

R E F R A M I N G

*the*

FAMILY



17 JANUARY ARTISTS SPACE 2 MARCH 1991

**ESSAYS**

CONNIE BUTLER  
BARBARA EHRENREICH  
MICKI MCGEE

**GALLERY EXHIBITION**

ESTHER BUBLEY  
DEBORAH COITO  
DANIEL CANOGAR  
LOU DRAPER  
HANH THI PHAM  
RICHARD HILL  
DOUG ISCHAR  
ZOYA KOCUR  
VINCE LEO  
KATHLEEN MACQUEEN  
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ALLAN SEKULA  
LINN UNDERHILL  
CARRIE MAE WEEMS

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ROBBIE MCCAULEY  
LETTY COTTIN POGREBIN  
MARK RICHARD  
JOHN WEIR  
& OTHERS

# REFRAMING *the* FAMILY

**ORGANIZED BY**  
CONNIE BUTLER & MICKI MCGEE

**JANUARY 17 - MARCH 2, 1991**  
ARTISTS SPACE



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS BY SUSAN WYATT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARTISTS SPACE

*Reframing the Family* is a timely and important exhibition for Artists Space. It presents works with an intellectual and historical depth that also encompass each viewer's private past in an enriching way. Further, it examines an aspect of life to which the arts are wrongly accused of being insensitive, and attempts to offer a new look at honest responses rather than a fiction which may never have existed.

This perspective is inclusive of a diverse range of familial configurations and experiences. The Latino, African- and Asian-American experiences of family, the gay and lesbian experience of partnership and child-rearing, and a wide variety of class and gendered roles are represented in the exhibition. Essays by Connie Butler and Micki McGee comment on this wide range of issues, yet carefully avoid speaking for others' experience. I am grateful to

both of them for their thoughtful analysis.

I would like to thank Barbara Ehrenreich for her invaluable contribution to the catalogue. I am also grateful to Deborah Artman who has organized a complementary series of readings, and Cara Mertes who co-organized the concurrent film series. Each of them has lent a great deal to our understanding of the issues explored in *Reframing the Family*.

## CURATORS' STATEMENT BY CONNIE BUTLER & MICKI MCGEE

*Reframing the Family* originated as a video program. The history of independent media, particularly experimental film, is laced with the subject of the family and, in its early years, was technically linked with home movies and raw, personal documentary

Special thanks are due to

Kathleen Ewing, for her help in coordinating Esther Bubley's work, and to interns Nadine Lemmon, Janiene Schaeffer, Jamie Dolinko and Suzanne Schroeder, all of whom worked tirelessly to help facilitate details of this exhibition.

Finally, my most sincere thanks go to the artists for producing the works for this significant exhibition. ✱

footage. More recently, many video artists have addressed the representation and mis-representation of the family. As the show gathered momentum to include work in other media, we decided to focus on photography and photo-based work, in part, as a way

right: still from *A Spy in the House that Ruth Built*, 1989 VANALYNE GREEN, videotape (photo/Video Data Bank); below: detail from *Forever*, 1988, LINN UNDERHILL, black & white photographs



of limiting the unwieldiness of the subject, but also because photography has inextricable art historical and popular connections. Decisions to graft a series of readings and films onto the program came naturally as the underlying relationship with text came to the fore of the curatorial premise.

Our initial impulse was to select eight artists and invite each of them to choose an artist whose work on the family had influenced them, or had been influenced by them. This approach proved to be both inspired and foolish. As a way to be inclusive and open-up the parameters of the exhibition, this generational metaphor, built into the curatorial process, was successful. The result is a show that includes three generations of artists wrestling with "the family" in its many configurations and cultural constructions. Allan Sekula's choice of his former student Vince Leo, Doug Ischar's selection of documentary

photographer Esther Bubley, and Carrie Mae Weems inclusion of Lou Draper were perhaps the most personal of the choices.

When we began preparing our list of eight, we were approached by Daniel Canogar, Zoya Kocur and Kathleen MacQueen, who proposed a group curatorial project focused on the family album and comprised of their individual work. Our tidy plan of selecting eight individual artists was fast beginning to unravel. One artist we very much wanted to include elected not to participate because the work in question, made several years ago, focused on a family member who is now undergoing chemotherapy and facing the very real possibility of death.

Another artist selected a former teacher who had a profound influence on her, but whose current work had turned away from familial representation. Collaborators Hanh Thi Pham and Deborah Coito felt that their work

for the show was singular in terms of referencing other forerunners. Canogar, Kocur, and MacQueen chose Richard Hill, someone whose work they mutually admired, but to whom none had a personal connection. Thus the family-of-artists metaphor—the notion of an extended family based on affinity rather than biology—found its mirror in the sometimes dysfunctional process of coordinating an exhibition.

Perhaps the most rigorous curatorial task was to address so personal a subject without becoming too mired down in personal baggage which is not, perhaps, as interesting to a general audience. Undoubtedly it is evident here and there. One suspects that this process of reclamation and redefinition parallels the process each of the artists has undergone in tackling so deceptively simple a subject as the nuclear family. ✱

## FAMILY VALUES BY BARBARA EHRENREICH

Sometime in the eighties, Americans had a new set of “traditional values” installed. It was part of what may someday be known as the “Reagan renovation,” that finely balanced mix of cosmetic refinement and moral coarseness which brought \$200,000 china to the White House dinner table and mayhem to the beleaguered peasantry of Central America. All of the new traditions had venerable sources. In economics, we borrowed from the Bourbons; in foreign policy, we drew on themes fashioned by the nomad warriors of the Eurasian steppes. In spiritual matters, we emulated the braying intolerance of our archenemies and esteemed customers, the Shi’ite fundamentalists.

A case could be made, of course, for the genuine American provenance of all these new “traditions.” We’ve had our own robber barons, military

adventurers, and certainly more than our share of enterprising evangelists promoting ignorance and parochialism as a state of grace. From the vantage point of the continent’s original residents, or, for example, the captive African laborers who made America a great agricultural power, our “traditional values” have always been bigotry, greed, and belligerence, buttressed by wanton appeals to a God of love.

The kindest—though from some angles most perverse—of the era’s new values was “family.” I could have lived with “flag” and “faith” as neotraditional values—not happily, but I could have managed—until “family” was press-ganged into joining them. Throughout the eighties, the winning political faction has been aggressively “profamily.” They have invoked “the family” when they trample on the rights of those who hold actual families

together, that is, women. They have used it to justify racial segregation and the formation of white-only, “Christian” schools. And they have brought it out, along with flag and faith, to silence any voices they found obscene, offensive, disturbing, or merely different.

Now, I come from a family—was raised in one, in fact—and one salubrious effect of right-wing righteousness has been to make me hew ever more firmly to the traditional values of my own progenitors. These were not people who could be accused of questionable politics or ethnicity. Nor were they members of the “liberal elite” so hated by our current conservative elite. They were blue-eyed, Scotch-Irish Democrats. They were small farmers, railroad workers, miners, shopkeepers, and migrant farm workers. In short, they fit the stereotype of “real” Americans; and their

right: ESTHER BUBLEY  
*The Congressman and the Baby Take a Trip*,  
 1952, *Life* Magazine  
 black & white photograph  
 (all Esther Bubley photos courtesy of  
 Kathleen Ewing Gallery)



values, no matter how unpopular among today’s opinion-shapers, are part of America’s tradition, too. To my mind, of course, the finest part.

But let me introduce some of my family, beginning with my father, who was, along with my mother, the ultimate source of much of my radicalism, feminism, and, by the standards of the eighties, all-around bad attitude.

One of the first questions in a test of mental competency is “Who is the president of the United States?” Even deep into the indignities of Alzheimer’s disease, my father always did well on that one. His blue eyes would widen incredulously, surprised at the neurologist’s ignorance, then he would snort in majestic indignation, “Reagan, that dumb son of a bitch.” It seemed to me a good deal—two people tested for the price of one.

Like so many of the Alzheimer’s patients he came to know, my father enjoyed watching the president on television. Most programming left him impassive, but when the old codger came on, his little eyes twinkling piggishly above the disciplined sincerity of his lower face, my father would lean forward and commence a wickedly delighted cackle. I think he was prepared, more than the rest of us, to get the joke.

But the funniest thing was Ollie North. For an ailing man, my father did a fine parody. He would slap his hand over his heart, stare rigidly at attention, and pronounce, in his deepest bass rumble, “God Bless Am-ar-ica!” I’m sure he couldn’t follow North’s testimony—who can honestly say that they did?—but the main themes were clear enough in pantomime: the watery-eyed patriotism, the extravagant

self-pity, the touching servility toward higher-ranking males. When I told my father that many people considered North a hero, a representative of the finest American traditions, he scowled and swatted at the air. Ollie North was the kind of man my father had warned me about, many years ago, when my father was the smartest man on earth.

