

GROUP PORTRAIT

November 18, 2005-January 22, 2006

Opening reception: Thursday, November 17, 5:30-7pm
832 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215, prcboston.org

This photography exhibition highlights contemporary photographers working in **narrative and group portraiture**. Featured artists include **Julie Blackmon** (Springfield, MO), **Ben Gest** (Chicago, IL), **Jessica Todd Harper** (Wynnewood, PA), **Amy Montali** (Northampton, MA), and **Sage Sohier** (Brookline, MA).

The **Photographic Resource Center (PRC)** is pleased to present a group show that highlights emerging and mid-career photographers who engage and challenge the genre of narrative and group portraiture. As we approach the holidays, when family and friends gather, it seems apt to consider the group portrait—a genre that traverses the diverse fields of fine art, commercial, and vernacular photography as well as painting. Many of these photographers reference painting in their arrangement, lighting, scale, and method. Several of the compositions immediately evoke Dutch and Victorian paintings, and others realize these realities via digital technologies. As such, these tableaux hover somewhere between the pre-modern and the post-modern in their aesthetics and philosophy. Within their groupings, these artists—all of whom use their own family and friends in interiors—investigate ideas of the self and the group as well as the dynamics of relationships and situations, simultaneously real, created, or somewhere in-between. The photographers in *Group Portrait*, as Jessica Todd Harper so eloquently puts it, assume “a new place within an old tradition.”



Julie Blackmon, *Saturday*, 2005, pigment ink print, 22 x 22 inches, 1/25, Courtesy of the artist and photo-eye Gallery, Santa Fe, NM

Julie Blackmon (Springfield, MO)

Julie Blackmon is the oldest of nine children and the mother of three. Indeed, her arrangements swirl with the energy of a full-house and celebrate the mythical amid the chaos of everyday life. Many of the scenes are set in her own home with her family acting as models. Appearing at once both contemporary and timeless, her beautifully-lit subjects and surroundings establish an environment that verges on the fantastic, replete with diminishing Renaissance perspective and Vermeer-like checkered floors. Born in Springfield, MO, Blackmon pursued studies in art education and photography at Missouri State University. She has received several national awards for her work, including 1st place in Photospiva 2005 (Joplin, MO), commendation in the 2004 Santa Fe Center of Photography Project Competition (Santa Fe, NM), and a merit award from the Society of Contemporary Photography (Kansas City, MO). Her exhibitions include a solo show at Blue Sky Gallery (Portland, OR) and the Museum of Contemporary Photography (Chicago, IL) for their Midwest Photographer's Project as well as group shows at venues such as Photo LA and photo-eye Gallery (Santa Fe, NM).

Ben Gest (Chicago, IL)

Ben Gest portrays everyday domestic scenes which upon further inspection, appear to be slowly unfolding right before one's eyes. To create his arrangements, he captures between 10-30 frames of film that he then scans and composites in the computer. The resulting shifts in perspective focus and guide our attention, serving to flesh out the developing storylines, and call into question a single point of view. Each of the figures seems lost in their own world, concentrating mostly on his or her actions or thoughts. Gest was born in Caldwell, NJ, and earned a BA from Rutgers University. He received his MFA in 2002 from Columbia College (Chicago, IL), where he is currently an Adjunct Professor. Recent solo shows include *Ben Gest's Pictures* at Daiter Contemporary (Chicago, IL) and *12x12 New Artists – New Work* at The Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago, IL). He is included in several collections in Chicago, including The Museum of Contemporary Art, The Museum of Contemporary Photography, The Art Institute of Chicago, and the LaSalle Bank Collection. This past summer he participated in Light Work's (Syracuse, NY) artists-in-residence program. Gest is represented by Daiter Contemporary (Chicago, IL).



Ben Gest, *Chuck, Alice, and Dale*, 2003, printed 2004, pigmented ink jet print, 40 x 40 inches, Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Daiter Gallery, Chicago, IL

Jessica Todd Harper (Wynnewood, PA)

PRC, GROUP PORTRAIT, continued

Jessica Todd Harper's subjects include herself and her family and friends within the domestic sphere. She acknowledges a debt to painting—from Mary Cassatt to Andrew Wyeth—in her concentration on intimate moments as well as a fascination with natural light. Like Gest, her focus is on people's private worlds and moments. Originally from Albany, NY, Harper received a degree in art history from Bryn Mawr College (Bryn Mawr, PA) and her MFA in photography from the Rochester Institute of Technology (Rochester, NY). Currently, she is a visiting professor at Swarthmore College (Swarthmore, PA). In 2005, Harper was named one of *PDN magazine's* "30 Emerging Photographers to Watch" and awarded a Juror's Choice at the Santa Fe Center for Photography. Harper has exhibited at venues such as Blue Sky Gallery (Portland, OR) and the Silver Eye Center for Photography (Pittsburgh, PA). This past summer, her work was shown at the Paul Kopeikin Gallery (Los Angeles, CA) and in October will be featured in a solo show at Notre Dame University (South Bend, IN). She is represented by Cohen Amador (New York, NY).



