



Still from Mom's Move, Susan Mogul (2018)

The artist **SUSAN MOGUL** has been working with the moving image since the early 1970s. Mogul was part of the Feminist Studio Workshop, a radical feminist art program in Southern California led by Judy Chicago. Mogul's diverse body of work addresses topics of female identity, sexuality, and feminism, often situated within her Jewish American experience. In projects such as *An Artist of a Certain Time* (1972), Mogul grapples with her career as an artist, feminist, daughter, and a Jew. Many of her film projects reflect on her relationship with her (Jewish) mother, historically a particularly deep well of both

humor and pathos for Jewish artists. Mogul explains that "in 2011, I interviewed several female artists and asked them to expound upon their mother's creative influence upon them. My intention was to make a film on the subject." Working on this project ultimately led Mogul back to her own mother, as she observed, "I didn't know it at the time, that these compelling interviews were preliminary research. And just a year later, I would embark upon a large-scale interdisciplinary project about my own mother's creative impact on my private and public life as an artist."



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Mom's Move, the film that Mogul completed in 2018, tells the personal story of assisting with her mother's move from the family home in 2012. Mogul describes her mom, Rhoda Blate Mogul, as a housewife and mother of six, and a lifelong, avid amateur photographer. Her creative drive—though confined to the home—had a major influence on Mogul's public life as an artist and filmmaker.

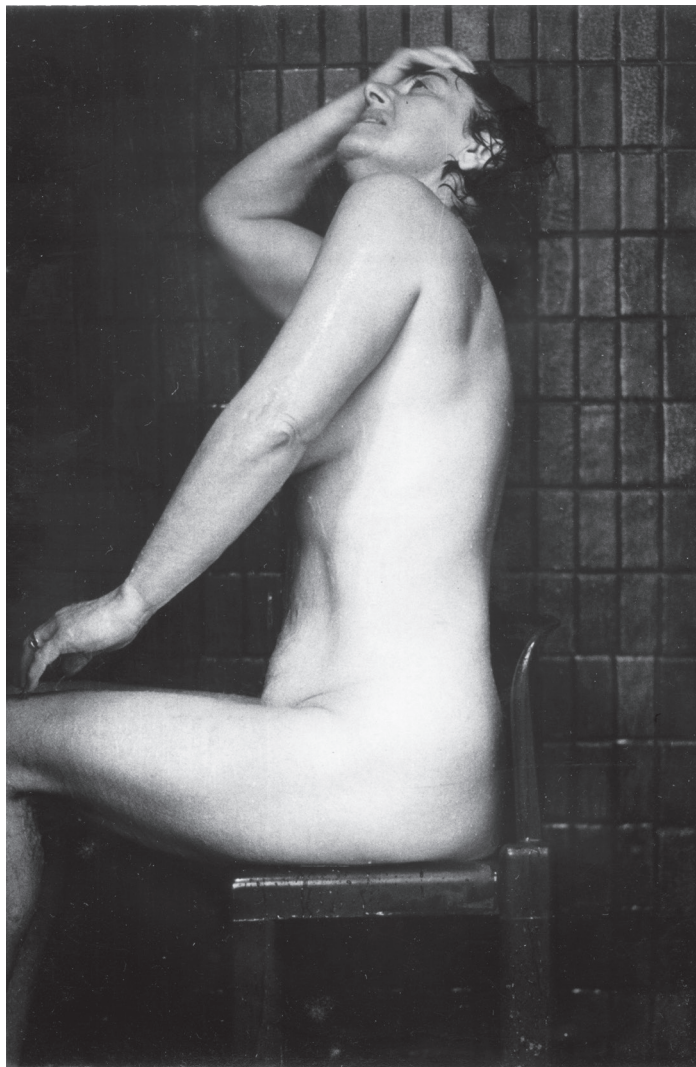
She says, "When Mom sold her house in 2012 at the age of 88, it was both a closure and a point of departure. Mom's loss of both home and memory was my loss as well.... Part bio, part memoir, *Mom's Move* portrays the relationship between two artists: an unconventional fifties housewife, and myself, her boomer feminist daughter."

In the course of the documentary-style film, Mogul tells the story of rediscovering her mother's inner creative life as they pack up her possessions. Through a series of personal self-portraits that her mother had made, Mogul discovers that she was not the only renegade in the family; her mother had her own method of self-expression, albeit often sacrificed to her role as mother and wife. In the film, the story of mother and daughter intertwines like the proverbial tree of life.

In a recent conversation with Mogul, she told me that while helping her mother move,

"I went through her entire photographic archive. I examined her proof sheets, negatives, and photographs. I saw photographs I had never seen and images on proof sheets Mom never enlarged. These 'new' photographs from the fifties and sixties enabled me to examine and ponder my childhood, my relationship to my mother, and the home I grew up in, from a slightly different vantage point."

As the keeper of her mother's legacy, Mogul's film tells a story that is at once familiar and yet enlightens us about inner life of her subject. Mogul witnesses her mother's aging through both the lens of a daughter and also the lens of a camera, a particular relationship that both subject and filmmaker acknowledge throughout the film. As her mom's health worsened over the course of the film, Mogul recalls, "Mom may have had dementia, but her visual acuity was perfectly intact. Over the course of the last few years Mom repeatedly said, 'You are my



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curator.' And that was all I needed to hear. I was unable to be the caretaker of my mother in the last years of her life. But, I did become the caretaker of her work."

Film (and the personal documentary genre in particular), allows for a posthumous understanding of the nuance of a subject's life. Such films have the capacity to elevate their subject to a space of dignity, illuminating larger truths about humanity in general. Thus, the film lives on as both a record of a life and also as a work of cinema, poetic, moving, and quietly illuminating.