

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Los Angeles Times
Calendar

Sally Mann takes a *very* close look at her children

By -- David.Ng @latimes.com
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PARENTS take pictures of their kids all the time, but Sally Mann's images of her three children were unlike any family album the public had ever seen. First shown in the 1980s, the photographs depicted her pre-adolescent offspring (Jessie, Emmett and Virginia) in various states of undress, their bare bodies arranged in defiant, almost confrontational poses. The controversy over the series' supposed sexual content helped make Mann an art-world sensation.

More than 15 years on, the photographer has revisited her children, who are now in their 20s, in 18 portraits that go on view Tuesday at Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills. You won't see nude bodies this time, however. The show features intense close-ups of their faces captured via a 19th century method called "the collodion process," which involves a complex mix of chemicals that allows the photographer to print on special glass plates.

Speaking from her home in Lexington, Va., Mann says the technique gives the faces a timeless quality, as if they were being memorialized. "The images seem like they're torn from life, especially along the dark edges where the collodion eclipses the corners of the plate," she explains. "It's contemplative almost, even reverential."

Mann invented her own matte varnish to get away from the shiny look associated with daguerreotypes.

"The agent is made from the skeletons of diatoms. It's like talcum powder but really hard," Mann says. "I actually use it in gardening. You can put it around squash plants so the slugs won't climb over them."

Her eldest daughter, Jessie, describes the shooting process as "just hanging out" with mom.

"She'll have a wood stove going, and we generally relax," explains Jessie. "We lie down on this plank and look up at a very big camera that's suspended above us. You can't really talk except in between pictures."

Recalling the controversy surrounding her mother's earlier work, Jessie, who is now an artist herself, says, "There's no such thing as original sin in our household. Mom always said to us, if you put on clothes, it starts looking like a fashion ad. The point is that we're comfortable with our natural selves."

'SALLY MANN'

WHERE: Gagosian Gallery, 456 N. Camden Drive, Beverly Hills

WHEN: Tuesday through Feb. 9

PRICE: Free

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SALLY MANN *Gagosian Gallery*

*"Jessie #30" is a photograph of the artist's eldest daughter
rendered using the collodion process.*