Jessica Todd Harper, *Self-Portrait with Christopher, (Easter Dinner)*, 2001/2003, pigmented ink jet print, 32 x 40 inches, Courtesy of the artist and Cohen Amador Gallery, New York, NY

Amy Montali (Northampton, MA)

Amy Montali's enigmatic, large-format color works reveal traces of her background working in film, theater, and dance. She works regularly with small groups of friends and acquaintances that function essentially as a repertory company. In creating her scenes, Montali "paints" her compositions with large swaths of bold color and aims for narrative ambiguity. Born in Oakland, CA, Montali received a BA from Wesleyan University (Middletown, CT), with majors in both Film Studies and Theater, and her MFA in photography from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in 2004. She was one of the last fellows to go through the Photography Institute National Graduate Seminar at Columbia University (New York, NY). Her work was featured recently in a show at Boston's Clifford-Smith Gallery and awarded an honorable mention at an exhibition juried by Andy Grundberg. Montali teaches photography at Tufts University (Medford, MA), Greenfield Community College (Greenfield, MA), and will also be teaching at Hampshire College (Amherst, MA) this winter. She continues to work as a video editor and producer.



Amy Montali, *Martin, Palmer, and Nora*, 2004, C-print, 30 x 40 inches, Courtesy of the artist

Sage Sohier (Brookline, MA)

Sage Sohier's featured work is from her series "Mother," in which she addresses her mother, herself, and her sister aging. Once a model for Irving Penn and Richard Avedon, Sohier's mother was featured on the cover of *LIFE* magazine. In many of the scenes, Sohier appears awkwardly posed or fussed upon, a Pygmalion to their Henry Higgins. Born in Washington, D.C. and a graduate of Harvard College, Sohier has taught around the Boston area, most recently for 12 years at Harvard University (Cambridge, MA). She has been awarded many fellowships from organizations such as the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, and the Massachusetts Artist Foundation. Her work has been featured in numerous solo and group shows at venues as diverse as the DeCordova Museum of Art (Lincoln, MA) and the Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY). Her work is included in the collections of the Addison Gallery of American Art (Andover, MA), Princeton University Art Museum (Princeton, NJ), and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco, CA), among others. In addition, her work on assignment has appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *LIFE*, and other journals. She is represented by Bernard Toale Gallery (Boston, MA).



Sage Sohier, *Mum, Laine, and me trying on wigs, Washington, D.C.*, 2004, C-print, 30 x 40 inches, Courtesy of the artist and Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston, MA

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND PRESS IMAGES CONTACT:

Leslie Brown, Curator, PRC, 832 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215 (617) 975-0600, lkbrown@bu.edu

ABOUT THE PRC

Founded in 1976, the PRC is an independent non-profit organization located on the campus of Boston University. Consistently cited by the press as an important voice in photography, the PRC provides its members and the general public with thought-provoking exhibitions, distinctive education programs, wide-ranging resources, and unique special events. Emphasizing new ideas and trends in contemporary photography, the PRC's gallery hosts 5-6 exhibitions each year. Led by regional and national photography luminaries, regular education programs include lectures, workshops, and portfolio reviews. Resource highlights include a comprehensive website, a bi-monthly newsletter, *in the loupe*, and the 4000-volume Aaron Siskind library. It is supported by grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, numerous private foundations, and the ongoing generosity of its members. **Location and Hours:** The PRC is located at 832 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA, 02215. Public transportation: Green B Line, outbound, BU West T-stop. Hours are Tuesday through Friday 10 to 6pm, Thursdays from 10 to 8pm, Saturday and Sunday 12 to 5pm. Admission is \$3/general public, \$2/students and seniors, and free to all on Thursdays and on the last weekend of every month. The PRC is always free to members, Institutional Plus member schools, children under 18, BU students, faculty, and staff, and all school groups with appointments. For more information, call 617-975-0600 or visit www.prcboston.org. The PRC is accessible.