



Real

Families

STORIES OF CHANGE

LARGE PRINT GUIDE

Content warning

This exhibition includes artworks that explore all aspects of family life, including themes of separation, loss and harm.

Introduction

The past 50 years have brought significant change to how families are created and structured. Gone is the notion that family only means two married heterosexual parents and their biological children. Artists have always painted families, often reinforcing the concept of the traditional unit, but they have also used mythology and the Bible to explore stories of single motherhood, adoption, step-parenting and surrogacy. Contemporary artists reflect recent changes in family structure. Their work adds new insights and supports the findings of the University of Cambridge Centre for Family Research, a leading centre for the study of modern family relationships.

Real Families: Stories of Change, developed in collaboration with the Centre for Family Research, shows how the joys, tensions and transitions in families have little to do with conforming to traditional structures,

but instead arise from relationships within families, and with the outside world. These artworks provide a testimony of family life that resonates with the centre's research.

Object Label

Joshua Reynolds

The Braddyll Family

1789

This portrait represents a traditional notion of family and lineage. The inheritance of characteristics between father and son is suggested by their similar poses, and of land by the backdrop of the family estate. Mrs Braddyll and her dog convey loyalty and obedience. The couple's three daughters do not appear in the portrait. As girls, unable to inherit or pass on their father's name, they were given no place.

Oil on canvas

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Given by the National Art-Collections Fund

from the Ernest Edward Cook Collection, 1955. PD.10-1955

Object Label

Spare Rib: A Women's Liberation Magazine

Cover and feature article, p.6,
September 1976, Issue 50

Feminist magazine *Spare Rib* ran an article in 1976 describing the struggle of lesbian mothers to gain custody of their children from their ex-husbands. Many children were forcibly removed from their mothers on the grounds they would be psychologically harmed by living with a lesbian mother. The article included a request for a researcher to conduct an objective study of what happens to children who grow up in lesbian mother families. This research, and studies of different family forms that followed, was the inspiration for this exhibition.

Published by Spare Ribs Ltd, London
Cover lent from a private collection

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Timeline

This timeline gives an overview of UK legal reforms, technological advances and changes in society that affected families from the late 1960s to the present.

1967 - Sexual Offences Act. Homosexuality partially decriminalised.

1969 - Divorce Reform Act. Allowed divorce based on 'irretrievable breakdown'.

1978 - Public awareness of lesbian mother families in the UK.

1978 - World's first 'test-tube' (IVF) baby born in the UK.

1984 - World's first baby born through egg donation in Australia.

1985 - Birth of 'Baby Cotton' in the UK, causing a media storm about commercial surrogacy.

1985 - Surrogacy Arrangements Act.

Prohibited commercial surrogacy and advertising for surrogates.

1986 - Around this time, the first baby was born through embryo donation.

1987 - Family Law Reform Act. Abolished status of illegitimacy for children born outside marriage.

1988 - Section 28 of Local Government Act.

Prohibited 'promotion of homosexuality' and described families with same-sex parents as 'pretend families'.

1989 - Children Act. Made children's welfare paramount in proceedings that affect them.

1990 - Human Fertilisation And Embryology Act. Required clinics to take account of child's need for a father in the decision to offer fertility treatment.

1991 - First UK report of single heterosexual women having children by sperm donation.

2002 - Adoption and Children Act. Allowed joint adoption by same-sex couples.

2003 - Sexual Offences Act. Homosexuality fully decriminalised

2004 - Civil Partnership Act. Introduced institution similar to marriage for same-sex couples.

2008 - Human Fertilisation And Embryology Act. Required fertility clinics to take account of child's need for supportive parenting rather than a father, and allowed same-sex couples to be joint legal parents of children born through assisted reproduction.

2010 - Birth of first child to lesbian couple through shared biological motherhood where one mother carried a pregnancy created using the other mother's egg.

2013 - Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act. Introduced same-sex marriage.

2018 - Amendment to Human Fertilisation And Embryology Act. Permitted single parents to apply to become sole legal parents of children born through surrogacy.

2019 - Transgender man Freddy McConnell gives birth to child in high profile UK case in which he contested being given the legal status of mother.

2020 - Divorce, Dissolution And Separation Act. No fault divorce permitted.

2020 - Around this time, attempts by adopted and donor-conceived people to trace biological relatives online through combined genetic and ancestry databases became increasingly successful.

2023 - First UK baby with genetic material from three people born through mitochondrial donation, a procedure developed to prevent serious inherited disorders being passed on to children.

2023 - The first children conceived after the removal of donor anonymity turn 18 and become legally entitled to request the identity of their sperm and/or egg donor. This is made possible through the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority Register of Information.

What is a family?

In recent years, many artists have prompted us to think further and harder about what makes a family. They have depicted new forms of family: those with LGBTQ+ parents or shaped by assisted reproduction. Such families have become possible through breakthroughs in reproductive technologies, alongside changes in both social attitudes and the law from the 1970s onwards. Artists have also grappled with the difficult experience of separation and with not having children, sometimes by choice.

In the same period, parallel insights have been provided by the Centre for Family Research, founded in 1966, which pioneered the study of new family forms. Psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and bioethicists have investigated families created by IVF, egg and sperm donation, and surrogacy. They also study families with lesbian mothers, gay fathers, single parents by choice and transgender parents.

This research has contributed to greater legal rights and fairer, more representative policies and legislation for new families in the UK and around the world.

Modern families

Object Label

JJ Levine

Alone Time 19

2021

This portrait appears to show a traditional family of a mother, father, son and daughter. Actually, the mother and father are the same person, and the son and daughter are the same child. The artist, who identifies as queer and trans, questions the idea that gender identity, gender roles and sexuality are unchangeable.

C-print, edition 2/3, 1AP

Courtesy JJ Levine/ELLEPHANT

Object Label

Aliza Nisenbaum

*Susan, Aarti, Keerthana and Princess,
Sunday in Brooklyn*

2018

When lesbian mother families first became visible in the 1970s, they were vilified in the press and parliament, and it was widely assumed that their children would be psychologically harmed. Nisenbaum's painting celebrates this family's close and affectionate bonds, an image that chimes with decades of research.

