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Raoul Dufy, *Portrait de Frouzette Axilette*, 1906
Oil on canvas laid on panel, 14.6 by 10.8 in (37.1 x 27.4 cm)

Empty Nest: The Changing Face of Childhood in Art, 1880 to the Present

Curated by Lowell Pettit

Through February 2, 2008

Nathan A. Bernstein & Co. Ltd. is pleased to present “Empty Nest: The Changing Face of Childhood in Art, 1880 to the Present.” Curated by Lowell Pettit, the exhibition will be on view through Saturday, February 2, 2008.

Where have all the children gone? Considering how Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Minimalism all but eliminate the depiction of children, it’s an inescapable question. This lament is the origin of “Empty Nest: The Changing Face of Childhood in Art,” a survey of painting, sculpture, and photography that tracks the subject’s development from 1880 to the present.

Children are a staple of the canon – a central focus through the Academy, and a key interest to the Impressionists. At the hands of the Cubists, Dadaists, and Surrealists however, things become less hospitable for this sanctioned tradition, which largely disappears. Save for a few important painters and sculptors who continued to reference children, such as Balthus, Hans Bellmer, Joseph Cornell, Henry Darger, Alice Neel, and Pablo Picasso – and several photographers including Diane Arbus, Helen Levitt, Ralph Eugene Meatyard and Aaron Siskind – school’s out for an extended summer that lasts almost three quarters of the 20th Century. It’s a curious fate for a seminal genre of Western Art, an absence that on one hand belies the deep history of this celebrated subject, and on the other, starkly contrasts the diversity and ubiquity of children in today’s art.

The recent, dramatic revival of representations of children foregrounds a shift in our understanding of childhood, and by extension, how the subject functions differently over the past 130 years. Broadly defined, in the 19th Century, images of children help protect and promote the *status quo*; in the 21st, they personify tumultuous change. Children today are not only both seen and heard, they’re e-mailed and focus-grouped – and making up for lost time.

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Change and chance underscore most of the works from “Empty Nest,” and characterize the newfound currency of the subject. The transient and arbitrary aspects of youth itself prove the perfect metaphor for an uncertain time and unstable world.

Amid a climate of out-sourced parenting and the rancor about, among other current touchstones: evolution, abortion, stem-cell research, and same-sex marriage, today’s young are orphans of an epic conflict that social critic and historian Benjamin Barber calls *Jihad vs. McWorld*. In the last century, the role of children in the family, society, and marketplace is an unfolding, benign conversation. Now, globalism’s offspring confront a discourse, if crisis, where the very definitions of “child” and “family” are in-play. In the imagery of children, the aspirations, fears, and dangerous contradictions of our time are consequently revealed in the sharpest detail. As the “Baby-Boom” generation has come of age – and the “nuclear family” is up for grabs – one question lingers. At what age will children still be children?

"Empty Nest" retells this dynamic, young story, bringing the representations of children full-circle, connecting disparate international artists interpreting children across three centuries.

“Empty Nest” includes works by Amy Arbus, Thomas Allen, Morton Bartlett, George Bellows, Suzanne Caporaël, Mary Cassatt, Larry Clark, Joseph Cornell, Rineke Dijkstra, Raoul Dufy, Neil Farber, Adam Fuss, Ellen Graham, Katy Grannan, Jill Greenberg, George Grosz, Pieter Hugo, Alex Katz, Justine Kurland, Yuliya Lanina, Helen Levitt, Max Lieberman, Loretta Lux, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, Kim McCarty, Mr., Edvard Munch, Jules Pascin, Max Hermann Pechstein, Pablo Picasso, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Adolf von Menzel, John Waters, Robin Williams, and Zhang Xiaogang.

A color catalogue accompanies the exhibition.

For more information, please contact Denise LaDuca at 212.288.8970 or denise@nathanbernsteinart.com.

Gallery hours during the exhibition are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