My father had started out as a copper miner in Butte, Montana, a tiny mountain city famed for its bars, its brawls, and its distinctly unservile work force. In his view, which remained eagle-sharp even after a stint of higher education, there were only a few major categories of human beings. There were “phonies” and “decent” people, the latter group having hardly any well-known representatives outside of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John L. Lewis, the militant and brilliantly eloquent leader of the miners’ union.



“Phonies,” however, were rampant, and, for reasons I would not understand until later in life, could be found clustered especially thick in the vicinity of money or power.

Well before he taught me other useful things, like how to distinguish fool’s gold, or iron pyrite, from the real thing, he gave me some tips on the detection of phonies. For one thing, they broadened the *e* in “America” to a reverent *ahh*. They were the first to leap from their seats at the playing of “The Star Spangled Banner,” the most visibly moved participants in any prayer. They espoused clean living and admired war. They preached hard work and paid for it with nickels and dimes. They loved their country above all, but despised the low-paid and usually invisible men and women who built it, fed it, and kept it running.

Two other important categories figured in my father’s scheme of things. There were dumb people and smart ones: a distinction which had nothing to do with class or formal education, the dumb being simply all those who were taken in by the phonies. In his view, dumbness was rampant, and seemed to increase in proportion to the distance from Butte, where at least a certain hard-boiled irreverence leavened the atmosphere. The best prophylactic was to study and learn all you could, however you could, and, as he adjured me over and over: always ask *why*.

Finally, there were the rich and the poor. While poverty was not seen as an automatic virtue—my parents struggled mightily to escape it—wealth always carried a presumption of malfeasance. I was instructed that, in the presence of the rich, it was wise to

keep one’s hand on one’s wallet. “Well,” my father fairly growled, “how do you think they got their money in the first place?”

It was my mother who translated these lessons into practical politics. A miner’s daughter herself, she offered two overarching rules for comportment: never vote Republican and never cross a union picket line. The pinnacle of her activist career came in 1964, when she attended the Democratic Convention as an alternate delegate and joined the sit-in staged by civil rights leaders and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. This was not the action of a “guilt-ridden” white liberal. She classified racial prejudice along with superstition and other manifestations of backward thinking, like organized religion and overcooked vegetables. The worst thing she could find to say about a certain in-law was



right: ZOYA KOCUR  
*Family Album*, 1990  
black & white photograph with text

that he was a Republican and a churchgoer, though when I investigated these charges later in life, I was relieved to find them baseless.

My mother and father, it should be explained, were hardly rebels. The values they imparted to me, had been “traditional” for at least a generation before my parents came along. According to my father, the first great steps out of mental passivity had been taken by his maternal grandparents, John Howes and Mamie O’Laughlin Howes, sometime late in the last century. You might think their rebellions small stuff, but they provided our family with its “myth of origins” and a certain standard to uphold.

I knew little about Mamie O’Laughlin except that she was raised as a Catholic and ended up in western Montana sometime in the 1880s. Her

father, very likely, was one of those itinerant breadwinners who went west to prospect and settled for mining. At any rate, the story begins when her father lay dying, and Mamie dutifully sent to the next town for a priest. The message came back that the priest would come only if twenty-five dollars was sent in advance. This being the West at its wildest, he may have been justified in avoiding house calls. But not in the price, which was probably more cash than my great-grandmother had ever had at one time. It was on account of its greed that the church lost the souls of Mamie O’Laughlin and all of her descendents, right down to the present time. Furthermore, whether out of filial deference or natural intelligence, most of us have continued to avoid organized religion, secret societies, astrology, and New Age adventures in spiritualism.

As the story continues, Mamie O’Laughlin herself lay dying a few years later. She was only thirty-one, the mother of three small children, one of them an infant whose birth, apparently, led to a mortal attack of pneumonia. This time, a priest appeared unsummoned. Because she was too weak to hold the crucifix, he placed it on her chest and proceeded to administer the last rites. But Mamie was not dead yet. She pulled herself together at the last moment, flung the crucifix across the room, fell back, and died. This was my great-grandmother. Her husband, John Howes, is a figure of folkloric proportions in my memory, well known in Butte many decades ago as a powerful miner and a lethal fighter. There are many stories about John Howes, all of which point to a profound inability to accept authority in any of its manifestations, earthly or

divine. As a young miner, for example, he caught the eye of the mine owner for his skill at handling horses. The boss promoted him to an aboveground driving job, which was a great career leap for the time. Then the boss committed a foolish and arrogant error. He asked John to break in a team of horses for his wife's carriage. Most people would probably be flattered by such a request, but not in Butte, and certainly not John Howes. He declared that he was no man's servant, and quit on the spot.

Like his own wife, John Howes was an atheist or, as they more likely put it at the time, a freethinker. He, too, had been raised as a Catholic—on a farm in Ontario—and he, too, had had a dramatic, though somehow less glorious, falling out with the local clergy. According to legend, he once abused his position as an altar boy by

urinating, covertly of course, in the holy water. This so enhanced his enjoyment of the Easter communion service that he could not resist letting a few friends in on the secret. Soon the priest found out and young John was defrocked as an altar boy and condemned to eternal damnation.

The full weight of this transgression hit a few years later, when he became engaged to a local woman. The priest refused to marry them and forbade the young woman to marry John anywhere, on pain of excommunication. There was nothing to do but head west for the Rockies, but not before settling his score with the church. According to legend, John's last act in Ontario was to drag the priest down from his pulpit and slug him, with his brother, presumably, holding the scandalized congregation at bay.

right: ESTHER BUBLEY  
*Nursery School Pupils at Bayway Community  
Center, Elizabeth, New Jersey, Standard Oil,  
1944, black & white photograph*



I have often wondered whether my great-grandfather was caught up in the radicalism of Butte in its heyday: whether he was an admirer of Joe Hill, Big Bill Haywood, or Mary “Mother” Jones, all of whom passed through Butte to agitate, and generally left with the Pinkertons on their tails. But the record is silent on this point. All I know is one last story about him, which was told often enough to have the ring of another “traditional value.”

According to my father, John Howes worked on and off in the mines after his children were grown, eventually saving enough to buy a small plot of land and retire to farming. This was his dream, anyway, and a powerful one it must have been for a man who had spent so much of his life underground in the dark. So he loaded up a horse-drawn cart with all his money and belongings and headed downhill,

toward Montana's eastern plains. But along the way he came to an Indian woman walking with a baby in her arms. He offered her a lift and ascertained, pretty easily, that she was destitute. So he gave her his money, all of it, turned the horse around, and went back to the mines.

Far be it from me to interpret this gesture for my great-grandfather, whom I knew only as a whiskery, sweat-smelling, but straight-backed old man in his eighties. Perhaps he was enacting his own uncompromising version of Christian virtue, even atoning a little for his youthful offenses to the faithful. But at another level I like to think that this was one more gesture of defiance of the mine owners who doled out their own dollars so grudgingly — a way of saying, perhaps, that whatever they had to offer, he didn't really need all that much.

So these were the values, sanctified by tradition and family loyalty, that I brought with me to adulthood. Through much of my growing-up, I thought of them as some mutant strain of Americanism, an idiosyncrasy which seemed to grow rarer as we clambered into the middle class. Only in the sixties did I begin to learn that my family's militant skepticism and oddball rebelliousness were part of a much larger stream of American dissent. I discovered feminism, the antiwar movement, the civil rights movement. I learned that millions of Americans, before me and around me, were “smart” enough, in my father's terms, to have asked “Why?”—and, beyond that, the far more radical question, “Why not?”

These are also the values I brought into the Reagan-Bush era, when all the dangers I had been alerted to as a child

were suddenly realized. The “phonies” came to power on the strength, aptly enough, of a professional actor's finest performance. The “dumb” were being led and abetted by low-life preachers and intellectuals with expensively squandered educations. And the rich, as my father predicted, used the occasion to dip deep into the wallets of the desperate and the distracted.

It's been hard times for a traditionalist of my persuasion. Long-standing moral values—usually claimed as “Judeo-Christian” but actually of much broader lineage—were summarily tossed, along with most familiar forms of logic. We were told, at one time or another, by the president or his henchpersons, that trees cause pollution, that welfare causes poverty, and that a bomber designed for mass destruction may be aptly named the *Peacemaker*. “Terrorism” replaced

missing children to become our national bugaboo and—simultaneously—one of our most potent instruments of foreign policy.

