

Press Release – for immediate use

## **New exhibitions at Belfast Exposed to explore “a women’s place” through the lens of photography**

**Ground-breaking works by feminist phototherapist Jo Spence and British-Asian artist Arpita Shah use photography to challenge ideas on female roles and identity.**

**Jo Spence: A Woman’s Place? | Arpita Shah: Modern Muse  
In Collaboration with the Centre for British Photography  
Dates: 17<sup>th</sup> October 2024 – 21<sup>st</sup> December 2024  
Venue: Belfast Exposed**

Belfast Exposed, in collaboration with the Centre for British Photography, will unveil two shows this month featuring artists Jo Spence and Arpita Shah.

*“Jo Spence: A Woman’s Place?”*, an exhibition spotlighting the ground-breaking phototherapy work of the celebrated British photographer and feminist Jo Spence (1934–1992), provides an intimate and powerful look at Spence’s exploration of the roles and experiences of women within society.

Jo Spence was not just a photographer but a cultural critic and activist who used her medium as a tool for emotional and political self-exploration. A central aspect of this exhibition focuses on Spence’s practice of phototherapy, developed primarily with collaborator Rosy Martin. Spence’s phototherapeutic sessions combined photography with therapeutic practices, allowing her to confront the deeply personal and often painful aspects of her life in a social context that sought to marginalise and silence women’s experiences. The exhibition shines a light on Spence’s engagement with the complexities of womanhood, class, sexuality, and health, addressing themes often left unspoken.

Spence's work in *“A Woman’s Place?”* showcases her lifelong exploration of the idea that the personal is political. It gives viewers a rare opportunity to engage with her deeply introspective yet socially critical perspectives. Her ability to draw attention to private moments - such as grappling with the shame of illness, body image, motherhood and sexuality - resonates profoundly today as we continue to question the roles women are expected to play in both the private and public spheres.

*“Modern Muse”* by acclaimed photographic artist Arpita Shah is a compelling exhibition that Belfast Exposed is delighted to bring to Ireland for the first time in collaboration with the Centre for British Photography. Originally commissioned by GRAIN projects, this ongoing series of portraits explores the evolving identities and visual representation of young British-Asian women. At the heart of *“Modern Muse”* is Shah’s desire to address and challenge notions of the ‘muse’ in art. By replacing the Mughal emperors of classical South Asian painting with modern British-Asian women, Shah subverts those historical representations and celebrates the strength, diversity, and individuality of each woman depicted in her series.

**Deirdre Robb, CEO of Belfast Exposed, said:**

**“At a time when femicide and racism dominate our headlines, we want to use our gallery to showcase this powerful work, which highlights the inequalities in our**

society. Jo Spence used photography as a form of therapy, a practice that we also use within Belfast Exposed to help communities with their mental health. Her messages about women's roles have never been more important. Arpita Shah's 'Modern Muse' looks at British-Asian identity and, in light of the recent racially motivated attacks across Northern Ireland, we think this show has a vital message to convey. We want visitors to Belfast Exposed to take time to reflect on ideas and preconceptions they have around 'A Woman's Place?' in society."

**James Hyman, Founding Director, Centre for British Photography, said:**  
"We are delighted to have collaborated with Belfast Exposed to bring these two important exhibitions to Belfast. These complimentary exhibitions bring to attention significant personal and political issues and are part of our mission to support the most powerful and challenging photographers past and present."

**José Neves, Curator of Photography, Belfast Exposed, said:**  
"Curating these two exhibitions has been an enriching journey, allowing me to explore the intersections of identity, memory, and healing through the perspective of two distinct yet very powerful artistic voices. At the core of Spence and Shah's work is the capacity for photography to be a transformative tool for self-exploration and cultural reflection. I am certain that the personal and collective histories on display will resonate with audiences in a profound way."

#### **About Belfast Exposed Gallery**

Belfast Exposed is a leading photography gallery in Northern Ireland, dedicated to showcasing contemporary photography and supporting photographers through exhibitions, educational programs, and community engagement.

#### **About the Centre for British Photography**

The Centre for British Photography (registered charity number 1190955) was founded by James Hyman in 2020 and seeks to support photographers working in Britain through exhibitions, events, grants and mentoring. The charity provides a platform for a range of voices in order to present an expansive overview of the diversity of photography, past and present.

**"A Woman's Place?" and "Modern Muse" will be on display in Belfast Exposed from Thursday, October 17, until Saturday, December 21.**

For more information, visit [www.belfastexposed.org](http://www.belfastexposed.org)

**For further information, interviews or features, please contact Lucy Dougan:**

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