Oil on linen

Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery
(Norfolk Museums Service)

Commissioned by the Contemporary Art Society for
Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery through the Valeria
Napoleone XX Contemporary Art Society initiative.

NWHCM: 2018.39

Object Label

Stuart Pearson Wright

Halfboy and Halfsister

2018

“I was an anomaly in my family. I always put this down to the fact that I had a sperm donor father.” Stuart Pearson Wright was conceived by anonymous sperm donation in 1975. Here, he depicts his childhood feelings of separateness from his half-sister. His painting illuminates the feelings of being different that can sometimes arise from donor conception.

Oil, sheep’s wool, zebrawood, wire and mixed media
on linen

Courtesy Stuart Pearson Wright

Object Label

Joseph-Marie Vien

Sarah Presents Hagar to Abraham

1749

Abraham needed an heir, and because his wife Sarah was unable to conceive, he impregnated Hagar, their Egyptian slave. Some have read this story as a version of surrogacy. Others understand Hagar as horribly exploited. Both can be true, then and now. This story demonstrates historic anxieties around the importance of a male heir, which put enormous pressure on women to bear sons.

Oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier

2015.21.1

Object Label

Bart Heynen

Milo with her Fathers and Sister. New York City.

From the photographic project *Dads*

2021

Bart Heynen is a gay father: “We all come from straight parents and have very few role models. So I wanted to see what other families with gay dads were like. Also, for my kids, it was important to meet other dads and kids. They were the only ones with two gay dads in their school.”

Inkjet print on photo rag paper

Courtesy Bart Heynen

Group Object Label

JJ Levine

Harry Pregnant, 2015

2015

C-print, edition 2/3, 1AP

Courtesy JJ Levine/ELLEPHANT

JJ Levine

Harry and Joah, 2016

2016

C-print, edition 2/3, 1AP

Courtesy JJ Levine/ELLEPHANT

JJ Levine

Harry, Joah and JJ, 2018

2018

C-print, edition 1/3, 1AP

Courtesy JJ Levine/ELLEPHANT

The first portrait shows Harry, a transgender man, pregnant with Joah. The second is of Harry with Joah as an infant. The third shows Joah aged two, with her two parents, Harry and JJ, the artist. In the Centre's research on families with transgender parents, children have said that it's not having a transgender parent, but other people's reactions to it, that they find upsetting.

Single-parent families

Object Label

Loulou d'Aki

*Sandra and Lilje. A portrait from the series
Mother of Choice*

2019

“When the doctor came in and told me I probably shouldn’t wait too long to have a child, I thought I’ll just do it – straight away! One year later, I was pregnant.” In 2016, the law changed in Sweden to give single women access to assisted reproduction. Lilje was born after insemination treatment with eggs donated from Sandra’s sister. This comes from a series about self-chosen single motherhood through fertility treatment.

Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper

Courtesy Loulou d'Aki

Object Label

Harry Borden

Jonathan with Xavier

From the photographic project *Single Dad*
2021

A small but increasing number of men are becoming single fathers by choice. Jonathan remembers: “I’d always felt that one day I’d be a dad, but I’d never imagined that becoming one would be so daunting. With the help of fertility specialists, lawyers, an egg donor and an awesome gestational surrogate, Xavier was born in Southern California, September 2013.”

C-type print

Courtesy Harry Borden

Object Label

Harry Borden

Tony with Emma and Louise

From the photographic project *Single Dad*
2021

There has been a rise in divorced or separated fathers raising their children alone. Tony says: “The girls’ mum and I shared care for several years after we split up. But then she decided to move away, for love and for work. I knew their childhoods would pass quickly so I decided to slow my life down, to enjoy every moment of fatherhood.”

C-type print

Courtesy Harry Borden

Object Label

Harry Borden

Florian (the Photographer's Son). From the photographic project, *On Divorce*
2023

The artist's son reflects on his parents' divorce: "I was so surprised when you told me. I still remember it all exactly. I now certainly wish it hadn't been so quick... I'd say probably when I was little, all my friends' parents were together. Now 70% must be divorced. Nothing is certain."

C-type print

Courtesy Harry Borden

Stepfamilies

Object Label

Stuart Pearson Wright

Stepdad

2015

“I was yearning for a solid family with a mother and father. A real father, not a stepfather with whom I had no connection, and siblings of my own age, and a secure environment at home.” Pearson Wright’s childhood was chaotic and nomadic. His painting *Stepdad* was an attempt to understand his relationship with his stepfather, Cyril, who had recently died.

Oil on linen, protective cardboard on the back
Private collection, Bonn, Germany

Object Label

Diana Markosian

Not too Long Ago, my Father had Another Child. I Should be Happy for Him, but Watching him Play with Her, Feels like a Bruise Someone Keeps Pressing. From the photographic project *My Father, The Stranger* 2013–14

This photograph expresses the ambivalence towards half-siblings that may be felt by those whose parents separate or divorce and form new families.

Archival inkjet print

Courtesy Galerie Les filles du calvaire, Paris

Object Label

Sassoferrato

The Holy Family

1660–85

Jesus Christ is always known as ‘the son of God’, yet Joseph, often sidelined in historic painting, is here shown raising Christ as his own son. He kisses the child’s hand, a sign of reverence, but also an expression of their loving bond, akin perhaps to that of stepfather and stepchild.

Oil on canvas

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Bequeathed by Charles Brinsley Marlay, 1912

M.74

Adoption

Group Object Label

Mary Husted

Luke (at 3 Days Old) 31 January 1963
1963

Pencil on paper

Private collection

Mary Husted

Luke at 8 Days Old Born 28 January 1963
1963

Re-drawn in 2011 after a copy of the lost original

Pencil on paper

Private collection

Mary Husted

Luke at 10 Days Old Born 28 January 1963
1963

Pencil on paper

Private collection

In 1963, Mary Husted, then aged 17, was forced to give up her baby for adoption. She made drawings of her son, Luke, when he was three, eight and ten days old, the day he was taken from her. The two were reunited 44 years later when Luke, renamed Ian, found Mary through the Murray Edwards Women's Art Collection in Cambridge. On their first meeting, Mary gave him the drawings she had made of him during their ten days together.

