

PRESS RELEASE

ARTIST

Gemma Pepper

The Thread of the Story

There is, in Gemma Pepper's work, something that resembles an archaeology of the intimate. Not a brutal excavation, nor a scholarly one, but a patient, almost painstaking exhumation of what photographs conceal: silence, suspended time, lives just waiting to speak again. Her defining gesture is that of a seamstress as much as a researcher: with thread, pins, hooks, and buttons, sewn by hand, traced with an almost obsessive insistence, she connects, sutures, and traverses. Here, the thread is a total metaphor. The thread of life, the thread of the family narrative, a thread stretched between two generations, between a forgotten face and a contemporary gaze seeking to recognize it.

What strikes one immediately in Pepper's work is the precision of her gaze on the mundane. She treats the postcard, the conventional pose, and the studio portrait as if they were anthropological documents. A photograph dated 1903, showing two young women dressed identically, in a Basel studio, had lain dormant for nearly sixty years in an immaculately preserved album, barely ever leafed through.

In Pepper's hands, this silent image becomes the starting point for a broader inquiry: what does a photograph say that words leave unsaid? What effect does it have on those who view it decades later?

Her work unfolds across several simultaneous levels of interpretation. First, on a formal level: the composition blends the physical and the digital, the raw and the polished, in a balance where technical mastery is never ostentatious but always perceptible. Conceptually, next: Pepper explores the profound implications of family dynamics on the human condition, on couples, on childhood grief, and on gender relations etched into poses and clothing. She probes the photographic unconscious—what Roland Barthes called the punctum, that detail that wounds, that catches the eye, that won't let go. Finally, on a sociological level, her entire body of work constitutes an X-ray of our societies through the prism of their most intimate representations: the family album as a political document, the bourgeois portrait as a revealer of power dynamics, nostalgia as a cultural construct. Brief Bio Gemma Pepper was born in 1979 in the United Kingdom.

She studied photography at Llandrillo College in Rhos-on-Sea (North Wales, Great Britain) and at the University of Derby (England), from which she graduated with a degree in fine arts photography (2013).

In 2021, she earned a Master of Arts (ZFH) in Art Education, with a specialization in curatorial studies, from the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).