



May 4, 2016

Jenkins Johnson Gallery opens first solo exhibition by renowned American photographer Sally Mann



Sally Mann, Emmett, Jessie and Virginia, 1994. From the Immediate Family series. Gelatin silver enlargement print. © Sally Mann.

SAN FRANCISCO, CA.- Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco announces its first solo exhibition by renowned American photographer Sally Mann. Emmett, Jessie, and Virginia features intimate black and white silver gelatin prints of the American South that highlight childhood and the growth of Mann's three children Emmett, Jessie, and Virginia from her acclaimed series Immediate Family (1992) and At 12: Portraits of Young Women (1988). The show runs from May 5 to July 9, 2016 with an opening reception on Thursday, May 5, 5:30 to 7:30. Running concurrently with Emmett, Jessie, and Virginia is Portraiture: A Group Photography Exhibition that features ethnically diverse and world-renowned artists, whose portraits reflect their personal and cultural identity, while also utilizing paint, props, pattern, and the lack thereof to emphasize their subject.

Photographed over a 10 year period, the series Immediate Family traces Mann's children, Emmett, Jessie, and Virginia, as they grow from childhood into adolescence. The series began in 1984 when Mann's daughter Jessie returned home with a gnatbitten, swollen face; the following day Mann photographed her reclining, her bright form wrapped in dark fabric, depicted in the image Jessie. Becoming a mother of three within the span of five years, Mann found inspiration and accessibility in using her children as her models, photographing them on the family's rural Virginia property, where Mann was also born and raised. "It's always been my philosophy to try to make art out of the everyday and ordinary... it never occurred to me to leave home to make art." Similar to many female artists throughout history, including Impressionist painter Berthe Morisot, who also utilized her daughter as a model, the compromise between domestic responsibility and creative practice often influences subject matter.

The photographs in Emmett, Jessie, and Virginia balance between the realm of reality and fantasy; Mann would occasionally plan the shoots in advance, but primarily she was struck by inspiration while watching her children play. She would ask them to "freeze," giving them direction and making small adjustments. The photographs would often take an hour or more to capture, but they still convey the impression of a snapshot. Emmett, Jessie, and Virginia were collaborators in these projects, making suggestions or rejecting photographs; Jessie referred to herself and her siblings as their mother's "artistic accomplices."

Heightening the feeling of fantasy within the photographs are the towering trees and dark water of the Deep South, which engulf the figures with a sense of ancient worldliness, creating a dialogue between life and death with the innocence of youth and the primordial memory of the wilderness. Intensifying the sense of unease, the often-nude, raucous, and feral appearance of the young Mann brood is exaggerated by their skin, glowing in high contrast to their backdrop. Mann's process further enhances the atmospheric quality of the works; photographing with a large format 8x10 camera and utilizing 19th century darkroom printing techniques, her images have the dreamy effects of vignettes and a shallow depth of field. She spent the majority of the year in the darkroom, only photographing in the summer when the children spent their days at home rather than at school.



Blowing Bubbles, 1987, From the Immediate Family series. Gelatin silver enlargement print.
©Sally Mann.

The photographs are extremely influential but have also sparked controversy. Mann did not expect an uprising over the images of her children nude, as it is a norm in their household and has been since Mann was a young girl. While some comment that the photographs are exploitative, Mann sees the images as purely artistic and motherly expressions. "These are not my children at all," she wrote in *Hold Still: A Memoir With Photographs*; "These are children in a photograph. They represent my children at a fraction of a second on one particular afternoon with infinite variables of light, expression, posture, muscle tension, mood, wind, and shade."

Also featured in the exhibition are photographs from Mann's second series of published works, entitled *At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women* (1988). The portraits are taken of local girls from the area around Mann's Virginia residence and capture the transitory period between girlhood and womanhood, often evoking a sense of emotional turmoil. In her introduction to the book, *At Twelve: Portraits of Young Women*, American novelist Ann Beattie writes, "These girls still exist in an innocent world in which a pose is only a pose—what adults make of that pose may be the issue." The photographs confront our ideas of where the invisible line is drawn between innocent girl and sexually conscious woman, creating individual narratives.

Sally Mann was born in Lexington, Virginia in 1951 and received her MA degree from Hollins College. Mann has won numerous awards, including three National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, as well as a Guggenheim fellowship. Time magazine named her "America's Best Photographer" in 2001. She has been the subject of two documentaries: *Blood Ties* (1994), which was nominated for an Academy Award, and *What Remains* (2007) which was nominated for an Emmy for Best Documentary in 2008. Her most recent book, *Hold Still: A Memoir in Pictures* (Little Brown, 2015) is a National Book Award Finalist and in 2016 won the Andrew Carnegie Medal of Excellence for Nonfiction. Sally Mann's photographs are in prominent permanent collections including: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Art, California; and The National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.