Object Label

Mary Husted

Dreams, Oracles, Icons ...

1991

This work shows a photocopied image of Mary Husted as a teenage girl and a small infant falling away, expressing her profound sense of loss after the adoption. It was through the work that Mary and her son were reunited. On seeing it online, he immediately recognised that it was about him. As Mary put it, “He had seen and recognised my flag”.

Collage

The Women’s Art Collection,

Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge

Object Label

Marcantonio Bellavia

*Romulus and Remus Discovered by
Faustulus and His Wife, Louva*

1668–70

In a story from Roman mythology, twin brothers Romulus and Remus were deserted and left to die on the banks of a river by their jealous father, the King. The pair were kept alive by suckling a female wolf, and then discovered and raised by a shepherd and his wife, unaware of their royal lineage. Abandoned and rescued children constituted a theme in many stories from the ancient world.

Etching on paper, bound into an album, state II/II

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Bequeathed by Richard, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam, 1816

31.H.6-8

Group Object Label

1 Billet book with fabric token attached

Foundling 10563, a girl, admitted 22nd November, 1758

The Foundling Hospital which continues today as the children's charity Coram
BA/FH/A/09/001/118.

2 Billet book with fabric token attached

Foundling 14922, a boy, admitted 24th December, 1759

The Foundling Hospital which continues today as the children's charity Coram
BA/FH/A/09/001/164

3 Ring

1700s

Metal and imitation stones

The Foundling Museum, London

2005.5.134

4 Engraved King James II shilling

1685–88

Smoothed and engraved about 1756

Silver

The Foundling Museum, London

2005.5.49.

5 Crystal beads

1700s

Rock crystal, metal wire

The Foundling Museum, London

2005.5.391

6 Heart-shaped token

1700s

Brass

The Foundling Museum, London

2005.5.63

7 Coral necklace

1700s

Coral beads, cotton string, metal clasp

The Foundling Museum, London

2005.5.156

When mothers left their babies at the Foundling Hospital, they sometimes attached tokens and wisps of fabric to their clothes or wrappings, expressing their love for the children they had to give up, often in the hope of being reunited one day.

Families without children

Group Object Label

Tabitha Moses

Investment: Emma's Gown

2014

Hand-embroidered threads, mirrors, beads, linen,
cotton binding

On loan from the artist

Jon Barraclough and Tabitha Moses

Investment: Tabitha

2014

Giclée print on Hahnemühle photo rag paper

On loan from the artist

Tabitha Moses's hand-embroidered hospital gowns represent the experiences and objects that were meaningful to her and Emma, a patient at the same fertility clinic, while they were trying to conceive.

These include syringes, a thermometer, fertility figurines, embryos, blood and tears. The emotional roller-coaster of fertility treatment, the hopes and fears of the women who experience it, the magical thinking that can accompany it, and the deep sense of loss of a failed treatment cycle, are embedded in these embroidered images.

Object Label

Vacuum Desiccator Bell Jar

About 1968–77

Louise Brown was born in 1978 through in vitro fertilisation (IVF) in Oldham, Lancashire, the first baby in the world conceived outside the human body. This became possible through the scientific work of Robert Edwards at the University of Cambridge and the obstetrician Patrick Steptoe. The first IVF babies, and possibly Louise herself, were conceived in this glass jar.

Glass, rubber stopper

Bourn Hall Clinic

Object Label

Elina Brotherus

Annonciation 7, Jour de l'Annonciation
2011

This work relates to the artist's five years of unsuccessful IVF treatment, and reflects the experiences of women undergoing IVF, anxiously waiting to discover whether they are pregnant. Brotherus references the Christian Annunciation story, in which the Angel Gabriel informs Mary that she will conceive a child. The artist described her own experience as "waiting for an angel who never shows up".

Pigment ink print on barytha paper from digital original
mounted on aluminium

Courtesy of the artist

Object Label

Nicolas Poussin

The Annunciation

1657

Poussin focuses on the emotional gravity of the moment the Angel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary she will conceive Christ. Her outstretched arms and ecstatic expression show her glad acceptance of the role. The Annunciation story emphasises the belief that women's virginity was crucial until marriage, but also shaped recent discussions of conception without sexual communion, births that many initially considered troubling and almost miraculous.

Oil on canvas

The National Gallery, London. Bought, 1878

NG5472

Content warning

Please be aware this work explores the experience of miscarriage.

Object Label

Britt Thomas

No Heartbeat and Little Rainbow

From *Lullabies for Loss*

2018

No Heartbeat, set to the melody of Brahms's *Lullaby*, evokes the trauma of discovering through a routine ultrasound scan that a longed-for baby has died in the womb.

Little Rainbow refers to rainbow babies, the name given to babies born following earlier miscarriages – rainbows after the storm.

These works are based on the artist's own experiences.

Rocking chairs and binaural lullaby recordings
performed by Ashlynn Ivy-Tamez

Courtesy of the artist

Group Object Label

Miriam Schaer

Untitled #1 ('Your Not Having Children Was the Biggest Disappointment of Our Life')

From the series, *Babies Not On Board: The Last Prejudice?*

About 2012

Hand embroidery on baby cotton

rompers/dresses

Courtesy of the artist

Miriam Schaer

Untitled #11 ('Children Are What Makes a Real Family')

From the series, *Babies Not On Board: The Last Prejudice?*

About 2012

Hand embroidery on baby cotton

rompers/dresses

Courtesy of the artist

Miriam Schaer

Untitled #13 ('You Are Not a Real Parent if You Have Only One Child')

From the series, *Babies Not On Board: The Last Prejudice?*

About 2012

Hand embroidery on baby cotton
rompers/dresses

Courtesy of the artist

Miriam Schaer

Untitled #15 ('Yes, You're Married ...')

From the series, *Babies Not On Board: The Last Prejudice?*

About 2012

Hand embroidery on baby cotton
rompers/dresses

Courtesy of the artist

Schaer, who was unable to have children, embroidered baby clothes with insensitive comments often made to women without children to express her anger about the way they can be made to feel.