At home, the poor and the middle class were shaken down, and their loose change funneled blithely upwards to the already overfed.

Greed, the ancient lubricant of commerce, was declared a wholesome stimulant. Nancy Reagan observed the deep recession of '82 and '83 by re-decorating the White House, and continued with this Marie Antoinette theme while advising the underprivileged, the alienated, and the addicted to “say no.” Young people, mindful of their elders’ Wall Street capers, abandoned the study of useful things for finance banking and other occupations derived, ultimately, from three-card monte. While the poor donned plastic outerware and cardboard coverings,

the affluent ran nearly naked through the streets, working off power meals of goat cheese, walnut oil, and crème fraîche.

Religion, which even I had hoped would provide a calming influence and reminder of mortal folly, decided to join the fun. In an upsurge of piety, millions of Americans threw their souls and their savings into evangelical empires designed on the principle of pyramid scams. Even the sleazy downfall of our telemessiahs—caught masturbating in the company of ten-dollar prostitutes or fornicating in their Christian theme parks—did not discourage the faithful. The unhappily pregnant were mobbed as “baby-killers”; sexual nonconformists—gay and lesbian—were denounced as “child molesters”; atheists found themselves lumped with “Satanists,” Communists, and consumers of human flesh.

Yet somehow, despite it all, a trickle of dissent continued. There were homeless people who refused to be shelved in mental hospitals for the crime of poverty, strikers who refused to join the celebration of unions in faraway countries and scabs at home, women who insisted that their lives be valued above those of accidental embryos, parents who packed up their babies and marched for peace, students who protested the ongoing inversion of normal, nursery-school-level values in the name of a more habitable world.

I am proud to add my voice to all these. For dissent is also a “traditional value,” and in a republic founded by revolution, a more deeply native one than smug-faced conservatism can ever be. Feminism was practically invented here, and ought to be regarded as one of our proudest exports to the world. Likewise, it tickles my sense of



right, top and bottom:  
CELIA ALVAREZ MUNOZ  
*Postales*, 1988, details  
mixed media installation  
6x9 feet each

patriotism that Third World insurgents have often borrowed the ideas of our own African-American movement. And in what ought to be a source of shame to some and pride to others, our history of labor struggle is one of the hardest-fought and bloodiest in the world.

No matter that patriotism is too often the refuge of scoundrels. Dissent, rebellion, and all-around hell-raising remain the true duty of patriots. 林



From *The Worst Years of Our Lives* by Barbara Ehrenreich.  
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above: DEBORAH COITO  
*Untitled*, 1990  
 black & white photograph

**"What shall I call you people?"**

# **RETHINKING THE MYTH OR WHAT I WANT TO BE WHEN I GROW UP BY CONNIE BUTLER**

Several months ago during the height of one of the many NEA battles in the protracted cultural war that is sweeping this country, I found myself seated next to a representative of the American Family Association on a panel discussing censorship in media. Though a small episode in the bigger new-morality agenda that has infiltrated every level of the arts, it had a profound effect on what many have come to view as a sinister network of issues put forth by a vocal few to inhibit the freedoms of a stunning diversity of people. I found myself in an argument with Mr. American Family over Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ*, speaking the same language but with diametrically opposed goals in mind. What offends the Reverend Wildmon and the minions of morality is Serrano's manipulation of the religious symbol which they take to represent

the general loss-of-faith malaise that is, we keep being told, infecting us all. This denigration is precisely the artist's point and from where his irony is drawn. He too probes the dearth of meaning in our present-day symbols. Battles of this kind are rife with similar paradoxes—an organization calling itself the American Family Association acts in the name of tradition and morality in direct conflict with those "American Family" values it espouses. Their well-rehearsed attack could not have less to do with tradition, the golden rule, decency, fairness or a moral structure any rational person would want to emulate or pass on to his or her children. Of whose family are we speaking? On what is the model and the deep fear of its disintegration based? Without addressing the inevitable question of whether or not the nation

is nearing the edge of a spiritual precipice, it seems that the question is not one of worship but of power. Though the American Family crusaders and their ilk argue morality, the struggle appears to be about a loss of power in the guise of a model which historically has very little basis in fact. The recent proliferation of media attention given to issues surrounding the family has generated a profile that is often one-sided if not propagandistic. *NBC Nightly News* recently launched a segment called "The American Family" whose first installment tackled the ever-pressing question of life in suburbia and the importance of the family car. Consider the less transparent example of the constant portraits of the war wives and children of Desert Shield mercenaries. Are we willing to create another generation of single mothers and fatherless children while

right:  
ESTHER BUBLEY  
*The McKoy Family, Topeka, Kansas,*  
How America Lives, *Ladies Home Journal*,  
October, 1951  
black & white photograph



feverishly dusting off the Ozzie and Harriet myth for the umpteenth time?

What apparently needs to be restated again and again is not only that the idealized model doesn't work but, in these restrictive terms, it does not even exist. We have unmarried couples with children, single parents, gay and lesbian couples with and without children, homeless families, couples with no children, couples with adoptive children, unmarried couples without children, both parents working away from the home, mothers working while fathers keep house, and children with no parents at all. The recent nostalgia for past solutions is based on a post-war patriarchal model that was short-lived the first time and applicable to only a privileged few. The pre-industrial history of work and familial structure in this country is more accurately one in which men and

women primarily worked side by side in the home until men were lured to factories and other work places outside the home. For immigrant families, the hearth-tending mother was never an economic option. It is thus the domestic retrenchment experienced after World War II which has brainwashed two generations into believing that the aberration of the two parent model is what we have to live up to. In *Family Politics*, Letty Pogrebin defines the family as fetish:

Like a sexual fetish..., an ideological fetish is dehumanized and dehumanizing, the object of compulsive rather than volitional devotion. A fetish triggers a response based on obsession or conditioning, not sense or sentiment. The family has become that kind of fetish for people who prefer inanimate concepts to organic human institutions. They want the Family to be concrete and to deliver fixed pleasures as predictable as those the shoe or silk panties deliver to the sexual fetishist.<sup>2</sup>

The nature of the right's gross misreading is the same we face in the onslaught on the arts. It is, in fact the same tactical maneuver that has allowed an intellectual witch hunt to secure its rhetoric. As Lisa Duggan summarily points out in *Sex Panics*

...words assume the reverse of their common meaning: liberation becomes chaos, desire becomes deviance, and dissent becomes the work of the devil.<sup>3</sup>

So. Why organize an exhibition about the family? Art alone, particularly photography within a gallery situation, cannot be prescriptive. Much of the work in *Reframing the Family* is surprisingly nostalgic or personal. What these artists offer is not a definitive answer to the dilemma of the nuclear family but basic questions about its structure, its relevance and its function while trying to glean and preserve what, if anything, is worthy of

right and far right:  
KATHLEEN MACQUEEN  
*thou shalt not tread on graven images*, 1990  
photographic details from installation



our continued attention and nurture. It is no accident that fifteen years ago there was much work about the family and that the subject is now being taken up again. Much of the text and subtext of the *Democracy* project by Group Material, for example, returns again and again to issues of the family. As the moralistic right has continued to take gratuitous swipes at the community of artists and, by extension, anyone intellectually engaged in the culture machine, a large network of people has developed who are also concerned with these issues—from the other side. An alternative family of sorts. And so, as new areas are laid bare for assault, artists and cultural activists are having to reclaim territory on a wide range of issues.

Not surprisingly, the most resonant work about the family is photographic. As Roland Barthes mused in

*Camera Lucida*, in recounting his discovery of the poignant likeness of his mother in an image of her as a child, the photographic process is one of violence and reconstruction. Memory is not possible without images and identity is fundamentally linked to the photographic mirror. Nearly all of the artists in *Reframing the Family* work off of their own family photographs or engage personal texts to structure meaning. The relationship to text is most often a diaristic one. And, finally, the work is optimistic. There is a sense of pushing new definitions while preserving what is most essential.

