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Family imagery snapped

Photo exhibit opens in Woodstock Sat.

By Kathleen Wereszynski Murray
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Weddings, birthdays and graduations are the celebrations of life most often documented in family photo albums.

But the nine international artists in "Family Album," a new exhibition at the Center for Photography at Woodstock, delve into the complexities of the nuclear family dynamic and bring the viewer's attention to the intimate moments in between the milestones.

"What unites them is a dialogue in and through the photographs of family and the idea of a collection of images both imparting a history and telling a story," said co-curator Ariel Shanberg.

The idea for the exhibition came about after co-curator Kate Menconeri met

Argentinean photographer Sebastian Friedman at FotoFest in Texas. Friedman, whose work is represented in the exhibition, has created a series of diptychs that juxtapose portraits of housekeepers with the families that employ them next to portraits of the housekeepers with their own families.

"Photographers like Sebastian broaden what a family portrait is and could be," Shanberg said. Other artists in "Family Album" focused the camera on their own families.

"Here are professional photographers thinking very heavily and intimately about the images of family that they're creating," Shanberg said. "They are trying to capture sincere, intimate moments that reveal the person who is being photographed or the relationship between those who are being photographed."

Everyday moments

Chicago-based artist Ben Gest manipulates photographs of family members performing mundane activities like reading the newspaper, talking on the telephone, changing the TV channel and washing the dishes.

"Some of my pictures come from moments I have seen my whole life," said Gest, an adjunct professor at Columbia College in Chicago.

One humorous photograph shows Gest's father struggling to install the air conditioner in the kitchen of the family's Caldwell, N.J., home while his mother removes the Thanksgiving turkey from the oven.

"I was trying to think of two things that you potentially could need another person's help with, but ultimately are left to fend for yourself," Gest said

Gest said the photographs, which he pieces together from separate exposures of each person, are a strange balance between reality and the construction of meaning.



Courtesy Photo
"Mom and Dad" by Ben Gest

Queens-based artist Brooke Berger, a former workshop intern at the center, created portraits for her photographic series “Dermis” of her family after her grandmother suffered a heart attack.

“It’s an exploration of emotional tension in everyone’s lives” Berger said. “It is my observation on how my family was handling that and facing their own mortality.”

“Squeeze,” a staged photograph of her father holding her mother’s waist, portrays them trying to be strong during their grief.

Berger aims to show the comfort and connection of the squeeze, but at the same time a feeling of isolation and disconnectedness.

“There’s an uneasiness in the embrace,” she said.

Other artists in the exhibition include Canadian photographer Rafael Goldchain, who restaged professional portraits of his relatives from the late 19th and 20th centuries by transforming himself to look like them.

The show also includes Yolanda del Amo (New York City), Susan E. Evans (San Francisco), Spencer Murphy (London), Gerardo Repetto (Argentina) and Carla Williams (San Francisco).

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