Object Label

Elina Brotherus

My Dog is Cuter than Your Ugly Baby

2013

“I don’t have children so I don’t need to adopt any preconceived role of an adult. I can give normality the finger.” Elina Brotherus described this work from her *Carpe Fucking Diem* series as an attempt to find meaning in a life without children, one she had not expected.

Pigment ink print on paper

Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark.

Acquired with funding from The Augusting Foundation

50-15-4019

Object Label

Sunil Gupta

Shalini, Rudi, Sunil, Léo, 3425 Stanley

About 1974

In the 1970s, when there were barriers to forming families outside the context of a heterosexual relationship, many LGBTQ+ people formed chosen families based on mutual support rather than blood ties, and not necessarily involving children. Gupta's photograph of his chosen family of friends and lovers was taken in his flat in Montreal's Gay Village, Canada.

Pigment print on archival paper

On loan from the Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston

Presented by the Contemporary Art Society to the Harris through the Collections Fund at Frieze, 2021/22

PRSMG: 2022.3.1

Object Label

Tejal Shah

*You Too Can Touch the Moon—Yashoda
with Krishna From the Hijra Fantasy Series*
2006

The mother-son story of Yashoda and Krishna is shown here with a person from the Hijra community of eunuchs, intersex and transgender people in India standing for Krishna's devoted foster mother. It speaks to loving relationships between parents and children in families with non-biological and queer parents.

Digital photograph on archival paper, dry-mounted on aluminium

Courtesy Richard Heaton, Warden
of Robinson College

Object Label

Sophie Calle

Today My Mother Died (Aujourd'hui ma Mère est Morte) From the series *Autobiographies*, 2/5 EN

2013

'On December 27, 1966, my mother wrote in her diary, "My mother died today".

On March 15, 2006, in turn, I wrote in mine, "My mother died today".

No one will say this about me.

The end.'

Colour photography, text, wooden frame

Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin/Copyright Sophie Calle/ADAGP Paris, 2023,

Photographer: Claire Dorn

Family transitions

Artists have long explored relationships between different family members and how they change over time. The emotional bonds between mothers and their children from infancy through to adolescence, and fathers' roles in the development of their children, are also a research focus of the Centre. Art about siblings speaks to the dynamic and intense relationships that exist between them from early childhood, and images representing grandparents and grandchildren highlight the benefit of having each other in their lives. Adults – including artists – are often faced with the expectation that they will care for their aging parents, provoking mixed feelings: of obligation and resentment, and of increased closeness.

Mother and Child

Object Label

Joos van Cleve

Virgin and Child

About 1525–30

Mary smiles warmly at the infant Christ as he dozes in her arms in this affectionate vision of their relationship. Traditionally, both Mary and Christ wear haloes to signify their divine status, but here they go without, with an emphasis on tenderness over holiness or divinity. Van Cleve's picture proposes that Mary's exceptional experience of motherhood also included moments of recognisable, everyday intimacy.

Oil on panel

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Bequeathed by the Rev. R.E. Kerrich 1872 (received 1873)

No 104

Object Label

Catherine Opie

Self Portrait/Nursing

2004

The artist celebrates motherhood with a nod to a painful history, the faded scars of the word pervert scratched into her chest, reflecting the struggle for acceptance as a lesbian mother. The opulent backdrop references the cloth of honour hung behind the Virgin and Child in Italian renaissance paintings.

Chromogenic print

Private collection

Object Label

Alice Neel

Nancy and Olivia

1967

Neel's portrait of her daughter-in-law and granddaughter conveys the fierce protectiveness of mothers, and an infant's feelings of security in being held. Infants become attached to their mother, or main caregivers, through behaviours that keep them physically close, such as crying and smiling, a closeness that protects and comforts the infant.

Oil on canvas

Collection of Diane and David Goldsmith

Object Label

Lena Cronqvist

The Madonna

1969

Lena Cronqvist's *Madonna* speaks to the stress and exhaustion that accompany early motherhood. Despite the greater involvement of fathers in parenting, most mothers remain largely responsible for childcare, and experience a more dramatic change to their lifestyle and identity.

Oil on canvas

Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Purchase 1970

NM 6278

Object Label

Caroline Walker

Study for 'Refreshments'

From the series *Lisa*

2022

Caroline Walker's *Study for 'Refreshments'* shows a joyful and engaged interaction between the artist's sister-in-law and her baby. All children form attachments, unless they experience severe deprivation, but they differ in how secure their attachments are. Infants whose mothers or caregivers are sensitive and responsive, and who interact in a conversation-like way, are more likely to become securely attached.

Oil on paper

Private collection

Object Label

Lisa Sorgini

Lise (36 weeks) and Lulu

From the series *Mother*

2019

Sorgini's photograph highlights playful interactions between mothers or caregivers and older children that are associated with secure attachment.

Giclée print on Hahnemühle paper

Courtesy of the artist

Object Label

Nicholas Nixon

*Bebe and Clementine, Cambridge,
Massachusetts*

1990, printed 2006

Nixon's work shows his young daughter, Clementine, very much in charge while arranging her mother's hair. It used to be thought that parents shaped the behaviour of their children, rather than the other way around, but more recent research has shown that, right from birth, children also influence their parents' behaviour towards them.

Gelatin silver print

© Nicholas Nixon, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery,
San Francisco

Object Label

Thomas Holton

Bored, 2011. From the series *The Lams of Ludlow Street*

2011

Adolescents become focused on their identity – who they are and who they wish to be – and strive for greater autonomy from their parents.

Inkjet print on paper
Courtesy of the artist

Object Label

Ishbel Myerscough

All

2016

Ishbel Myerscough's portrait of her family shows a time when they were particularly close-knit. She reflected: "I see my daughter growing into an uncanny reflection of my younger self, same hair, wearing my old clothes. Life is full of echoes." Family ties remain important for adolescents, providing them with a foundation for entry into the adult world.

