction. She constructs complex images rooted in children's stories and fantasies, in which falsehood and imagination become tools for revealing truth.

The collages were born from isolation. The imagery is composed of dozens of different sources. The girl functions as a symbolic portrait of an ongoing female lineage. The radiant light emanating from her face is a collage of cosmic photographs taken from the James Webb Space Telescope, depicting events of birth and disintegration of stars and galaxies. The forest, plants, and animals are the result of both external and internal research, including magical beings and images of primal forces that accompany the figure's inner journey.

Barzon reveals a symbiotic bond between mother and daughter. The mother does not perceive the child as a separate entity, but as a biological, emotional, and symbolic continuation of herself. The boundary between mother and child dissolves, and the image becomes a space of overlapping identity, love, and revelation, where the private merges with the collective.