

# BABY

## PICTURING THE IDEAL HUMAN 1840 - NOW



Enchantingly Newborn beauty pageant in Walker, LA, 2006  
© Colby Katz



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## **PICTURING THE IDEAL HUMAN**

### **1840 - NOW**

**Exhibition March 22 – May 31, 2008  
and book**

**Nederlands Fotomuseum  
in Las Palmas  
Rotterdam**



*Walter Blum, 1950-1960, gelatin silver print. Spaarnestad Photo, Haarlem*

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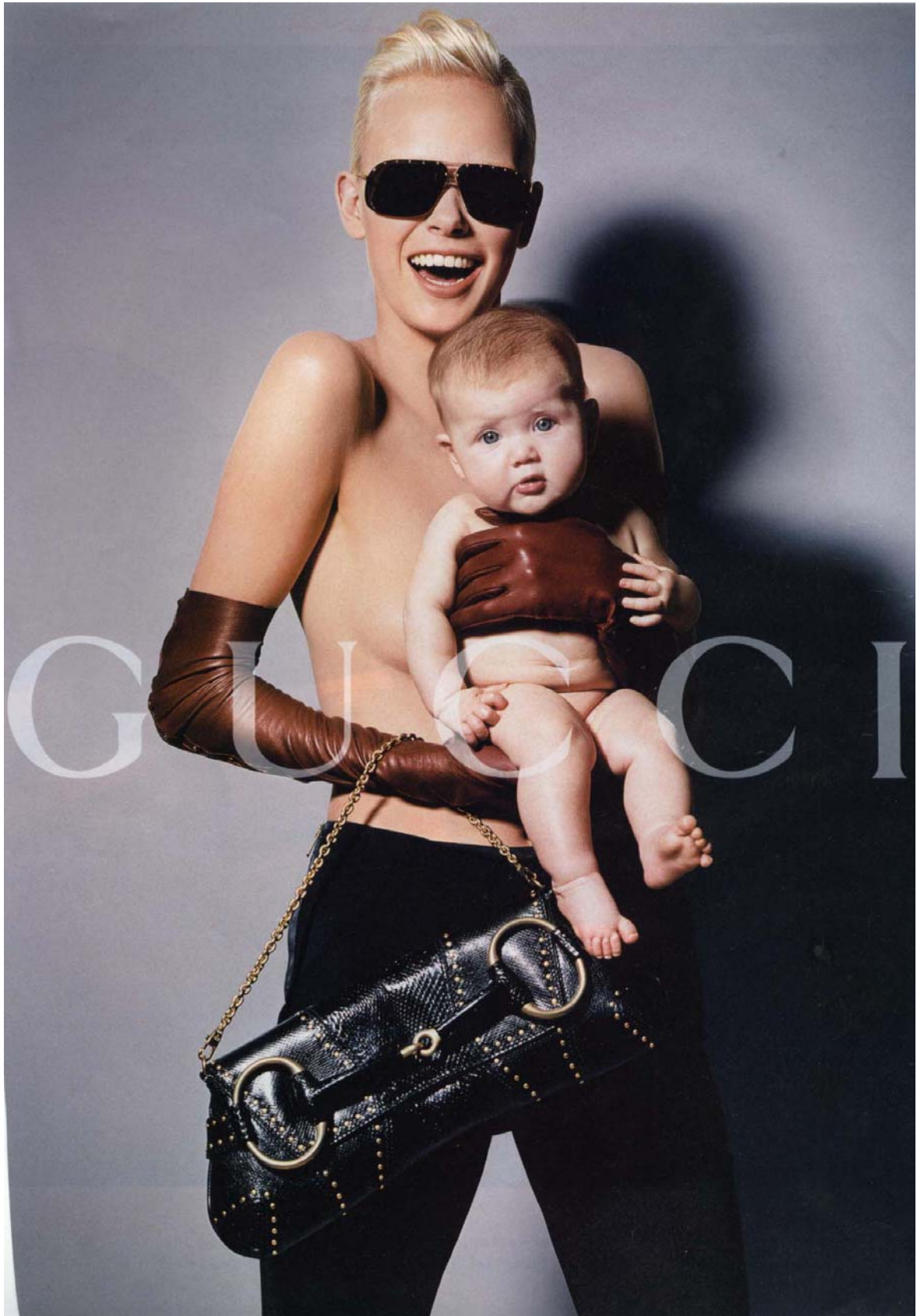
Each era has its own beauty ideals: fashion, make-up, hairdo's and even bodies change as general preferences change. In advertising and on television, we are continuously confronted with images of what the ideal human should look like. The ideal image nowadays seems so peremptory that we even want our newborns to mirror this criterion. That this is no novelty becomes clear when we look at baby portraits from the past 165 years. The underexposed and underappreciated genre of baby photography proves not to be as innocent as it seems.

In their urge to live up to beauty ideals some parents nowadays have their 6 month old babies partake in beauty pageants. Here, they are covered in makeup and spray paint, and dressed in layered princess gowns. Examples of the idealisation of a baby's appearance can be found in portraits dating from the mid-19th Century. Even in post-mortem portraiture (an important genre at the time) babies were idealised: they were depicted as if they were sleeping and could wake up any moment.