Oil on canvas

Ishbel Myerscough/Flowers Gallery,

London and Hong Kong

Group Object Label

Unidentified Staffordshire potter

Model cradle

1708

Lead-glazed earthenware

Inscribed: 'HS, John Walker, HS 1708 EC'

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Bequeathed by J.W.L. Glaisher, 1928

C.256-1928

Unknown maker

Infant's bonnet

1700s

Linen embroidered with the words 'sweet babe'

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Given by J.N. Peyton, 1981

T.19-1981

Unknown maker

Model cradle

1729

Lead-glazed earthenware

Inscribed: 'Mary/Overton/Her cradle, 1729'

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Bequeathed by J.W.L. Glaisher, 1928

C.237-1928

Miniature pottery cradles such as these were given as gifts to newly married couples to express hope for the birth of future children, or as celebratory tokens at christenings.

Made popular between the late 1600s and mid 1800s, the reasonable price of pottery made the cradles more affordable for many than traditional gifts for newborns, such as silver spoons. People also made their own gifts, such as this bonnet embroidered with the words 'sweet babe'.

Father and Child

Object Label

Winifred Nicholson

Father and Son

1927

Winifred Nicholson depicts a loving relationship between her then husband and Jake, their baby son. Artist Ben Nicholson went on to have more children with the sculptor Barbara Hepworth, but he remained involved with his first family.

Oil on canvas

The Fitzwilliam Museum

Bought with the assistance of the Art Fund
and V&A/ACE Purchase Grant Fund, 2022

PD.72-2022

Object Label

Winifred Nicholson

Kate and Jake, Isle of Wight

1932

Soon after Winifred and Ben Nicholson separated, in 1931, Winifred rented a house on the Isle of Wight where she painted this portrait of her two eldest children.

Oil on canvas

Bristol Museums: Bristol Museum & Art Gallery

K4094

Group Object Label

Zun Lee

*Billy Garcia and Daughter Esmeralda
Sharing a Tender Moment at a Gas Station.
Bronx, NY, September 2012.*

From the photographic project

Father Figure, 2012–13

Archival pigment ink on 100% cotton rag paper

Courtesy of the artist

Zun Lee

*Bedtime Shenanigans with Carlos
Richardson and his Daughter, Selah.
Harlem, NY, August 2012.*

From the photographic project

Father Figure, 2012–13

Archival pigment ink on 100% cotton rag paper

Courtesy of the artist

Zun Lee

*Guy Miller Surveying the Playground Whilst
Bandaging son Nijel's Injured Arm.
Harlem, NY, July 2013.*

From the photographic project

Father Figure, 2012–13

Archival pigment ink on 100% cotton rag paper

Courtesy of the artist

Zun Lee

*Guy Miller Keeping an Eye on all of his Four
Children. Bronx, NY, December 2012.*

From the photographic project

Father Figure, 2012–13

Archival pigment ink on 100% cotton rag paper

Courtesy of the artist

Zun Lee's photographs, taken in US cities between 2011 and 2015, of Black fathers and their children contradict their stereotype as absent fathers. Describing his project, the artist said: "Few of the men I met were in traditional relationships, but I observed these fathers interact with their children, and I saw that they were loving, present and responsible, and took their parenting role seriously, nonetheless".

Object Label

Jean-Loup Cornet

Michael Andrews and his Daughter Melanie swimming in Glenartney, Scotland

1976

This photograph of the artist Michael Andrews teaching his daughter to swim was taken by a family friend and formed the basis for Andrews's painting, *Melanie and Me Swimming*. This depicts an example of what is termed scaffolding, the process of helping children achieve what they cannot quite do by themselves through instruction and support.

C-type print on paper

Tate Library and Archive, Michael Andrews archive

© The Estate of Michael Andrews

TGA 200025/3/9

Object Label

Grayson Perry

Vase Using My Family

1998

Perry presents his strong family unit. He found that being a father raised questions about his own childhood. Alongside photographs of his wife and daughter is a photograph of his childhood teddy bear, Alan Measles, a key source of comfort for the artist in navigating his difficult relationship with his stepfather.

Glazed ceramic

Lent by Stephen Kinder, Brighton

Siblings

Group Object Label

Nicholas Nixon

*Clementine and Sam, Cambridge,
Massachusetts*

1989

Gelatin silver print

© Nicholas Nixon, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery,
San Francisco

Nicholas Nixon

*Sam et Clementine, Cambridge,
Massachusetts*

1990

Gelatin silver print

© Nicholas Nixon, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery,
San Francisco

Nixon's photographs of his children show the close, yet often aggressive, interactions that characterise sibling relationships. They also highlight changes in these relationships over time. Siblings who get on well in childhood are likely to continue to do so as they grow up. If parents treat siblings differently, with one child the "favourite", this can cause damaging and long-lasting effects on their relationship.

Object Label

Jan van Meyer

The Decker Sisters

1718

Decker's young daughters look alike but the artist conveys their own distinct personalities through props and dresses, and through the depiction of their different reactions to being painted and observed.

Oil on canvas

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Bequeathed by Richard, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam, 1816

No 437

Object Label

Pieter Rodermond after Rembrandt

Esau Selling his Birthright to Jacob

1639–60

The Old Testament story of brothers Esau and Jacob explores the tensions and rivalries of siblings jostling for power within a traditional family structure. In an impulsive trade, the starving Esau exchanges his right as first-born son, principal heir and leader of the family, with his brother Jacob for a meagre bowl of food. The deal causes a rift for years.

Etching and engraving

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Transferred by Cambridge University Library, 1876

AD.12.39-22

Object Label

Alice Neel

The De Vegh Twins

1975

Despite being dressed the same, the individual personalities of these identical twins shine through. The portrait captures their close relationship: the two girls sharing a seat, their bodies fitting together, one with her arm around the other, to create a strong unit.

Oil on canvas

Private collection.

Courtesy Tracy Williams Art Advisory, NY

Object Label

Tracey Emin

Me and Paul – The Twins

1963–93

Tracey Emin and her brother Paul are non-identical twins. Emin's career in art took her on a different path to her brother. In *Me and Paul – The Twins*, she describes the impact on her own life of Paul going to prison, an account that illustrates the significance of her relationship with her twin.

