

Burning Down the House: Rethinking Family

June 1 until September 8, 2024

Exhibition Dates

June 1 until September 8, 2024

Press Preview

May 31, 2024, 11 a.m.

Exhibition Opening

May 31, 2024, 6:30 p.m.

Opening Hours

Tue – Sun: 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Thu: 10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.

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Laurienc Durieu, *Butterflies and Birds*, 2020, courtesy of the artist

From June 1 to September 8, 2024, Kunstmuseum St.Gallen presents an ambitious, international group exhibition that critically engages with “the family” as a tradition, idea, and lived reality. *Burning Down the House: Rethinking Family* untangles some of the crucial problems, beliefs, and contradictions that the family as an institution embodies and takes a close, critical view of family constructs across geographies, histories, and scales. The exhibition provides a rare overview of contemporary art practices relating to this topic, bringing together works by more than thirty-five artists in which notions of family—and representations of the stereotypical, bourgeois family in particular—are problematized.

The family is a rare topic in contemporary art. While feminist artists have thematized the roles of women, caretakers, and mothers, the family has— weirdly—largely been absent. To be sure, family life is a well-represented genre in photography, and the family has a long history in portraiture, but as a subject for critical investigation, beyond mere representation, the family has only rarely been addressed. It’s almost as if the family is considered unworthy of such examination because of how deeply it is nested in our reality. It has been naturalized to the point that it “just is.” As the writer Sophie Lewis put it recently: “So deep runs the idea that the family is the exclusive place where people are safe, where people come from, where people are made, and where people belong, it doesn’t even feel like an idea anymore.”

This relative lack of attention is remarkable, since—all things considered—the family is a problematic concept. Indeed, the family poses a problem, one that artists have long engaged with even if, curatorially and art historically, it has been largely neglected. The family is a source of exhaustion, conflict, and trauma. Moreover, it can be argued that the nuclear family, in particular, is a conservative, patriarchal structure that is fundamentally bound up with capitalism as a system. In its classical constellation—man-woman-child(ren)—the family also embodies a model that no longer aligns with many people’s understandings of gender, or simply no longer works. Finally, and perhaps most fatally: looking at how rapidly the climate crisis is progressing, one might seriously feel compelled to ask if putting children on this earth is still a responsible thing to do, given our fears about the future state of the world they will inherit.

The exhibition brings together important historic contemporary artworks by pioneering artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Mary Kelly, Bobby Baker, and PINK de Thierry and presents them in dialogue with works by artists from a younger generation, including Rhea Dillon, Kyoko Idetsu, and Lebohang Kganye. With its thematic scope, the exhibition goes beyond the purview of previous exhibitions that have focused on individual aspects or manifestations of the family—such as parenthood/motherhood and chosen or rainbow families—to address more comprehensively and fundamentally the (nuclear) family. It also differs from numerous exhibitions that have centered primarily on visual representations of the family in photography and painting.

To accompany the exhibition, a catalog featuring essays by leading academics and art historians will be published by Hatje Cantz. A study on the future of the family by the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute, one of the most renowned Swiss think tanks, is also set to be released on the day of the opening and will be available at: gdi.ch/familie.

With a.o.: Jonathas de Andrade, Louise Ashcroft, Shuvinai Ashoona, Bobby Baker, Nina Beier, BOLOHO, Louise Bourgeois, Kathe Burkhart, Vaginal Davis, Adolf Dietrich, Rhea Dillon, Laurence Durieu, Marie-Louise Ekman, Buck Ellison, Christina Forrer, Maria Guta/Lauren Huret, Nadira Husain, Juliana Huxtable, Kyoko Idetsu, Mary Kelly, Lebohang Kganye, Ghislaine Leung, Tala Madani, Katja Mater, Alexandra Noel, Phung-Tien Phan, Josiane M.H. Pozi, Niki de Saint Phalle, Ben Sakoguchi, Ju Sekyun, Sable Elyse Smith, Lily van der Stokker, Madeleine Kemény-Szemere, PINK de Thierry, Terre Thaemlitz, Ryan Trecartin, Amalia Ulman, Evelyn Taocheng

Wang, Gillian Wearing, Ambera Wellmann

Curated by Melanie Bühler, Senior Curator at Kunstmuseum St.Gallen

Factsheet

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