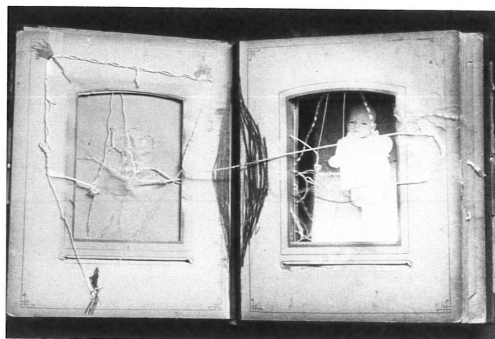
European countries are generally ahead of the United States in granting legal rights to same-sex couples—Denmark being the furthest by granting “registered partnerships” to homosexual couples—and no state in

the United States permits same-sex marriage. Only recently in New York have rent control regulations pushed domestic partnerships to be recognized in court.<sup>4</sup> The judge in the landmark case delimited criteria which are instructive in understanding what constitutes a permanent life partnership in the eyes of the law. The definition applies to any familial relationship regardless of where gender lines are drawn and redrawn:

- “Exclusivity and longevity” of a relationship
- the “level of emotional and financial commitment”
- how a couple has “conducted their everyday lives and held themselves out to society”
- the “reliance placed upon one another for daily family services”
- “...the totality of the relationship as evidenced by the dedication, caring and self-sacrifice of the parties should, in the final analysis, control”<sup>5</sup>

Doug Ischar has explored gay domestic relationships in previous

right: DANIEL CANOGAR  
*Photo Family Album #1*, 1990  
 photo album, kodalith,  
 fluorescent lamp, string, graphite  
 open: 10x16x3 inches; closed: 10x8x3 inches



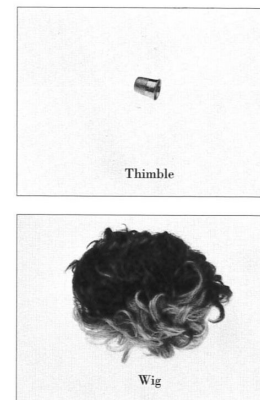
work such as *Household Misappropriations* by juxtaposing photographs from his own life with World War II photographs appropriated from *Life* magazine. While construction of a gay sensibility and homoerotic fantasy are central to his current work, the erotic parallels are drawn another way in *Surrender in Uniform*, which deals with the lives of the artist's working class parents. By employing a documentary format and focusing on loaded domestic objects (tranquilizers, a sewing kit, a doll's dress, a boy's jock strap) a certain distance from the subject enhances the gender/generation confusion and probes the complexity of the parent/child equation. The work also cuts to the heart of questions of "life partnership" by harking back to the very context from which traditional values about "normalcy" were promulgated.

Ischar's choice of documentary photographer Esther Bubley for inclusion in the exhibition broadens the context of both their work. Bubley's photo-journalistic format and WPA approach to subject references the era against which Ischar is pushing. Much of Bubley's work has focused on families, including a project commissioned by *Life* Magazine in 1952 which records a meeting, orchestrated for the cameras, between a Congressman and a young child. This calculated manipulation of power on the part of a government official in the life of the child is a kind of faux assimilation. The documentary image as propaganda becomes a metaphor for the imposition of the patriarchal structure on the situation of the disenfranchised.

Deborah Coito quietly rages against hierarchy in work which pairs personal and found text with staged

images often exaggerating or parodying her own family role as a lesbian mother with two children. She takes on, in her words, a "critical drag" which scrambles ingrained familial equations. Repeated images of her own children are paired with a marriage portrait of her brother and his wife who is black and underscored by a quote from Coito's parents: "When asked by his wife if he preferred his son to marry a black woman or a gay man, Fred could not answer"; in another self portrait, "Let me lend you fifty dollars so you can buy a new pantsuit to win him back." The gleaming faces of Anita Bryant and her squeaky clean family stare out of a press photo next to a photo of Coito and her family playing gender-fuck dress-up. Options are reframed and contrasted against the narrow scope of her parents' conditioned and confused generation.

right: DOUG ISCHAR  
*Surrender in Uniform*, 1991  
 photographic details from installation



In collaboration with Hanh Thi Pham, a first generation Vietnamese American woman whose choreographed tableaux feature herself struggling with symbols of her cultural identity, the two women make parallel analogies about the maintenance of individual freedoms in the face of cultural expectations. Pham's work further raises issues of the cultural myths within Asian families that fall outside a Western domestic education: the hierarchy of respect based on age which extends to siblings; or the translation of the intensely male-dominated system when it is strained and supplanted by the economic needs imposed by immigration to a capitalist system. Black and white images of Pham's family in Vietnam are embedded in the fabric of the color tableaux. Idealized and actual reality merge in a dialogue about outside and inside as

the oldest daughter Pham challenges the rules about ancestor worship and male power passed generationally by blood. In a voice shared by many of the artists in the exhibition, she suggests that the familial past is not expendable, but in need of reassessment. Both she and Coito ask how difference is possible within difference, whether woman, lesbian, mother, person of color, artist.

The problem of cultural assimilation as expressed through language is the territory explored by Celia Alvarez Munoz. Munoz works in a variety of media depending on her subject, and draws on her heritage as a Catholic and a Chicana from El Paso, Texas. Though Munoz has been making art for only ten years, she has found rich materials for her textual/conceptual work in her own bicultural, bilingual upbringing. The *Postales* series of photographically derived paintings, street signs and

scrolls addresses the bizarre conflation of cultures that occurs when George Bush's Texas and home-grown Catholicism meet in suburbia. The ironies of the clash locate the text:

This came to be when we moved from Canal Street to Evergreen Road. The entrance to Washington Park zoo. Many times we played *Florin Dishes* *Florin Dan* or *El Saponi*. The former was *London Bridge*, the latter, *Here Comes a Pony*.

These are punctuated by pairs of street signs in Spanglish (a bastardization of English and phonetic Spanish) which index the cultural overlay. They are the linguistic parallel of the painted backyard with a madonna and pink flamingo.

Interpreting personal histories in order to understand the societal machinations which, however insidious, provide the framework for hierarchies of respect and learning, is undertaken in a collaborative project



right: ZOYA KOCUR  
*Family Album*, 1990  
 black & white photograph with text  
 opposite page:  
 top row: DEBORAH COITO, *Untitled*, 1990  
 3 black & white photographs  
 bottom: HANH THI PHAM, *Untitled*, 1990  
 color photograph



by Daniel Canogar, Zoya Kocur and Kathleen MacQueen titled *Make Yourself at Home*. Using a more formal approach to bridging the gap between the public and the private, each explores how an architecture and language of the family has been established since the time of turn-of-the-century America, through the history of the family album. Their investigations attempt to read the family album as fiction through the vehicle of their own personal fascinations with family images. The installation recreates a domestic interior, inviting the viewer to peruse the homey territory—mirroring the act of leafing through an album to reconstruct a visual history.

There are certain moments when understanding rushes into a vortex of comprehension of one's own situation. Like the moment when the television

evangelist slaps the forehead of his kneeling supplicant ("you could knock 'em over with a feather"). Like the point at which we realize that our own parents are people less perfect than we were taught to believe. That perhaps the less perfect family is the more human. And that there are other ways to do it—that the unit can be pruned open, tugged at, jerked around and somehow glued back together in a million different combinations that are less airtight but better, new and necessary ways to survive.

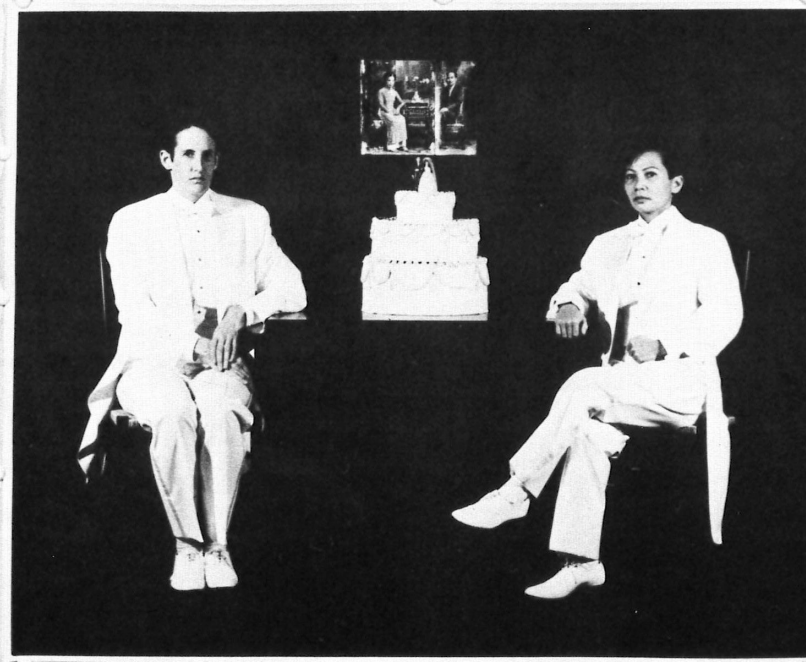
Coming to grips with one's own feminism can be much the same—feeling confident that it's fine to say "Yes, I am," without preface or qualification. I remember reading Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and having the creeping realization that we are dangerously near her fictional world where reproductive choices are

controlled by men, and women who have not been disappeared by AIDS are bred like cattle. Unless we push hard for a time when childbearing is an accepted phase of adulthood and not a governmentally sanctioned disability, when daycare is publicly funded, parental leave guaranteed, mothers and children protected by welfare, abortions made safe and legal for all, the survival of any form of the family is threatened. 永无休止

#### NOTES

1. "Censorship in the Media," panel sponsored by Media Law Project, New York Law School, Spring, 1990.
2. Letty Cottin Pogrebin, *Family Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), p. 7.
3. Lisa Duggan, "Sex Panics," *Democracy, A Project by Group Material*, Brian Wallis ed. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), p. 210.
4. Philip S. Gutis, "Small Steps Toward Acceptance Renew Debate on Gay Marriage," *New York Times*, Sunday, November 5, 1989, E24.
5. Philip S. Gutis, "New York Court Defines Family to Include Homosexual Couples," *New York Times*, Friday, July 7, 1989, B16.