Memorabilia and text (seven parts), all framed
Courtesy Vanessa Branson

Object Label

Barbara Hepworth

Group of Three Magic Stones

1973

In 1934, Barbara Hepworth had triplets with artist Ben Nicholson. He had three previous children with the painter Winifred Nicholson, and moved between the two households. Although struggling to cope, Hepworth then created her first sculpture with three forms, which was to become a recurring theme in her work.

Silver on ebony base

Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge

BH 5

Object Label

Li Tianbing

Autoportrait sur neige (Self-Portrait on Snow)
2007

Li Tianbing's portrait is of himself as a child with an imaginary brother, his response to the loneliness he felt as an only child. The artist grew up in China at the time of the one child policy, enforced from 1979 until 2016, which produced a generation of people without siblings.

Oil on canvas

Collection Mr Eric Fitoussi

Grandparents

Object Label

Tracey Emin

May Dodge, My Nan

1963–93

'May Dodge - My Nan She's 92 I call
her Plum She calls me

Pudding -

She made me the most beautiful

baby clothes - white crocheted

she made them for me a few

years ago - She said at the time

"I've made them for you now

because - by the time you have a

baby - I'll be making clothes

for angels.

Dear Nanny I'm not afraid anymore -

Life's fantastic - who'd have thought

I could make angels -

for you -

They're waiting

XXX

Tracey Emin

May Dodge, My Nan

1963–93

Wooden box, glass, doll and 5 works on paper,
photographs, ink, printed
papers and wool

Tate: Presented by Tate Members 2004

T11886

Object Label

Joy Labinjo

Having the Conversation

2020

Labinjo depicts a tender moment between a grandmother and her grandchild. The importance and involvement of grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren can vary across cultures. Multi-generational households are the norm in some parts of the world, and rarer in others.

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Object Label

Celia Paul

My Mother with a Rose

2006

Celia Paul's picture charts the changing nature of her relationship with her mother. The artist made many paintings of her elderly parent, who at first was a reluctant sitter, but then became dedicated to the project. As the artist described it: "I was a bully at first, but it came to mean everything to her. It became her vocation."

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Object Label

Lucian Freud

The Painter's Mother Resting

1975–76

Lucian Freud's portrait of his mother shows her asleep or avoiding his gaze. He could only paint her when she wasn't looking directly at him. Freud said of this work: "I was feeling sadder than I ever have before or since. I was painting the paisley patterns on her dress and remember worrying that my sadness would get into the paisley shapes and I suppose perhaps it did."

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Group Object Label

Larry Sultan

My Mother Posing

1984

Chromogenic print from the book *Pictures from Home*

© Estate of Larry Sultan.

Courtesy of Casemore Gallery, San Francisco;

Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York; Galerie Thomas

Zander, Köln; and the Estate of Larry Sultan.

Larry Sultan

Business Page

1985

Chromogenic print from the book *Pictures from Home*

© Estate of Larry Sultan.

Courtesy of Casemore Gallery, San Francisco;

Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York; Galerie Thomas

Zander, Köln; and the Estate of Larry Sultan.

In 1982, Sultan embarked on a ten-year project photographing and interviewing his parents at their home in California. His exploration of his mother and father's relationship with one another, and with him, examined their vulnerabilities, what it means for a parent to age, and asked how much a child can truly understand their parents.

Group Object Label

Nan Goldin

Lil Laughing, Swampscott, MA

1996

Cibachrome

Collection Fotomuseum Winterthur

Gift of Andreas Reinhart

1999-008-023

Nan Goldin

My Father Shaving, Swampscott, MA

1997

Cibachrome

Collection Fotomuseum Winterthur

Gift of Andreas Reinhart

1999-008-022

Nan Goldin had a difficult relationship with her parents from childhood onwards, made worse by her older sister's suicide when Goldin was eleven years old. These photographs of her mother and father were taken when they were in their eighties.

Object Label

Dirck van Baburen

Roman Charity, Cimon and Pero

1618–1624

This scene, from a popular ancient Roman story, shows Pero breaking into her father Cimon's prison cell to revive him with her breastmilk after he was sentenced to death by starvation. Intended to show Pero as a self-sacrificial, virtuous daughter who recognises above all her duty to her father, this image may also have been intended to titillate male viewers by subverting taboos about father-daughter relationships.

Oil on canvas

York Museums Trust (York Art Gallery).

Presented by F D Lycett Green through The Art Fund, 1955.

YORAG: 788

Object Label

Cathy Wilkes

Untitled (Possil, At Last)

2013

Cathy Wilkes's installation suggests the despair of a father and the vulnerability of his children. It evokes the transmission of poverty and social inequality from one generation to the next, reflecting decades of research on the effects of family adversity on children.

Mannequins, wooden stools, card boxes, linen, cotton, glass bottles, ceramic pieces and other materials

Tate: Presented by Tate Members 2014

T14119

Family dynamics

Families are often depicted as extremely happy or deeply dysfunctional; the reality usually lies somewhere in between. Based on our experiences from infancy onwards, we build up ideas and expectations of family relationships in our minds, especially those with our parents. This has an influence on how we interact with them, and how we come to see ourselves. Artists are uniquely placed to translate their internal representations of family to the outside world. They make works that reflect both positive and negative family dynamics between couples, parents and children, and within their extended families, that explore affection and rejection, comfort and conflict, involvement and estrangement, and not fitting in, as well as the wider social and cultural influences on family relationships. By doing so, they help us ponder our own families.

Group Object Label

Richard Billingham

Untitled, RAL 25

1994

C-type print mounted on aluminium

Copyright of the artist, courtesy of Anthony Reynolds,
London

Richard Billingham

Untitled, RAL 27

1994

C-type print mounted on aluminium

Copyright of the artist, courtesy of Anthony Reynolds,
London

Billingham's photographs of his parents provide intimate and expressive examples of both joy and conflict. The artist's parents stayed together despite their differences and these works appear to reflect research findings that warmth and affection are protective against the negative effects of conflict. Most couples argue, but what matters is the frequency and severity of their arguments, and how quickly and easily they make up.

