# MOTHER WINTER Pastable Copy

## Bio

Sophia Shalmiyev emigrated from Leningrad to NYC in 1990. She is an MFA graduate of Portland State University with a second master's degree in creative arts therapy from the School of Visual Arts.

She lives in Portland with her two children. *Mother Winter* is her first book.

## Jacket Copy

Russian sentences begin backward, Sophia Shalmiyev tells us on the first page of her striking, lyrical memoir, Mother Winter. To understand the end of her story we must go back to her beginning.

Born to a Russian mother and an Azerbaijani father, Shalmiyev was raised in the stark oppressiveness of 1980s Leningrad (now St. Petersburg). An imbalance of power and the prevalence of antisemitism in her homeland led her father to steal Shalmiyev away, emigrating to America, abandoning her estranged mother, Elena. At age eleven, Shalmiyev found herself on a plane headed west, motherless and terrified of the new world unfolding before her.

Now a mother herself, in *Mother Winter* Shalmiyev recounts her emotional journeys as an immigrant, an artist, and a woman raised without her mother. Depicted in urgent vignettes that trace her flight from the Soviet Union and back again to find the mother she never knew, Shalmiyev’s story is an arresting, impassioned account that is equal parts refugee-coming-of-age tale, feminist manifesto, and a meditation on motherhood, displacement, gender politics, and art. Her years of travel, searching, and forging meaningful connection with the worlds she occupies culminates in a searing observation of the human heart and psyche's many shades across time and culture.

## Editor’s Note

Dear Reader:

Sophia Shalmiyev’s story transfixed me from the moment I started reading. Here was a woman on a mission—quite literally, to find the mother she was forced to abandon in Leningrad as an eleven-year-old girl, and to reunite with her in Mother Russia after years of searching and longing. Here was a woman looking, not only for the woman you see pictured on this book’s jacket, but for the essence of a near-stranger who had been woven so intimately into the fabric of Shalmiyev’s own life.

I soon realized that she was on another mission entirely—one that extended beyond geography or consequences. Here was a writer concerned with breaking narrative conventions, to find and forge a voice so fiery and unapologetically her own, to tell her story, of course, but also the story of many—Russians and Americans, women and artists, immigrants and citizens, misfits and bandits, and perhaps most potently, mothers and daughters.

Mother Winter upended my own expectations of what memoir is, and can be. I think this is what all good writing should do: take conventions and color them in a new shade so unfamiliar and enticing that you can’t help but see your world with new eyes.

Zack

## Blurbs

"Shalmiyev stubbornly, brilliantly pursues loss in this psychogeography of immigration, grief displacement, and damage. A mother herself, Shalmiyev's narrator channels the ghosts of Dorothy Richardson, Anais Nin, Frances Farmer, and the sad, bad stories of Aileen Wuornos and Amy Fisher, who could never be the right kind of girls. Like the great modernist writers, Shalmiyev writes from, not about trauma, but at a pitch that's witty, dry, sad, and laconic. 'I love America,' her narrator declares. 'It's broken, like me.'"

—Chris Kraus, author of *I Love Dick*

"The coldness of Russia, of the occult; the heat of punk rock, of motherhood. The psychic tear of emigration and motherlessness; a past gone into mystery. With sparse, poetic language, Shalmiyev builds a personal history that is fractured and raw; a brilliant, lovely ache."

—Michelle Tea, critically-acclaimed author of *Against Memoir*

"When she leaves her native Russia at age eleven, Sophia Shalmiyev is forced to abandon a mother she may never see again. Mother Winter is the wrenching story of her exile and grief, but it's also a chronicle of awakening—to art, sex, feminism, and the rich complexities of becoming a mother herself. Like a punk-rock Marguerite Duras, Shalmiyev has reinvented the language of longing. I love this gorgeous, gutting, unforgettable book."

—Leni Zumas, author of *Red Clocks*

"*Mother Winter* slices through the conventions of narrative with the most delicate blade, ribboning what you think you know about memoir, homecoming, what it means to live in a female body, to live as a motherless mother, to be mothered by art and the arms of all that is strong enough to hold you. This book hypnotized me with its beauty and brutality. I feasted on Shalmiyev's sentences, and they will stay with me for a long, long time.

—Melissa Febos, author of *Whip Smart* and *Abandon Me*

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