

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
September 1991

PLEASURES AND TERRORS OF DOMESTIC COMFORT

September 26 - December 31, 1991

The current state of the American Dream of domestic happiness is examined in a major photography exhibition opening at The Museum of Modern Art on September 26, 1991. Organized by Peter Galassi, curator, Department of Photography, **PLEASURES AND TERRORS OF DOMESTIC COMFORT** presents a varied and challenging cross-section of contemporary work, all of it devoted to life at home. While the exhibition makes no attempt at sociological objectivity, the many voices it assembles have much to say about life in the eighties.

Long a staple of literature and film, domestic life has emerged over the past decade as an important theme in American photography. The exhibition surveys this development in approximately 150 pictures, a majority of them in color, by about seventy artists (partial list attached). The work, all but a small fraction of it made since 1980, is diverse in style, sensibility, and scale. A major publication edited and introduced by Mr. Galassi accompanies the exhibition.

Arranged thematically, **PLEASURES AND TERRORS OF DOMESTIC COMFORT** explores the settings, rituals, and moods of domestic experience. Straightforward, documentary-style photographs appear alongside staged, frankly artificial pictures--and with a wide range of work that falls between these two poles of contemporary work. The exhibition concludes with a suite of pictures that take snapshots and family photographs as their theme.

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The earliest works included are by William Eggleston, whose mundane household scenes--an open oven or the view beneath a bed--are charged with feeling. When Eggleston made those pictures around 1970, the public street was still the favored arena of American photographers. By 1980 many had begun to turn their attention to the private life of the home, often photographing their own families or friends. In this new work, domestic experience is described not from the detached viewpoint of the journalist or sociologist, but from within.

In the accompanying book, Mr. Galassi suggests that artists "began to photograph at home not because it was important, in the sense that political issues are important, but because it was there--the one place that is easier to get to than the street. After they had worked for a while, many also realized that the overlooked opportunity was also a rich one, full of uncharted mysteries." In Doug DuBois's family photographs, such as *My Sister Lise*, *Christmas Eve* (1984), moments that only an insider might notice are rendered with an intimacy that only an insider could possess.

At the opposite end of the artistic spectrum are the staged or fabricated pictures of Ellen Brooks, Jo Ann Callis, Cindy Sherman, and others. In Laurie Simmons's *Coral Living Room with Lilies* (1983), two women at home (plastic figurines posed before a magazine reproduction) inhabit a prison of their own making. In a photograph by Bruce Charlesworth, an archetypical ordinary guy studies the want-ads at breakfast. Reworking the domestic clichés of popular imagery, these artists examine the role of the mass media in shaping private lives. Although their approach is remote from that of Eggleston and DuBois, they share the conviction that something important is going on at home.

Between these divergent poles, several photographers subtly and often mischievously blend reality and fantasy, provoking viewers to imagine the stories behind their pictures. As a man searches the refrigerator in a picture by Philip-Lorca diCorcia or as a couple play a late-night game of cards in a work by Carrie Mae Weems, our sense that the scene has been concocted only draws us deeper into its drama.

Many of the artists belong to the baby-boom generation, and many of their pictures revisit the domestic myths of their youth. Frequently, as in the suburban elegies of James Casebere and Ken Botto, the result evokes both irony and nostalgia. Perhaps in part because the baby-boomers have reached the age of parenthood, children figure prominently in the exhibition. In Sage Sohier's *Brookline, Massachusetts* (1983), for example, an infant appears to signal OK as his antic parents coax for the camera. Throughout the exhibition, a strain of wry humor is matched by an absence of sentimentality; these pictures take children seriously.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Nan Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, a slide presentation incorporating music, will be shown on Thursday, December 12, at 8:30 p.m. in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1. The program is made possible by The Contemporary Arts Council, The Museum of Modern Art. Tickets are \$8, \$7 for members, and \$5 for students and will be available at the Museum's lobby information desk from October 1, or by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope with payment to the Department of Education, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019.

On view through December 31, **PLEASURES AND TERRORS OF DOMESTIC COMFORT** is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. After its New York showing, a national tour is planned.

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PUBLICATION

Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort by Peter Galassi. 128 pages. 69 color and 52 black-and-white illustrations. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Paperbound, \$24.95, available in The MoMA Book Store.

No. 63

For further information or photographic materials, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.

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Partial List of Artists in the Exhibition

Robert Adams (b. 1937)
Nicolas Africano (b. 1948)
Joan Albert (b. 1943)
Tom Bamberger (b. 1948)
Tina Barney (b. 1945)
Mary Berridge (b. 1964)
Geoffrey Biddle (b. 1950)
Judith Black (b. 1945)
Ken Botto (b. 1937)
Andrew Brilliant (b. 1952)
Ellen Brooks (b. 1946)
Peter Brown (b. 1948)
Jo Ann Callis (b. 1940)
James Casebere (b. 1953)
Bruce Charlesworth (b. 1950)
Albert Chong (b. Jamaica, 1958)
Maude Schuyler Clay (b. 1953)
Eileen Cowin (b. 1947)
Gregory Crewdson (b. 1962)
Philip-Lorca diCorcia (b. 1953)
Doug DuBois (b. 1960)
William Eggleston (b. 1939)
Larry Fink (b. 1941)
Mary Frey (b. 1948)
Lee Friedlander (b. 1934)
David Goldes (b. 1947)
Nan Goldin (b. 1953)
Jill Graham (b. 1963)
Susan Kandel (b. 1949)
Mary Kocol (b. 1962)
Pok Chi Lau (b. Hong Kong, 1950)
Frank Majore (b. 1948)
Sally Mann (b. 1951)
Abelardo Morell (b. Cuba, 1948)
Marilyn Nance (b. 1953)
Nic Nicosia (b. 1951)
Nicholas Nixon (b. 1947)
Lorie Novak (b. 1954)
Kathy O'Connor (b. 1960)
John Pinderhughes (b. 1946)
Melissa Ann Pinney (b. 1953)
David Prifti (b. 1961)
Marvin Rhodes (b. 1948)
Thomas Roma (b. 1950)
Sheron Rupp (b. 1943)
Gabrielle Russomagno (b. 1963)
Adrienne Salinger (b. 1956)
Cindy Sherman (b. 1954)
Stephen Shore (b. 1947)
Laurie Simmons (b. 1949)
Sage Sohler (b. 1954)
Joni Sternbach (b. 1953)
Joel Sternfeld (b. 1944)
Jock Sturges (b. 1947)
Larry Sultan (b. 1946)
Anne Turyn (b. 1954)
JoAnn Verburg (b. 1950)
Wolf Von dem Bussche
(b. Germany, 1934)
Jo Ann Walters (b. 1952)
Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953)
Henry Wessel, Jr. (b. 1942)
Neil Winokur (b. 1945)