

San Francisco Chronicle

May 12, 2016

Sally Mann's notorious family photos on exhibit in S.F.

By Jessica Zack



Blowing Bubbles, 1987, from Sally Mann's *Immediate Family* series, gelatin silver enlargement print.

The exceptional intimacy of Sally Mann's "Immediate Family" photos has been famous, and famously controversial, ever since their publication in 1992. In Mann's uncommonly beautiful decadelong series, her three children — Emmett, Jessie and Virginia — are captured from toddlerhood through adolescence, at play and at rest. They're captured striking adventurous and languorous poses, often unclothed, on the family's sprawling property in the rural Virginia hills.

The work received critical scorn at the time of Mann's book release and was swept up in a mid-'90s furor over government funding of the arts. Two decades later, it is widely

lauded as one of the great, indelibly poetic photographic projects of our time.

In her acclaimed 2015 memoir "Hold Still," Mann wrote of the series: "Out of a conviction that my lens should remain open to the full scope of their childhood, and with the willing, creative participation of everyone involved, I photographed their triumphs, confusion, harmony and isolation, as well as the hardships that tend to befall children — bruises, vomit, bloody noses, wet beds — all of it."

What strikes viewers now is the "uncommon grace and ease of her children, looking both feral and beautiful, absolutely comfortable in nature and comfortable with one another," says gallerist Karen Jenkins-Johnson, who is exhibiting 28 photographs from Mann's series at Jenkins Johnson Gallery.

"People living in cities so often forget that we are from nature, and that family bonds and being in the wild are our most natural states, even if most of us don't live this way now," adds Jenkins-Johnson.



Emmett, Jessie and Virginia, 1994. From Sally Mann's *Immediate Family* series. Gelatin silver enlargement print.