Object Label

Samira Abbassy

Reincarnated Fears

2017

Reincarnated Fears speaks to the transmission of trauma and anxiety from one generation to the next, with the hidden gun at the mother's head addressing the destructive impact of external and domestic violence. As the Iranian-born artist described it: "It comes from the geopolitical all the way down into one room where there is a fire".

Oil on gesso on birch panel

Courtesy of the artist

Object Label

Zoë Buckman

When She Had a Black Eye

2018

Buckman embroiders textiles that have a history of use in the home and suggest a connection to the stories of the women who owned them. This work is from a series that examines the universal female experience of violence and loss of power, based on real or imagined encounters, reflecting on the strength and resilience it takes to endure them.

Embroidery on vintage linen tea towel

Bill and Christy Gautreaux Collection, Kansas City, Mo.

Object Label

Paula Rego

Split

2017

Paula Rego's works relating to the family are both subversive and insightful. *Split* evokes the dysfunctional alliances that can occur in families, which can have a damaging effect on family relationships. Here a child appears as an outsider plotting to split the others apart. This drawing was inspired by the French children's book, *Sophie's Misfortunes* (*Les Malheurs de Sophie*) written by the Comtesse de Ségur in 1858.

Pastel on paper on aluminium

Anne Wilkening Collection

Group Object Label

Jim Goldberg

Untitled From the series *Rich and Poor*,
made between 1977 and 1985

'This picture says that we are a very emotional & tight family, like the three musketeers. Poverty sucks, but it brings us closer together. Linda Benko.'

Gelatin silver print

© Jim Goldberg. Courtesy of the artist.

Jim Goldberg

Untitled From the series *Rich and Poor*,
made between 1977 and 1985

'I feel comfortable with my daughter. I honestly believe that my job is to wipe her nose, slap her on the rear, and get her going to be productive. That's where I find pleasure. R Bransten.'

Gelatin silver print

© Jim Goldberg. Courtesy of the artist.

Jim Goldberg

Untitled From the series *Rich and Poor*,
made between 1977 and 1985

'My family is o.k. I think Im stupid I always do something
wrong Lonnie Lynch Lonnie Me Mom Wayne This is my
Family I love them I like moms dress the Hotel is rotten
I want to move Roy'

Gelatin silver print

© Jim Goldberg. Courtesy of the artist.

Jim Goldberg

Untitled From the series *Rich and Poor*,
made between 1977 and 1985

'To my discomfort, I am often considered a grand dame.
I know how to behave in most circumstances whether
with inferiors or superiors, without attracting attention.
I was properly brought up. To the manor and manners
born. Katherine Cebrian'

Gelatin silver print

© Jim Goldberg. Courtesy of the artist.

These photographs speak not only of the devastating impact of social inequality on family life, but also of resilience in the face of adversity. The words of the families portrayed suggest that close and affectionate bonds can prevail despite economic hardship, and also that affluence does not guarantee warm family relationships.

Object Label

Tina Barney

Thanksgiving From the series *Theater of Manners*

1992

Thanksgiving highlights strained family relationships, and lack of communication, in an affluent family. Tina Barney explained: “I thought the American family wasn’t close enough, emotionally and physically, and that family members didn’t show their affection enough, and didn’t tell each other they loved each other enough. So, I directed them to try to get closer together.”

From an edition of 10

Chromogenic colour print

© Tina Barney. Courtesy Kasmin, New York.

Object Label

Tina Barney

Andrew, John and George

2011

In contrast to *Thanksgiving*, the portrait of *Andrew, John and George* celebrates their warmth and closeness in a modern family: married fathers and their son, born through surrogacy.

Chromogenic colour print

Collection of Andrew Solomon and John Habich

Solomon, Rhinebeck, New York

Group Object Label

Caleb Cole

Stripes From the series *Odd One Out*
2018

Inkjet print made with Epson's archival ink
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Kayafas

Caleb Cole

The Big Day From the series *Odd One Out*
2018

Inkjet print made with Epson's archival ink
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Kayafas

Cole's works express the uncomfortable sense of not belonging in one's family. Sometimes, like the boy in *Stripes*, children feel that something is amiss, perhaps because they think they are not meeting parental expectations, or that they are different in some way.

Adults who do not fit in, sometimes because of their gender identity or sexuality, can feel pressured to conform.

Group Object Label

Tracey Moffatt

Birth Certificate, 1962 From the series
Scarred for Life

1994

Lithograph on paper

Tate: Purchased 1998

P78101

Tracey Moffatt

Useless, 1974 From the series *Scarred for Life*
1994

Lithograph on paper

Tate: Purchased 1998

P78105

Tracey Moffatt

The Wizard of Oz, 1956 From the series
Scarred for Life
1994

Lithograph on paper
Tate: Purchased 1998
P78100

Moffatt's series, based on stories told to the artist, speaks to the adverse impact of rejection and trauma on mental health and self-esteem.

Group Object Label

Albrecht Dürer

The Visitation

1503

Woodcut

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Bequeathed by the Rev. R.E. Kerrich 1872 (received 1873)

P.3418-R

Jan Sadeler I after Maarten de Vos

The Visitation From the series *The Youth
of Christ*

1582

Engraving within an album of prints

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Bequeathed by Richard, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam, 1816

23.I.2-403

Mary, heavily pregnant with Jesus, embraces her cousin Elizabeth, who despite her advanced age is also pregnant. These scenes suggest the importance for women of an intimate network of female relations with whom to discuss shared experiences.

This focus on women's relationships contrasts with the many biblical stories in which the purpose of family is to establish and protect the male bloodline.

Family legacies

The popularity of television shows that explore ancestry, and the large number of people signed up to family tree databases, highlight the importance to many of a sense of connection and belonging. Sometimes family secrets are uncovered in this way; all it can take is a saliva sample to find out online whether we are genetically related to our parents, and if not, who our genetic parents are. The transmission of family from one generation to the next through genetic inheritance, social and cultural practices, language and objects is a subject for artists, who have explored the ways these can forge emotional connections and give rise to family memories. We often treasure domestic objects and tokens of affection that stand for those links and memories, or create them.