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above: VINCE LEO  
"Grace in the Sink"  
from *Birthday*, 1988  
multimedia installation

## THE OVEREXTENDED FAMILY BY MICKI MCGEE

As I review videotapes, slides, and notes for this essay, two local public television stations have begun their year-end pledge drives with special marathon presentations of family therapist John Bradshaw's latest series, *Homecoming*. The unprecedented success of Bradshaw's previous PBS production, *On the Family*, catapulted his spin-off books to *The New York Times* bestseller list. Almost evangelical, always psychological, Bradshaw focuses on the family unit as the most effective site for personal and social change, preaching familial reconciliation as the basis for problem solving.

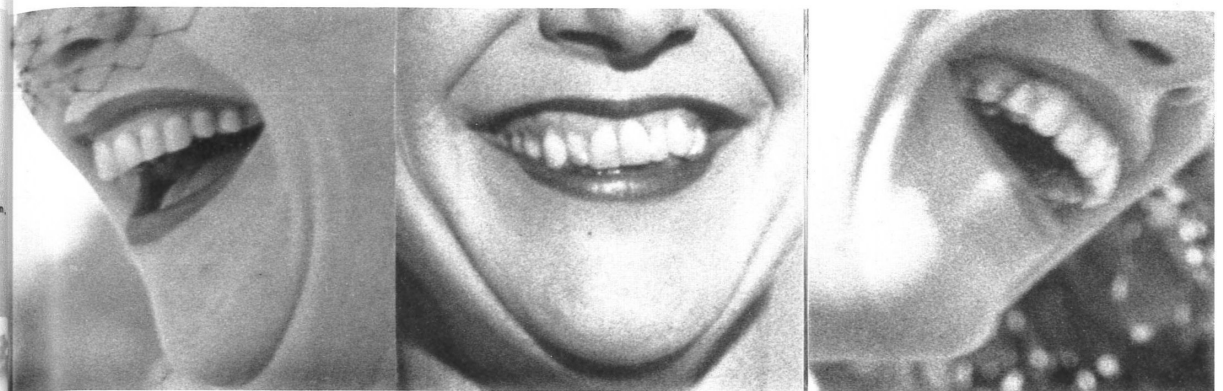
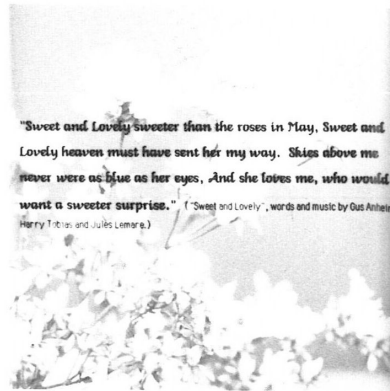
While there's little doubt John Bradshaw's well-intentioned work has helped many individuals struggling with the grief of failed families, the discourse of "dysfunctional families" and "co-dependency" has something in common with the conservative rhetoric

of groups such as the Reverend Donald E. Wildmon's American Family Association.<sup>1</sup> I suspect that both Bradshaw and Wildmon would shudder at my comparison—at even occupying the same sentence—so different are their political sensibilities. But there are striking similarities in both the rhetoric of the right and the liberal discourse of family therapy: in each, responsibility for the failures of society is shifted to the family and social problems are re-characterized as psychological issues.<sup>2</sup> While conservative constituencies call for the return of the traditional family, the vast audience of the Bradshaw phenomenon—those public television watchers and self-help book buyers—call for a healing of the family. Although it's unlikely that either of these groups' desires will be realized, their popular appeal is symptomatic—indicative of

the attenuation of the nuclear family. As the traditional Caucasian-American family—Dad at work and Mom at home with the two kids—dwindles to a mere 4% of the total U.S. population, this hallowed image has become a bludgeon used to hammer away at personal freedoms. Meanwhile, real families—in their myriad configurations—are overextended, stretched to the limits of finite individual resources.<sup>3</sup>

The current attenuation of the family has its roots in industrialization: as production moved from the home to the factory, the social function of the family shifted. No longer a site for the production of commodities (for example, spinning, weaving, sewing, candle-making and canning were all parts of a former domestic economy), most families in the industrialized world have ceased to function as productive economic units.<sup>4</sup> Relieved

right:  
LINN UNDERHILL  
detail from  
*Forever*, 1988  
black & white photographs



of this productive function, the family unit has been charged with the labor of biological and cultural reproduction (or socialization), as well as the task of fulfilling personal needs.

This split between the public and private spheres—between financially compensated labor in the “world” and the unwaged housework and “labors of love” of the domestic sphere—pits personal life against the demands of production. In the words of social theorist Eli Zaretsky:

Under capitalism almost all of our personal needs are restricted to the family. This is what gives the family its resilience, in spite of the constant predictions of its demise, and this also explains its inner torment; it simply cannot meet the pressure of being the only refuge in a brutal society.<sup>5</sup>

Charged with the impossible task of being a “haven in a heartless world,” the family is our fascinating failure. And as this world becomes ever more

heartless, the failures grow ever more frightening. Witness the massive (and successful) lobbying of corporate interests for a presidential veto of the Family and Medical Leave Act, a measure which would have required that companies employing 50 or more people allow up to 12 *unpaid* weeks of leave each year. Neither kind, nor gentle, the June 1990 veto reveals the stark disparity between the words and actions of the Bush Administration, but more importantly, the defeat signals the degree to which personal life and public productivity are at odds.

While all working people suffer from this short-term, bottom-line mentality, women workers, who continue to tend to most familial emergencies, are most severely affected.<sup>6</sup> The predicaments that female workers face—the daily dilemmas of juggling childcare and work,

the exhaustion of the “second shift,” —are inadvertent results of the partial successes of feminism. No longer “protected” by paternalistic family and divorce courts, women who have devoted their lives to raising families and making homes find themselves defined as equal economic partners (though their unwaged contributions are often excluded from settlements and they are frequently ill-prepared to re-enter the waged work force).<sup>7</sup> Though feminism has pushed the average woman’s earnings from 59 cents for every man’s dollar in the 1970s to around 70 cents today, wage parity continues to be an elusive goal.<sup>8</sup> With less than three-fourths of a man’s earning power, single mothers and the children they support are the fastest growing group of the U.S. poor.<sup>9</sup> Responding to the shifting roles and vacuum of support in this critical

interim juncture, the political right has played on the vulnerability of women no longer “protected” by the family.<sup>10</sup> To the problem of the second shift, they propose a ready solution: women can return to their proper sphere of home and family.

Although economic realities militate against a mass exodus of women from the workplace,<sup>11</sup> conservatives introduced the 1979 Family Protection Act to facilitate this return to the home. This omnibus bill, written by Moral Majority executive director Robert Billings and introduced by Senator Paul Laxalt, aimed to strengthen the American family and promote the virtues of family life through education, tax assistance and related measures.<sup>12</sup> To this end, the bill sought to:

- 1) eliminate Federal funds to schools which purchase materials that

“denigrate, diminish or deny the role differences between the sexes as it (sic) has been historically understood in the United States.”<sup>13</sup>

- 2) eliminate Federal funding to any “individual, group, foundation, commission, corporation, association, or other entity which presents homosexuality, male or female, as an acceptable alternative life style or suggests that it can be an acceptable life style.”<sup>14</sup>

- 3) require parental notification when a minor is treated for venereal disease or sought abortion counseling.

- 4) restore prayer and religious education in public schools.

