

IV. Relationship to Other Projects on the Topic and the Project's Unique Contributions

Reframing Childhood enters into dialogue with a number of past exhibitions and projects that address representations of childhood, trauma, and the politics of photojournalism. It builds upon the visual and thematic foundations laid by earlier efforts, while proposing a more porous, participatory curatorial model with global perspectives.

Notable previous projects on photographs of children include ***Confronting Childhood at Princeton University Art Museum***, which presents voices of various European and American artists, whose photographs weave together a complex narrative of childhood as an unresolved idea that demands the artist's continuing attention. The exhibition raises questions on the notion of childhood as a social construct made in the European Enlightenment and hints at the diverse and uncategorizable nature of the reality of childhood. ***Nothing Gold Can Stay at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*** takes a similar approach in exploring the complex territory of childhood and adolescence. Inspired by Robert Frost's poem, the selected photographs of this exhibition focus on the transience and fragility of childhood. ***Ryoji Akiyama's Photography Exhibition in Shanghai*** invited viewers to rediscover moments of naivety and the warmth of childhood in a materially modest yet spiritually rich era in China. Our project, *Reframing Childhood*, borrows the nostalgic and humanistic approach found in these exhibitions, yet weaves the topic of childhood into broader contexts of children's rights and global injustices. Unlike these previous projects that often highlight approaches by individual photographers or regional context, *Reframing Childhood* proposes an overarching narrative that focuses on the presentation of children in times of war and the ethical portrayal of them in literature and media in global contexts.

Confronting Childhood

Saturday, February 2, 2019 - Sunday, June 9, 2019



Sally Mann, American, born 1951. *Under Blueberry Hill*, 1991. Gelatin silver print, image: 48.3 × 58.4 cm. Museum purchase, Philip F. Maritz, Class of 1983, Photography Acquisitions Fund (2016-46) © Sally Mann, Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery

Confronting Childhood considers the complex reality of childhood and family life in the modern world. Spanning more than 150 years, the exhibition affords glimpses of children and their families through the vantage point of painting and primarily photography, including artists such as Diane Arbus, Ruth Bernhard, Lewis Carroll, Lewis Hine, Dorothea Lange, Sally Mann, and Clarence White.

[Download the exhibition checklist.](#)



CURRENT EXHIBITIONS
Nothing Gold Can Stay: Photographs of Childhood
MAY 2, 2025 - OCTOBER 5, 2025
Photography Gallery

Free Admission



About This Exhibition

Drawn from recent gifts of nearly 200 photographs donated by collector Joseph Bais, *Nothing Gold Can Stay* explores the complex territory of childhood and adolescence. Bais, who has formed a spectacular collection of more than 5,000 photographs around the themes of childhood, adolescence, and family, was initially drawn to these subjects when he became a father.

The exhibition includes nearly 20 photographs that explore themes related to childhood and adolescence by artists working from the 19th century to the present. They include Diane Arbus, William Eggleston, Dorothea Lange, Lee Sidel, Emmet Gowin, and others.

The title *Nothing Gold Can Stay* takes its inspiration from a Robert Frost poem about the fragility and transience of youth. The exhibition was curated by Dr. Sarah Kennel, VMFA's Aaron Siskind Curator of Photography and Director of the Rayzor Center for Works on Paper.



The spatial layout and design of the visitor experience are largely inspired by ***Diane Arbus: Constellation at the Park Avenue Armory*** and ***Activist New York at the Museum of the City of New York***.

In the ***Diane Arbus*** exhibition, the photos are scattered in different positions in the space, supported by metal frames, creating an illusion of a dense web of connection or constellations, which, according to curator Matthiew Humery, is an idea inspired by the New York City subway map in the sense that viewers have to look around and find their way.³ *Reframing Childhood* builds on this idea of “*constellation*”, similarly distributing images across the exhibition space in a non-linear manner. We introduce a subtle curatorial logic to hint at the historical narrative and thematic connections, encouraging people to make similar connections. Like the Diane Arbus exhibition, we view the constellation as the web of connections not only formed by the images, but also by the visitors. However, we extend this metaphor further by seeing each visitor not only as a navigator but as an integral part of the constellation itself. Through the interactive space in the exhibition, the visitors are able to name their constellations and contribute to the system of constellations. The connections between images shift with each engagement, and the constellations continue to grow as the project expands into formats such as books and digital platforms. It is a dynamic network that is shaped collectively by the images and the viewers.

The Activist New York exhibition and other exhibitions at the **Museum of the City of New York** provide us with inspiration for how we designed spaces for visitor engagement and participation in our project. *Activist New York* presents various protest movements in clustered multimedia installations that include photographs, texts, historical documents, and videos. Our project adopts a similar multimedia and cluster-based approach in our thematic stations, which include interpretive texts, selected images, and recommended readings. Moreover, the exhibition includes an ongoing online component that invites the public to contribute their own images and stories of today’s activism. It is continuous and is open to the public to contribute their images to tell today’s activism. This type of open-ended, participatory exhibition design informed our approach to building a space that evolves through public interaction and collective storytelling.

These previous models informed *Reframing Childhood*’s unique curatorial vision, one that views the photos not just as works of fine art, but as frozen moments of multiple historical narratives that invite free and multiperspectival thinking and as historical and political documents that offer lenses into the complex sociopolitical network beyond the frames. Borrowing from Susan Sontag’s argument in *Against Interpretation* that the critic’s task should be not to show the ‘meaning’ of a work of art, but to demonstrate how it is what it is, we encourage viewers to read different narratives of childhood, to be informed about various experience of childhood, to locate their privilege in relations to other people’s suffering, all without reducing or simplifying the idea of childhood into a single, fixed definition.

³ Solotaroff, Joanna. 2025. “A Return to Diane Arbus’s New York.” *Vogue*.
<https://www.vogue.com/article/diane-arbus-constellation-park-avenue-armory-review>.



Diane Arbus: Constellation, 2025, Park Avenue Armory.



The Activist New York, 2025, Museum of The City of New York, photo taken by the curatorial team