Object Label

Apostolos Georgiou

Untitled

2019

Family secrets can have far-reaching consequences for family relationships, getting in the way of communication between those in the know and those who are not. The accidental discovery of a family secret may be illuminating, but might also be deeply shocking and disturbing, causing those affected by the revelation to feel angry or deceived.

Acrylic on canvas

Haidas Collection

Object Label

Sarah Williamson

Sampler

1795

Sewing a sampler was a popular way to teach young women needlework skills. By including verses from the Bible and lines from books on virtuous Christian behaviour they also provided moral and religious instruction. The ten-year-old Williamson's idyllic vision of her family is accompanied by embroidered text expressing gratitude to her parents, who are 'Next unto God' as figures of authority and virtue.

Wool embroidered with coloured silks

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Given by Miss J.D.W. Eames, 2000

T.1-2000

Object Label

1 Unknown maker

Mourning ring made for a child, to commemorate Frances Greene, who died aged 61 years

1767

Up until the end of the 1800s, people often left money in their will to make inscribed rings commemorating their death. Hair from the deceased was sometimes incorporated into the design of mourning jewellery, allowing the bereaved to feel that a part of their loved one lived on. This ring, made for a child to wear, includes hair intricately arranged into a floral pattern.

Gold, amethysts and hair

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Given by Mrs J.C. Burkill, 1979. M.26-1979

Object Label

2 Unknown maker

Mourning ring to commemorate N B and
W Toms who died aged 5 and 11
1794

In this mourning ring made for grieving parents, the hair of two young brothers who died only a few years apart is interlaced and studded with stars, suggesting a togetherness in a heavenly afterlife. The inscription on the underside of the ring names the children and their dates of birth and death. Child mortality rates were high in this period, but losses were still felt deeply.

Gilt-metal, hair from two different heads
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
Bequeathed by S.G. Perceval, 1922
PER.M.272-1923

Object Label

3 Unknown maker

Mourning pendant

About 1790

The inscription on this pendant suggests that adopted children were mourned just as fiercely as other children, and were remembered by their parents through the same tokens and rituals. Mourning jewellery, like this example, were decorated as miniature funerary monuments. The motif of the urn was a common symbol of death and grief.

Gold, gilt-metal, glass, hair, enamel

Inscribed: 'sacred to the memory of an adopted child'

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Bequeathed by S.G. Perceval, 1922

PER.M.274-1923

Object Label

Sally Mann

Three Generations

1991

Family resemblances are endlessly fascinating, with conversations about who someone takes after, either in appearance or behaviour, being part of family life.

A strong resemblance, as portrayed here by Sally Mann, helps people feel connected to their family. A lack of likeness, perhaps due to adoption or donor conception, can sometimes make people feel they do not belong.

Gelatin silver print

Edition, exhibition print

© Sally Mann. Courtesy Gagosian

Group Object Label

Mary Berridge

Grayson with his Sister From the book *Visible Spectrum: Portraits from the World of Autism*
2021

Archival pigment print

On loan from the artist

Mary Berridge

Graham at the Louvre From the book *Visible Spectrum: Portraits from the World of Autism*
2021

Archival pigment print

On loan from the artist

Grayson sits somewhat apart from his sister. She is pondering her sandwich as food, but he appears absorbed by the bite shape in his slice of salami. Heightened interest in form is common in autistic children and can lead to strong reactions to changes in their environment. *Graham at the Louvre* illustrates how neurodiversity produces different perspectives: everyone else is looking down, but his gaze is drawn upwards, captured by a detail that has escaped everyone else's attention.

Object Label

Donald Rodney

In the House of My Father

1996–97

Donald Rodney's photograph shows a small sculpture of a house resting in his hand, made from the artist's skin. The skin had been removed during surgery for sickle cell disease, an inherited disorder that reduces life expectancy dramatically and is more prevalent among people of African and Caribbean ancestry. Rodney died of the disease at the age of 36.

Photographic print on aluminium

Arts Council Collection

Photograph taken by Andra Nelki

Donald Rodney © The Estate of Donald G Rodney

ACC59/1997

Object Label

Zineb Sedira

Mother Tongue

2002

Mother Tongue is a demonstration of a possible impact of migration on how family members might communicate. On the left, a grandmother and mother, the artist, speak in Arabic and French. In the middle, the mother and her daughter speak in French and English. On the right, grandmother and granddaughter are silent, lacking a language in common.

Video, three flat screens, colour and sound (stereo)

Duration: 5 mins

Tate: Purchased 2007

T12315

Object Label

Hardeep Pandhal

Baba Deep Thing By Mum

2014

Hardeep Pandhal's piece, created in collaboration with his mother, foregrounds the connections and disconnections that arise in families as a result of migration. The mother speaks little English, while the artist speaks little Punjabi. Communication between them takes place in other ways, including the creation of joint works of art.

Synthetic wool, hanger

Arts Council Collection

ACC41/2017

Spotlight on Chantal Joffe

Joffe's paintings of her family illuminate the complexities and tensions, and comforts and joys, that family relationships can bring. These portraits convey what it means to feel secure in one's family as a child, the anxieties of being a new mother, the pleasures and challenges in watching one's child grow up, the mixed emotions that can accompany the relationships of adults with their parents and siblings, and the entry of a new partner into the family.

Object Label

Chantal Joffe

Story

2020

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Object Label

Chantal Joffe

Me, Em and Nat

2019

Oil on board

Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

Object Label

Chantal Joffe

Mother and Child II

2005

Oil on board

Collection of Idris Khan and Annie Morris

Object Label

Chantal Joffe

Esme with a Striped Blanket

2005

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

Object Label

Chantal Joffe

Self-Portrait Combing Esme's hair

2009

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

Object Label

Chantal Joffe

Esme at the Kitchen Table

2019

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

Object Label

Chantal Joffe

Esme on the Sofa 1

2022

Oil on board

Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

Object Label

Chantal Joffe

Beach Hut

2018

Oil on board

Private collection

Object Label

Chantal Joffe

Self-Portrait with Emily

2017

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

Object Label

Chantal Joffe

The Living Room 2

2022

Oil on board with collage

Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

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