Although the bill failed to make it through committee in its omnibus form (a less sweeping bit of social security legislation, H.R. 4122, later acquired the name “Family Protection Act”), the Act remains instructive as it outlined the conservative political agenda for the decade ahead.<sup>15</sup> Current political battles—over reproductive choice and parental notification, federal funding for the arts and for

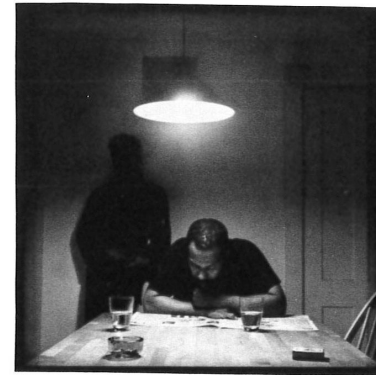
AIDS education, and the ongoing struggle over religious instruction and censorship of school books—were outlined in this battle plan. The strategy, articulated by *Ms.* magazine founder Letty Cottin Pogrebin, was simple: cloak the conservative agenda in the seemingly virtuous aims of “family values.”

If you favor male supremacy, fear the loss of patriarchal power, and hate the idea that women and children might control their own destinies, you can mask your indelicate views behind a clever all-American slogan: Call yourself “pro-family” and all you have left to worry about is defining the kind of family “family” is, so that you can comfortably be for it.<sup>16</sup>

*Reframing the Family* presents work that questions the definition of “family” and the social roles that both real and rhetorical families have come to play. More an inquiry than a polemic, this exhibition looks at the



right and opposite:  
CARRIE MAE WEEMS  
*Untitled* (triptych, man reading  
newspaper), 1990  
silverprint, 3 panels  
(photos/ Adam Reich; courtesy P.P.O.W.)



ambivalence, longings, and struggles which have been relegated to the domestic sphere. Though we run the risk of being just another minor symptom of the nuclear family's fragility—of focusing attention on the family as an isolated social unit as Reverend Wildmon and John Bradshaw have done—we take that risk because of the importance of reframing the issues.

The act of reframing the family takes many forms. The photographers, installation artists, and film and video makers presented here employ diverse tactics and tones: some are confessional and revelatory, while others are analytical; some are somber, even sobering, while others are absurd and comical. Many artists (among them photographers Doug Ischar, Deborah Coito, Hanh Thi Pham) challenge the rigid heterosexual basis for the family.

Their work suggests that domestic partnership, as much as parenthood, might well constitute a more expansive and accurate notion of family. Cara Mertes questions the naturalized construction of the family in her work-in-progress, *The Natural Order*, while Jan Mathew and Martha Rosler each confront the radical implications of new reproductive technologies on our concept of the family.

Mathew's documentary *Let's Not Pretend*, produced for English Channel 4's *OUT! on Tuesday* series, recounts Parliamentary attempts to deny artificial insemination technologies to all but married women. On first consideration, this seems a minor problem: no high-tech tools are necessary for insemination; all that is needed is a willing sperm donor. But her documentary analyzes the very real problems that such limitations impose:

when a lesbian asks a male friend to donate sperm, they face the dilemma of whether to seek HIV testing. And many lesbians, fearful of a legal system that privileges biological fathers over "ill-fit" lesbian parents, express concern over anything other than anonymous sperm donation. If sperm banks are closed to unmarried women, the availability of safe, anonymous donors is severely limited. Although *Let's Not Pretend* documents legal moves made in England, similar legislation has been considered in the United States. Martha Rosler's *Born to be Sold: Martha Rosler Reads the Strange Case of Baby \$M*, reminds us that U.S. courts continue to privilege a ten-second squirt of sperm over nine months gestation and the labor of childbirth. As the tenuous biological basis of the family unravels with biotechnological developments, Rosler

and Mathew argue that women must retain control of their reproductive lives, free from legislative limitations and the mandates of the marketplace.

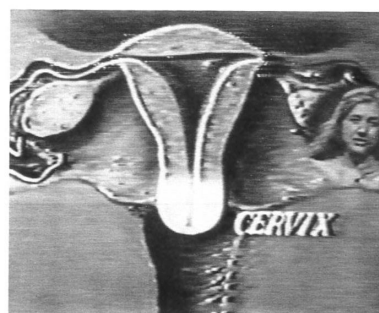
Along with challenging the heterosexual and biological basis of the family, several video and film makers represented in the program dispossess us of any idealized image of the family. Documentaries by Cara DeVito, Mary Ellen Strom, and Camille Billops and James Hatch reveal domestic abuse that stands in sharp contrast to the happy families of *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*. In *Suzanne*, Suzanne Billops and Hatch expose a pattern of wife and child abuse in one African-American family. The documentary begins after the perpetrator has died, when mother and daughter can speak frankly of the abuse they endured and the repercussions they continue to experience. Strom's *Shut*

*Up and Listen* recounts a story of incestuous abuse, while DeVito's *Always Love Your Man* uncovers the ambivalent affection in an abusive relationship. To produce the documentary, DeVito moved into her grandmother's home for one week in 1975, shooting with an open-reel black and white video recorder. DeVito's widowed grandmother speaks lovingly of a husband who beat and humiliated her. The facts of the abuse emerge with startling nonchalance, amidst her poignant description of how much she misses him. Who, she asks, will share the small pains and joys of daily life with her now that he's gone? As long as no other part of the culture fulfills these fundamental needs, the family—no matter how abusive—retains the "resilience" that Zaretsky describes.

These ambivalent affections can hold one enthralled long beyond the

lifetime of the objects of those affections. Vanalyne Green's *A Spy in the House that Ruth Built* demonstrates the indelible imprint of the family of origin. Green describes a nostalgic longing for family and father that resurfaces as a sexualized obsession with baseball. Calling herself "a forty-year-old trying to piece together a family from webbing, the silhouette of a house, the shelter of a stadium and the ephemera of masculinity," she teases out the meaning of her obsession with baseball and discovers a yearning for connection with "a Kentucky hillbilly, turned lifer in the army, otherwise known as my father."

Not all of the work focuses on individual families or autobiographical accounts. Photographer Linn Underhill juxtaposes 1960s-era wedding photographs taken by her mother (who was a professional portrait



stills, above left and center: MARTHA ROSLER, *Born to be Sold*; *Martha Rosler Reads the Strange Case of Baby \$M*, 1988; above right: RICHARD FUNG, *The Way to My Father's Village*, 1988 (photos, right and left: Video Data Bank; center: Jamie Dolinko)

photographer) with a text that reveals the tedium of married life. A list of nouns—"the lipstick, the toothpaste, the first time, the shower cap, the condom, the blush, the lotion, the shampoo, the diaphragm"—progresses through stages of a middle-class marriage: "the sailboat, the bypass, the stocks, the journals, the safe deposit box, the portfolio...."

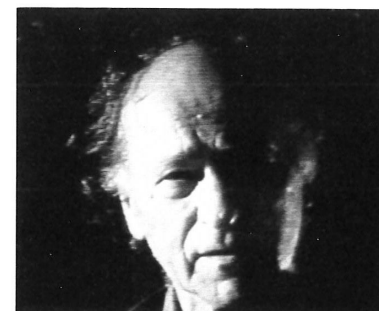
Often mistaken as autobiographical, Mako Idemitsu's video melodramas consider the repercussions of the split between public and private that encourages frustrated Japanese women to realize their ambitions vicariously—through emotionally incestuous relationships with their sons.<sup>17</sup> *Yoji, What's Wrong With You?*, part of her ongoing investigation of the Japanese family, is instructive as a cross-cultural reference. Her eloquent, culturally-specific representations point to the

problems that will develop in any society that excludes women from the public sphere, stifling their ambitions and warping their relationships with children and spouses.

Whether particular or paradigmatic, most of the photos, installations, videotapes, and films included in this exhibition forge links between the public and the private spheres, working to re-integrate these sectors and to re-implicate the public sphere. Richard Fung's *The Way to My Father's Village* demonstrates the impact of Chinese political upheavals on his father's life. Fung traces his immigrant father's voyage to Trinidad and weaves together the political and personal forces that constructed the lives of both father and son. Beth B and Ida Applebroog's mother-daughter collaboration, *Belladonna*, interweaves text fragments from the testimonies of child-murderer

and wife-beater Joel Steinberg and Nazi physician Josef Mengele with Sigmund Freud's famous essay on the masochistic position, "A Child Is Being Beaten," to suggest the interplay between authoritarian parenting and repressive regimes.

