

# CLOSE TO HOME

## PHOTOGRAPHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

In the 1980s, Larry Sultan and Tina Barney reinvigorated the genre of portraiture by turning their lenses on their own families to document their personal histories. *Close to Home* presents photographs made during the past three decades by both established and emerging artists. While these images speak of events and emotions we easily recognize, they also reveal intimate moments these artists have elected to share with us, offering a view into the private world most choose to reserve behind closed doors. Having a parent, spouse, or sibling who is a photographer means living with the constant presence of the camera. The unstudied familiarity of these photographs belies a more elaborate process behind the lens, their subjects accustomed to an observer who is also an inseparable part of their daily lives.

The Bernie Stadiem Endowment Fund provided support for the exhibition.

## **Marina's Room**

1987

chromogenic development print

## **Tina Barney**

born New York City 1945

Although this image has a snapshot-like feel—as if we too were sitting on the bed—Tina Barney works with a large-format view camera. One of the first photographers to make oversize prints, the near life-size scale of her images adds to their sense of immediacy, and the rich colors and busy interior draw us further into the scene. Barney documents the social and economic elite as an insider, capturing a world that is out of reach of most Americans, yet her photographs portray the intimate gestures and relationships common to every family.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase, 1989.5

# **Christina and Gram on Thanksgiving, New Hampshire**

2004

chromogenic development print

## **Virginia Beahan**

born Philadelphia, PA 1946

When her eighty-nine-year-old mother was stricken with dementia and no longer able to care for herself, Virginia Beahan and her husband moved her into their home. A landscape photographer accustomed to traveling extensively, at first Beahan found her prospects constrained by these circumstances, but she quickly discovered a new subject for her lens. Beahan documented the last years of her mother's life with compassion as well as a clear-eyed accounting of the difficulties that came with the reversal of their roles.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Haluk and Elisa Soykan, 2010.6.1

# First Day of Spring, New Hampshire 2005

chromogenic development print

## Virginia Beahan

born Philadelphia, PA 1946

The act of making photographs opened a new kind of dialogue between Virginia Beahan and her mother:

My mother responded to being photographed—she liked the attention. A natural flirt, that side of her nature came out in the pictures—like a teenager preening for a date. There was something about the self she became in front of the camera that revealed more than a failing old woman, and the act of photographing became a special transaction between us. I felt an unexpected appreciation for the intimacy of the exchange. We had made a kind of peace.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Haluk and Elisa Soykan, 2010.6.3

# Untitled

1999

inkjet print

## Christopher Dawson

born New York City 1972

Christopher Dawson's photographs of his relatives and extended family appear to capture distinct moments, but they are in fact constructed from multiple exposures taken in sequence and assembled to form narrative panoramas of interlocking gestures and expressions. The earliest image in this series, *Livingston, Montana* (1995), was created by mounting three individual prints side by side. Recently, Dawson has begun to make digital scans of multiple negatives to create single, unbroken images. In the print at left, the same figure appears repeatedly throughout the scene, a clever hint about his process.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, TL 45.2010.4

## **Todos los santos II (Recuerdos)/ All the Saints II (Memories)**

1992–93

From the series Santos y sombras  
(Saints and Shadows)

gelatin silver print

### **Muriel Hasbun**

born San Salvador, El Salvador 1961

Muriel Hasbun was born and raised in El Salvador; her Paris-born mother came from a Polish-Jewish family, and her father from a Palestinian Christian family that settled in El Salvador in the early twentieth century. Against this complex backdrop, her photographs remind us of the rich histories that families weave. Her series Santos y sombras (Saints and Shadows) addresses issues of personal identity and her national, ethnic, and religious heritage, buried beneath generations of assimilation and emigration. Drawing on “found objects” and mementos of her parents and grandparents, Hasbun’s multi-layered images are a reflection of her complicated and turbulent background.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of  
Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Moore, 2005.3.1

# Heirs Come to Pass, 3

1991

Cibachrome print

## Martina Lopez

born Seattle, WA 1952

Most families assemble photo albums—scrap-books brimming with the faces of relatives dimly remembered, photographs of our parents looking younger than we ever knew them, or images of ourselves as children—that create a loosely assembled history. Rather than drawing on her own family's past, however, Martina Lopez has collaged images of anonymous figures found in second-hand stores in digitally created tableaux that are at once familiar and haunting. Charged with implied narratives that we can never completely understand, her images resonate with our own experiences to remind us of the complicated patterns of our lives.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the Consolidated Natural Gas Company Foundation, 1998.85

# **Easter Dress**

2007

inkjet print

## **Margaret Strickland**

born Valdosta, GA 1986

Margaret Strickland watched closely as her younger sister, Caroline, navigated adolescence in their close-knit Southern family. Her photographs portray a young woman struggling with family expectations and pressure from peers, as well as the often overwhelming emphasis on beauty and success found in our society. Though they appear to capture candid, everyday moments, Strickland's photographs are carefully orchestrated, balancing her sister's gestures and surroundings against the projection of an idealized world.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase made possible by David S. Purvis, 2010.13.1

## **Dad on the Bed**

1984

From the series Pictures from Home  
chromogenic development print

### **Larry Sultan**

born New York City 1946—

died Greenbrae, CA 2009

Larry Sultan returned to his parents' home as an adult, camera in hand, to explore his past. Compiling “found” photographs—snapshots and portraits his parents collected in scrapbooks or frames printed from old home movies—with his own images, he has created a narrative of their life in the post-war California suburbs. This portrait of his father is simultaneously affectionate and awkward. It shows the respect of a son for his father, as well as his father's frustration; a corporate executive with Schick who was forced into early retirement, he now finds himself quite literally all dressed up with nowhere to go.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, 2010.17.1

## **Rikki Red, Carrie Blue**

2007

chromogenic development print

## **Carrie Will**

born Suffern, NY 1979

Carrie Will's photographs are double portraits that explore the life she shares with her identical twin. Their complex relationship both heightens and effaces her sense of self; her images often give the impression of looking into a mirror.

The relationship I have with my twin sister is tightly woven, beautifully strange and difficult to explain. . . . Having been subjected to stares and double takes my whole life, I use photography to exaggerate the gaze of others. It is difficult to see yourself as an individual when no one else does.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist,  
2009.23

Top row, left to right:

**September 22, 1993**

**January 6, 1994**

**October 7, 1994**

**April 13, 1995**

**April 13, 1996**

Bottom row, left to right:

**May 31, 1996**

**June 6, 1996**

**August 17, 1996**

**May 6, 1997**

**April 11, 1998**

ten gelatin silver prints from the series,  
Mother and Daughter: Posing as Ourselves

## **Elaine O'Neil**

born Meriden, CT 1946

Over a period of five years Elaine O'Neil and her daughter Julia Hess met each day in the living room to pose for a portrait. The images that resulted from their project—over 1,500 exposures in all—document Julia's transition from a child of ten under her mother's protective arm to an independent young woman. They also uncover the complexity of feelings shared by parents and children, laying bare the emotions—affection, anger, frustration, indifference, exasperation, amusement—Julia and her mother felt as they paused for a brief moment while waiting for the shutter to click.

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, 2010.47.1