



By Judy Bolton-Fasman for JewishBoston

Through A Mother's Lens

Photographing her adult children, Becky Behar reaches across generations to stop time and share fleeting moments in new exhibit, "Interlaced."

TOP PICK JANUARY 30, 2023



Becky Behar, "Grounded," 2020, archival pigment print (Courtesy Becky Behar)

The photographer [Becky Behar](#) is a 2023 recipient of the [CJP Arts and Culture Community Impact Grant](#). The grant will support her newest project, "[Tu Que Bivas](#)," a blessing in Ladino: "May you live and grow and thrive like a small fish in fresh water." Behar, born in Bogotá, Colombia, received the blessing growing up, particularly when she was on the cusp of a significant life event. As she told an audience at the opening of her exhibit "[Interlaced](#)" at Kniznick Gallery at the Brandeis Women's Studies Research Center, the photographs speak to the relationships among generations of her family.

Full disclosure: Behar is my close friend. Our children went to school together. Those were years when our art loomed large in the background years as we focused on motherhood. We seemingly reinvented ourselves once we launched our children into the world, but that is not exactly true—it is more like we reclaimed our art.

Photography was a notable presence in Behar's early life. In high school, she spent hours in the darkroom. When she arrived at Wellesley College in 1987, she found a mentor in the photographer [Judith Black](#). Behar told her audience that Black's "most potent subject was close to home, recording her family of four children and partner. She photographed the

strangeness and marvelousness in the everyday. Black was part of a new wave of photographers arising in the 1980s whose work revealed how the domestic interior, the lives of children and the daily habits of the family are filled with meaning and arresting visual interest. I spent so much time mothering; my subject matter is always close at hand. Mothering and photography have always been 'interlaced.'"



Becky Behar, "Grace," 2018, archival pigment print (Courtesy Becky Behar)

As her children grew, Behar took tentative steps toward revisiting the art form she loved. She enrolled in a history of photography class at Wellesley to reacquaint herself with the subject. And then she took the plunge when she emailed a teacher about a beginning photography class at the [Griffin Museum of Photography](#) in Winchester, Massachusetts. At her talk, her teacher, [Emily Belz](#), read the 2015 email that relaunched her career in photography.

It said, in part: "I'm 46 years old, and I've spent the past 18 years dedicated to my children.

Before that, I was very interested in photography, had my own darkroom, and took several classes at Wellesley and RISD. ... Unfortunately, I've stopped taking pictures and would like to get back into it as a more mature me. Can you please tell me if my profile fits the type of students for the class?"

The answer was a resounding "yes." Behar began staging and photographing evocative still lifes in vibrant colors that amplified her resonant and visual commentaries on domesticity. In 2018, she began the first of the collaborative series with her children called "[Seeing You, Seeing Me.](#)" The focus was on her daughter, Leah, who was turning 21. Leah as model and collaborator is a serene presence in Behar's photographs.



Becky Behar, "Insight," 2018, archival pigment print (Courtesy Becky Behar)

Additionally, Behar evoked the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer in "[Seeing You, Seeing Me.](#)" Rather than a paean to Vermeer, she captured an active and powerful partnership with his

work. She took Vermeer's use of light, his scenes of domestic life and use of female models and made them wholly her own. For the series, Leah wears Behar's clothing to symbolize the objects and spirit of what is "passed from one generation to the next."

In 2020, Behar began photographing "[Homespun: The Lives We Stitch Together](#)." Her three young adult children returned home during the pandemic. She posed them in a group and as individuals for various photographs. She also documented her two sons and daughter knitting and crocheting through the pandemic. "I used those art forms as a metaphor to show the construct of our lives together," Behar noted.



Becky Behar, "Fringes," 2020, archival pigment print (Courtesy Becky Behar)

Behar captures the culmination of family coming together in a group photo of her children seated on the floor called "Grounded." They glow in white against a dark background, evoking the three Fates of Greek mythology. In "Fringes," a striking image of her older son, shirtless, turned away from the camera and resting on a pile of blankets, one with bright-color fringes, emphasizes his scarred back. The photograph is intimate, personal and, for Behar, represents healing. Behar experimented with scale as she enlarged "Fringes" for the show. "The size [of an image] can alter the intimacy of a photograph and the choice of frame can change the story," she said.

"Home Shelves" is an ongoing collection of still lifes Behar created starting in 2019. Her goal was "to use light, texture, color and emotion to talk about different things in the home." As she did in "Fringes," Behar again played with scale in the signature photograph for "Interlaced" called "Kitchen Shelf." She noted that a smaller version of the photograph hangs in her home between the dining room and kitchen. "There's a conversation that goes on when you hand-hold a project; it becomes more intimate," she said. "I like playing with those ideas."

For the last part of her talk, Behar showed photographs from her "Tu Que Bivas" series, which is still in progress and not on view in this exhibit. In these images, Leah and Behar's mother, Matilde, wear the same blue dress. Matilde sits for a portrait in which she blocks her face with a sepia photograph of her mother. In another portrait, Leah has her back to the camera and models an old-fashioned key that may have once opened the heavy wooden door of a Jewish home in medieval Spain.



Becky Behar, "Kitchen Shelf," 2019, archival pigment print (Courtesy Becky Behar)

Keys are emblematic of the Sephardic experience. I grew up hearing stories of people carrying keys through multiple exiles, claiming they opened the doors to the homes they hoped to return to in Spain. Ladino itself became a portable language that Sephardim carried with them for centuries. The language absorbed the vocabulary of the various countries to which Jews escaping the Inquisition fled—countries such as Turkey, the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe.

Behar has also started a side project designing and hand-binding books. She intends to continue telling more stories that "adorn walls" and perhaps fill the pages of her handmade books. In the meantime, she continues growing as an artist. "With each new project, I gain a new perspective on my life," she said. "In my 'Interlaced' world, I use symbolism throughout and discuss the fragility of life through broken objects and vulnerable moments. There is decay. There is healing. With my camera, I stop time with intent to share special, fleeting



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Becky Behar's "Interlaced" will be on display through Feb. 22. Behar will be leading a guided tour of the exhibit on Wednesday, Feb. 8, at noon (register [here](#)). She is also available for individual tours. [Kniznick Gallery](#) is open Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.



Becky Behar, "Tu Que Bivas Portfolio," 2022, archival pigment print (Courtesy Becky Behar)