In Sherry Millner's videotape *Scenes from the Micro-War* comedy and analysis intersect as a male narrator introduces his family. "Here we are," he says, "what you might call an average American family—the wife and I and the two kids." They're completely average, except for the fourth member of the family, their little son Contra, who's a lifeless mannequin. With "average" debunked, the absurdist narrative that follows collapses the skewed logic of military spending onto the domestic unit of the family. Clothed in camouflage, the couple discuss their household budget



stills, above left: BETH B. & IDA APPLEBROOG, *Belladonna*, 1989; above center and right: SHERRY MILLNER, *Scenes from the Microwar*, 1985 (photos, left: Video Data Bank; center: Jamie Dolinko; right: Micki McGee)

and conclude that "if Uncle Sam can spend 42% of their current income on military outlays, so can we." The family is depicted as literally embattled—struggling to survive in a world where their camouflage fashions are the metaphor for the necessity of protecting the beleaguered private sphere from a hostile world.

The battle for familial survival takes on a more poignant tone in Vince Leo's multimedia installation, *Birth-day*. Leo documents the first two years of his daughter's life—from the birth room to the birthday cake—in color slides, with a soundtrack of answering machine messages. The messages reveal the fragility of the support system for this new life: there are calls from an irritated car mechanic dunning the Leos for "holding him up"; from a possible employer at an art trucking company; from grandparents

checking on "how Nancy is" or "how Grace is doing"; from a sick babysitter who cancels the couple's evening out. With great economy of means, this intimate look reveals the strains of "starting a family" (i.e. having a child) when the biological family of parents and grandparents are the sole support for the new born.

Perhaps this fragility would be of less consequence if the family had not been charged with the unmanageable task of fulfilling all the needs of the young. In her book *Silences*, Tillie Olsen describes the conflict that the schism between public and private, between work and family, meant in her life:

Motherhood means being instantly interruptible, responsive, responsible. Children need one now (and remember, in our society, the family must often try to be the center for love and health the outside world is not). The very fact that these are needs of love, not duty, that one feels

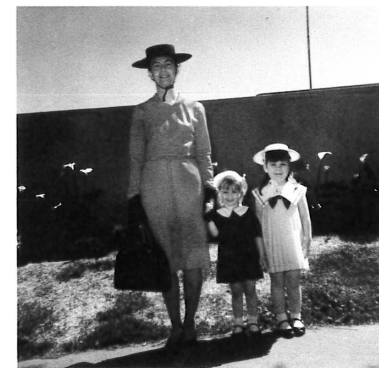
them as one's self; *that there is no one else to be responsible for these needs*, gives them primacy.<sup>18</sup>

Though traditional roles (and current realities) usually leave women to shoulder this caretaking responsibility, Leo's slide installation reminds us that these conflicts are experienced variously by both men and women.

While the strain of starting families is felt by both men and women, these stresses are far more acute for African-Americans, who have traditionally been denied access to economic resources. Commenting on the "racialization of poverty," Margaret B. Wilderson and Jewell Handy Grisham observe:

One of the most pernicious aspects of the white patriarchal definition of an acceptable household (one headed by a male who is able to provide for his family) is that the masses of black youth and men who are excluded from the opportunities and rewards of the economic system cannot possibly meet this requirement. Then both males and females of the subjugated

this page and opposite:  
ALLAN SEKULA, photos from  
*Meditations on a Triptych*, 1973-78  
three C-prints with text



class are castigated as being morally unfit because they have not held their reproductive functions in abeyance.<sup>19</sup>

Though Carrie Mae Weems' photographs make no direct comment on this economic reality, this background is useful as a touchstone when considering her photographic narratives. In a series of starkly elegant photographs, Weems sits at a table—perhaps a dining room table—in a domestic setting. She appears alternately with a male partner, with her daughter, with supportive women friends, with a caged bird, and finally, alone playing solitaire. The partner, the daughter, and the female friends never occupy the same frame; they are discrete aspects of a fragmented support system. Her richly modulated vernacular text describes a search for “a man who didn't mind her bodacious manner, varied talents, hard laughter, multiple options and her hopes were getting slender.”

28

In a very different photo-text work, Allan Sekula poses a more direct relationship between social forces and familial configurations and between text and photographic representations. The text for *Meditations on a Triptych* begins an epistemological investigation of the limits of photographic representation as Sekula reflects on the social forces which evade the camera:

Suppose I told you that there was something prophetic in the accidentally menacing figure of industrial arts. As he poses the man believes he has climbed above his working-class immigrant family background. Two years later, he joins a growing reserve army of unemployed aerospace engineers. Nearly three years after that he returns to work, to a lower-paying, lower-status job. He is ritually humiliated by his superiors. He is told he will not be promoted. For the first time in his life, his work activities are subjected to a time and motion study.<sup>20</sup>

Sekula focuses on the actual social and economic circumstances of his family, but his triptych form invokes the image of the medieval altarpiece,

those gilded homages to the Holy Family. The reference suggests the long-standing psychic resonance of the nuclear family: though the medieval family was not yet pared down to its nuclear components by the forces of industrialization, the family triangle was nonetheless sanctified in images of the Trinity, the Holy Family, and the Madonna and Child.

The historical recurrence of hallowed family images brings us full circle: back to the striking symptoms of our current social and familial malaise, to the popularity of that pair of preachers, Bradshaw and Wildmon. Perhaps the strength of their appeal owes as much to this seemingly trans-historical reverence for the family as to the particular political and economic realities of this recent period of feminist retrenchment. We might well profit from examining this centuries

old reverence. I suspect this reverence stems from the awesome vulnerability and abject terror of the newborn, and from our ambivalent gratitude to those who nurtured us from the absolute dependency of infancy to the interdependence of adulthood. Perhaps if the social structures to support the helpless and dependent were less fragile and tenuous—if the schism between private needs and public resources were bridged—the image of the family would lose some of its enduring power to sway us. Until these social aims are realized, families will continue to be overextended, and the representation of the family will be continually contested, framed and reframed by competing social forces.✱

#### NOTES

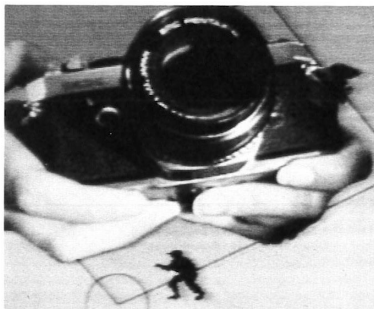
1. See Elayne Rapping's analysis of the political implications of the burgeoning success of the “12 step programs” movement which have developed from Alcoholics Anonymous, “Hooked on a Feeling,” *The Nation* (Volume 250, No. 9) March 5, 1990, p. 316-319 and “Rapping Replies to Letters Regarding ‘Hooked on a Feeling,’” *The Nation* (Volume 250, No. 20) May 21, 1990, p. 690 and 719.
2. The original impulse of family systems theory developed by Dr. Murray Bowen was to shift responsibility for mental illness from the individual to the family. In Bowen's groundbreaking work, schizophrenic patients were considered “the identified patients,” but entire family communications systems were treated by focusing on group interactions rather than individual functioning. See Michael E. Kerr, “Chronic Anxiety and Defining A Self: An Introduction to Murray Bowen's Theory of Human Emotional Functioning,” *The Atlantic* (Volume 262, No. 3) September 1988, p. 35. The popularization, indeed bastardization, of his ideas in bestselling self-help books such as Melody Beattie's *Co-Dependent No More* (Harper/Hazleton, 1987) has shifted the emphasis back to individual functioning and “character defects,” which are said to be solved through prayer and perseverance.
3. I have borrowed the title for this essay from a caption on one of the many collages of an artist who signs his or her name “Lee” and has posterized downtown Manhattan with comical photo-text collage images of family and friends.
4. Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family, and Personal Life* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1976) pp. 31-35.
5. Zaretsky, pp. 140-141.
6. “The average American woman will spend 17 years raising children and 18 years helping aged parents, according to a 1988 U.S. House of Representative report.” Melinda Beck, “Trading Places,” *Newsweek*, July 16, 1990, p. 48-54.
7. Sylvia Ann Hewlett, *A Lesser Life: The Myth of Women's Liberation in America* (New York: Warner Books, 1986) pp. 51-69.

