

New Hood Museum Exhibition Explores Photography's Connection to Belonging and Family

Visual Kinship looks at how photography shapes our sense of relationality to both people and places



Rania Matar, *Alae (with the mirror)*, Beirut, Lebanon, archival pigment print. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth: Purchased through the Edward, Julia, Victoria, and Christopher Hansen Fund for Photographic Acquisitions and the Olivia H. Parker and John O. Parker '58 Acquisition Fund; 2022.45.2. © Rania Matar

August 21, 2025—Hanover, NH—How does photography both shape and disrupt the notion of family? This is one of the questions confronted by the Hood Museum of Art's fall exhibition *Visual Kinship*, on view August 30 through November 29, 2025. It features lens-based works from the Hood Museum's collection, loans from Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, and a site-specific installation by artist Sim Chi Yin. Several of the works are newly acquired by the Hood and will be on view for the first time at the museum. Taken together, these artists seek to broaden our approach to how we recognize our relationships with others and when those become (or are rejected as) a type of kinship. The exhibition is co-curated by Alisa Swindell, associate curator of photography, Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth; Thy Phu, distinguished professor, Arts, Culture and Media,

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University of Toronto Scarborough; Kimberly Juanita Brown, associate professor, Department of English and Creative Writing, and director of the Institute for Black Intellectual and Cultural Life, Dartmouth; and lyko Day, Elizabeth C. Small Professor of English, Mount Holyoke College.

Visual Kinship draws upon three frameworks to explore the connections between photography and kinship: relationality to land, formations of family, and kinship of care. From its inception, photography has served numerous roles as a signifier of identity, especially regarding one's place within socially and governmentally determined systems, including state-sanctioned familial relationships. In the late 19th century, small personal cameras became available, which led to the creation and popularity of family photo albums as a means of visually acknowledging kinship. However, ties of blood and the nuclear family are not the only ways to understand kinship, and photography has long played a role in these other visual paradigms as well.

As co-curator and conceptual originator Thy Phu says, "*Visual Kinship* challenges us to see family not as a fixed structure but as something formed through connection, nurtured through care, and continually reimagined. From colonial archives to refugee dreams, the photographs in this exhibition reveal how images shape our sense of belonging, trace the ties that bind us, and open up new ways of being in relation."

Visual Kinship hopes to provide visitors with new ways to think about belonging and the various systems that support or refute feelings of connection. It also sheds light upon how perceptions of kinship are mediated through photography, especially by contemporary artists who use archives, government documents, and media tropes as their starting points. The images range from ideas about how we hold onto ties of kinship to critiques of the complex processes that legitimize familial connections to explorations of the acts of care that deepen friendships until they become families of choice.

In her *Family Portrait* series, for example, Nancy Rivera uses cross-stitch to recreate photographs of herself and her parents that have been used to legitimize their citizenship documents. Rivera chose this type of needlecraft, passed down across generations of women in her family, to recreate these photographs as a means of connecting herself to traditions that were in some ways lost to her through the immigration process. Other artists, like Zig Jackson, use humor to picture connections to a place or a land. In his self-portrait titled *China Basin District* (negative 1997, print 1997–98), Jackson plays into media

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images of Native Americans by wearing a headdress while posting signs that pronounce the reclamation of stolen Indigenous land.

All three exhibition frameworks come together in Sim Chi Yin's site-specific installation *The Suitcase Is a Little Bit Rotten*. The iteration of this project commissioned for *Visual Kinship* consists of ten contemporary versions of 19th-century amusements, magic lanterns, and a video work that is premiering in the exhibition. Sim has created interventions regarding the colonial photographs printed on magic lantern slides to speak to her family's multigenerational histories and the way colonialism, war, state violence, and immigration have impacted those relationships.

Related Programming

12 September, Friday, 5:00–6:30 pm

The Dr. Allen W. Root Contemporary Art

“Speaking of Kinship”

Join us for a panel discussion with three of the artists whose work is featured in the exhibition *Visual Kinship*: Nancy Rivera, Sim Chi Yin, and Kali Spitzer. Moderated by Associate Curator of Photography Alisa Swindell, the conversation will address photography's role in thinking about, understanding, and knowing kinship and its relation to their art practice. A reception will follow in Russo Atrium.

About the Hood Museum of Art

The Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, centers art and people in teaching and learning through inclusive and robust academic, cultural, and civic engagements with art and its histories. Dartmouth's art collections are among the oldest and largest of any college or university in the country, but it was not until 1985 that they were all housed under one roof and made available to faculty, students, and the public. For four decades, the Hood Museum has sought to advance learning, care, and connections through the reach and relevance of visual art and material culture as a nexus for the exchange of ideas.

In 2025, the Hood Museum of Art is commemorating its 40th anniversary with landmark exhibitions, loans, and innovative programs that support a visionary future for art at Dartmouth and the communities of the Upper Valley region of New Hampshire and Vermont.

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The 72,000 objects in the Hood Museum's collection represent the diverse artistic traditions of six continents, including, broadly, Native American, European and American, Asian, Indigenous Australian, African, and Melanesian art. The museum collects, preserves, and makes available for interpretation these works in the public trust and for the benefit of all.

About Dartmouth College

Dartmouth College educates the most promising students and prepares them for a lifetime of learning and of responsible leadership through a faculty dedicated to teaching and the creation of knowledge. The Dartmouth model is unique in higher education: the fusion of a renowned liberal arts college and robust research university where students and faculty partner to take on the world's great challenges. Since its founding in 1769, Dartmouth has provided an intimate and inspirational setting where talented faculty, students, and staff—diverse in background but united in purpose—contribute to the strength of an exciting academic community that cuts easily across disciplines.

Hood Museum of Art Media Contact

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