

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 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 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. It takes a close, critical view of family constructs across geographies, histories, and scale, providing a rare overview of contemporary art practices connected to this topic. It brings together works by more than thirty-five artist that problematize the notion of the family in its stereotypical, bourgeois representation, which has informed our visual culture for century.

Accompanying 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 is also set to be released on the day of the opening at gdi.ch/familie.

The family is a rare topic in contemporary art. While feminist artists have thematized their 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, just as 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 seems 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.” This seems particularly strange as we live in a moment of reckoning, a time

in which institutions are being profoundly questioned. It's time we question the family.

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, an almost taboo subject within contemporary art. It also differs from numerous exhibitions that have centered on visual representations of the family, primarily focusing on photography and painting. *Burning Down the House: Rethinking Family* is the first international group exhibition at a museum level to focus on the family from a contemporary perspective while simultaneously questioning it. In addressing this theme, the exhibition and its accompanying publication make an important contribution to art history and engage with current discourse around ideas such as “family abolition” (as theorized most recently by Sophie Lewis, among others).

The following questions are central to the exhibition: What does family life mean beyond the mainstream narratives of TV and advertising? What are the difficulties, peculiarities, and specific qualities of living together as a family? How is the family anchored in and by the larger systems that impact our lives, such as capitalism and (neo)colonialism? Is the family a problem? How can we imagine a life beyond the traditional concept of family?

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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