8. Hewlett would dispute the advance suggested by these figures, noting that in 1985 the average American woman earned 64% of the male wage, up just one cent since 1939. Hewlett, p. 406.
9. Sociologist Ruth Sidel reports that two out of three adults living in poverty are female and that over a third of all female-headed households are now classified as poor. *Women and Children Last: The Plight of Poor Women in Affluent America* (New York: Viking, 1986) p. 3-4.
10. Witness the success of Phylliss Schlafly's STOP ERA movement, which responded to the anxieties of women “terrified of any further erosion of their rights and privileges as wives and mothers.” Hewlett, p. 207.
11. Hewlett reports that, “One Gallup poll shows that only 13% of working mothers want to work full time, although 52% of them do so.” Sylvia Ann Hewlett, “Running Hard Just to Keep Up,” *Time*, special edition, *Women: The Road Ahead* (Vol. 136, No. 19) Fall 1990, p. 54.
12. See Senate Bill # S.1808 (96th Congress, 1st Session) September 24, 1979, p. 1.
13. Ibid, p. 4.
14. Ibid, p. 53.
15. Letty Cottin Pogrebin, *Family Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983) p. 13.
16. Pogrebin, p. 13.
17. Micki McGee, “Domestic Disharmony: Mako Idemitsu's Psychodramas,” *The Independent* (Volume 9, No. 3) April 1986, pp. 16-19.
18. Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978) p. 33.
19. M.B. Wilkerson and J.H. Gresham, “The Racialization of Poverty,” *The Nation* (Volume 249, No. 4) July 24-31, 1989, p. 126.
20. Allan Sekula, “Meditations on a Triptych” *Afterimage* (Volume 6, No. 1&2) Summer 1978, p. 33.

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Stills, right: VANALYNE GREEN, *A Spy in the House that Ruth Built*, 1989; far right: MAKO IDEMITSU, *Yoji, What's Wrong with You?*, 1987 (photos, right: Video Data Bank; far right: Marita Sturken, courtesy of Electronic Arts Intermix)



above: VINCE LEO  
"Nancy and Grace"  
from *Birthday*, 1988  
multimedia installation



## REFRAMING the FAMILY

### VIDEO PROGRAM

The video program screens continuously during gallery hours in the video screening room at Artists Space.

*Belladonna* by Beth B and  
Ida Applebroog (12 minutes, 1989)  
*Always Love Your Man* by  
Cara DeVito (20 minutes, 1975)  
*The Way to My Father's Village*  
by Richard Fung (38 minutes, 1988)  
*A Spy in the House That Ruth Built* by  
Vanalyne Green (29 minutes, 1989)  
*Yoji, What's Wrong with You?* by  
Mako Idemitsu (17 minutes, 1987)  
*Let's Not Pretend* by Jan Mathew  
(26 minutes, 1990)  
*The Natural Order* by Cara Mertes  
(6 minutes, 1991)  
*Scenes from the Micro-war* by  
Sherry Millner (24 minutes, 1985)  
*Born To Be Sold: Martha Rosler Reads  
the Strange Case of Baby \$M*  
by Martha Rosler (35 minutes, 1988)  
*Shut Up and Listen* by Mary Ellen  
Strom (5 minutes, 1990)

### FILM PROGRAM

Two evenings of films that question traditional representations of the family, organized for Artists Space by Cara Mertes and Micki McGee.

FEBRUARY 1, 1991

*Peel* directed by Jane Campion  
(9 minutes, 1982)  
*Bless Their Little Hearts* directed by  
Billy Woodberry; writer/cinematographer: Charles Burnett  
(87 minutes, 1984)

FEBRUARY 8, 1991

*He Was Once* directed by  
Mary Hestand (15 minutes, 1989)  
*From Romance to Ritual* written and  
directed by Peggy Ahwesh  
(20 minutes, 1986)  
*Suzanne, Suzanne* directed by  
Camille Billops and James Hatch  
(26 minutes, 1982)  
*Piece Touchée* by Martin Arnold  
(15 minutes, 1990)

### VISUAL ARTISTS

ESTHER BUBLEY graduated from the Minneapolis School of Design and in 1943 began her career in documentary photography. She has worked in government agencies and private industry and for numerous publications. She lives in New York City.

DANIEL CANOGAR received his MFA in the New York University/International Center of Photography studio art program in 1989. He lives and works in New York City and has exhibited his work extensively in Spain.

DEBORAH COITO lives and works in Los Angeles. She received an MFA from Cal Arts in 1990 and recently exhibited her work at the Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies. This is her first exhibition in New York City.

LOU DRAPER has been exhibiting his photographic work since 1960. He received an MFA from New York University's Institute of Film and Television in 1970. He lives in Trenton and teaches photography at Mercer County Community College in New Jersey.

HANH THI PHAM currently lives in Rialto, California and teaches at Cal Arts. She has exhibited her works at the Washington Project for the Arts and the California Museum of Photography. This is her first exhibition in New York City.

RICHARD HILL attended the Art Institute of Chicago from 1968-70. He has worked as an instructor in native American Studies at the State University of New York and is now the Director of the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum in Sante Fe. His photographic work has been shown extensively in the U.S. and Canada.

DOUG ISCHAR lives and works in Chicago where he teaches photography. He has exhibited his work at L.A.C.E. in Los Angeles, Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, and Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago. This is his first exhibition in New York City.

ZOYA KOCUR received her MFA in the New York University/International Center of Photography studio art program in 1990. She lives and works in New York City where she is an Educator at The New Museum of Contemporary Art.

VINCE LEO lives and works in Minneapolis where he teaches studio and theory classes at Film in the Cities and is an Associate Editor at *Artpaper* magazine. He has exhibited his work at C.A.G.E. in Cincinnati and Ten on Eight in New York City.

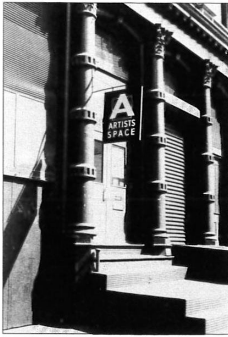
KATHLEEN MACQUEEN received her MFA in the New York University/International Center of Photography studio art program in 1990. This is her first exhibition in New York City where she lives and works.

CELIA ALVAREZ MUNOZ lives and works in Arlington, Texas. Her work has been included in exhibitions at INTAR Latin American Gallery in New York, San Antonio Museum of Art in Texas, and *Family Stories* at the Snug Harbor Cultural Center in Staten Island.

ALLAN SEKULA is currently Program Director for Photography at Cal Arts. His video and photography has been exhibited extensively and his criticism and essays on photography are published regularly.

LINN UNDERHILL lives and works in Lisle, New York where she teaches at Syracuse University in the Department of Media Studies. Her work has been included in exhibitions at C.E.P.A. Gallery in Buffalo, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery and San Francisco Camerawork. This is her first exhibition in New York City.

CARRIE MAE WEEMS received her MFA from the University of California at San Diego in 1984 and is currently living and working in Oakland, where she teaches at the California College of Arts and Crafts. Her work has been included in exhibitions at the Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies, The New Museum and the Institute for Contemporary Art in Boston.



front cover: photo courtesy of ZOYA KOCUR

back cover: ERIKA ROTHENBERG  
*There are still traditional families* 1990  
billboard, 14x48 feet  
(photo courtesy of the artist)

## VIDEO ARTISTS

IDA APPLEBROOG is a painter who studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. *Belladonna* is her first collaboration with her daughter and her first videotape.

BETH B. has worked in film for the past ten years. She has completed numerous films, including the feature length production *Salvation*, and has been shown extensively in the U.S. and abroad.

CARA DeVITO received a BA from Beloit College in 1951. She has received two NEA Fellowships for her documentary work and an Emmy Award in film editing. She lives in Verona, New Jersey.

RICHARD FUNG is a graduate of Ontario College of Art and the University of Toronto. He is a writer, activist and media producer living in Toronto.

VANALYNE GREEN is chairperson of the video program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. A graduate of Cal Arts, she is known for her videotapes, performances and critical writings. She has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Jerome Foundation.

MAKO IDEMITSU studied at Waseda University in Tokyo and at Columbia University. Her video work has been exhibited throughout Japan and internationally. She lives in Tokyo.

JAN MATHEW has produced documentaries for England's Channel 4 *OUT? on Tuesday* series. She lives in Brighton, England and is currently at work on a documentary on mourning and loss in the lesbian community.

CARA MERTES is an independent producer and curator in New York City. She is the producer of the Independent Focus series at WNET.

SHERRY MILLNER studied at Cal Arts and received an MFA from UC San Diego. Known for her videotapes, critical writing, and collages, she is also an editor of *Jump Cut* magazine. She currently teaches video at Hampshire College and has exhibited her work extensively in the United States and abroad.

MARTHA ROSLER has exhibited her photography/text works and videotapes throughout the U.S. and abroad. Her critical writings have been published extensively. She teaches at Rutgers University and lives in New York City.

MARY ELLEN STROM is a video artist, choreographer and teacher who lives in New York City. *Shut Up and Listen* is her first personal documentary. She was born in Butte, Montana.

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**ARTISTS SPACE**  
**223 WEST BROADWAY**  
**NEW YORK, NY 10013**

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