The main theme of this exhibition is the idealisation of babies since the early days of photography until now. This can be illustrated through images by 19th Century studio photographers, 20st and 21st Century beauty pageants, babies in advertising, fashion series and 4D ultra-sound scans. A selection of this kind has never been shown anywhere in the world before.

Since parents, advertisers, consumers and society in general have always preferred to see an idealised image of babies since the early days of photography, this is what the majority of works will reflect. The contrasting images -the realistic view- will serve as an antithesis to this ideal perspective. Packed with images from family albums, postcards, advertising, documentary and creative photography, BABY offers a unique view of baby portraits since the beginning of photography.





Mario Testino, Gucci magazine advertisement Elle 2003. Courtesy Art Partner, New York

# EXHIBITION

## CONTENT AND FORM

This exhibition depicts the western baby as seen through the eyes of the world's most famous photographers as well as amateur and studio photographers, and of course parents themselves. Besides many examples from 19th Century vernacular photography - including albums- there is work from the famous Southworth and Hawes studio in Boston, Julia Margaret Cameron, John Thomson, Oscar Rejlander and Jacob Riis. In addition to 20th Century studio portraits and postcards, the show includes photographs by Weegee, Rineke Dijkstra, Elliot Erwitt, Madame Yevonde, Mary Ellen Mark, Mario Testino, Philip Lorca diCorcia, Henri Lartigue, August Sander, Ed van der Elsken, Amy Arbus, Annelies Strba, Koos Breukel, Colby Katz and Frank Krems.

We see perfection and innocence; the desired image (including Anne Geddes merchandise and Royal Family portraits); representations inspired from Mary and baby Jesus; ultra sound scans and birth; poverty and post-mortem portraits. These sub themes include scientific, creative, vernacular, studio, documentary and advertising photography.

## EXHIBITION DESIGN

The exhibition is designed by Preta Wolzak (Fort Blink, Amsterdam) in cooperation with Cecilia Hendrikx (SuopuLab).

## LOANS

This exhibition derives its images from archives and collections worldwide. The selection will be adapted to each new venue. Each exhibition will be supplemented with local vernacular photography. Thus, local visitors can relate to the subject even more easily. Institutions that will lend work to the exhibition include the Nederlands Fotomuseum (Rotterdam), ICP (New York), George Eastman House (Rochester), Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam), Prentenkabinet/SDCF (library University of Leiden), Spaarnestad Photo (Haarlem), Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris), Victoria & Albert Museum and National Portrait Gallery (London) as well as private collectors. The earliest works in the exhibition are daguerreotypes and a salted print; the most recent objects are digital works and 4D antenatal films.

## EXHIBITION SPACE

The exhibition consists of approximately 150 photographic objects, requiring a space of 800-1000m<sup>2</sup>.

## AVAILABILITY

The exhibition in Rotterdam will take place from 22 March - 31 May 2008. The exhibition will therefore be available from the summer of 2008.



*John Bull (ABC Press), 1959, gelatin silver print. Spaarnestad Photo, Haarlem*



## BOOK

The catalogue is a well-documented, solid publication with excellent printing. It can serve both as a photobook and a reference book. It includes a text by the curators of the exhibition, in which they focus in depth on the ways in which the baby has been represented photographically through the years. Professor Val Williams and curator Hedy van Erp will contribute essays. Williams is Director of the University of the Arts London Photography and the Archive Research Centre, based at the London College of Communication (LCC). The preface is written by Frits Gierstberg, who is Head of Exhibitions at the Nederlands Fotomuseum and holds a named professorship at Erasmus University in Rotterdam.

*Editors* Hedy van Erp, Iris Sikking and Frits Gierstberg.

*Production and final editing* Hatje Cantz (to be confirmed).

*Number of pages* 168 (120 pages full colour; 48 pages black/white)

25% text; 75% images

*Edition* 2.500 copies

*Language* Dutch and English



*Anon., 1845-1855, daguerreotype. Collection Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*

# GENERAL INFORMATION

***BABY: images of the ideal human 1840 - now*** is initiated and curated by Hedy van Erp and Iris Sikking (ICON Foundation). The exhibition is produced by the Netherlands Fotomuseum in Rotterdam.

## ICON FOUNDATION

ICON Foundation - founded by photo historians Hedy van Erp and Iris Sikking- advocates slow reading of the photographic image as it uncovers the prevailing view and current mentality, and thus tell us something about the construction of our social environment. ICON analyses not just art photography, but also genres that are often easily ignored, such as personal, amateur and advertising photography.

## NEDERLANDS FOTOMUSEUM

The Nederlands Fotomuseum has in-house expertise in many fields of photography. Debates are regularly launched on vital contemporary issues. The knowledge and professionalism of the staff at the Museum can be found in publications, discussions and symposiums, educational activities and on the internet. All this makes the Nederlands Fotomuseum an authoritative centre for photography in The Netherlands and abroad, not merely for professionals, but for everyone who wants to stay in touch with developments in the field.

## SEE ALSO

[www.nederlandsfotomuseum.nl](http://www.nederlandsfotomuseum.nl)

[www.iconfoundation.nl](http://www.iconfoundation.nl)

## MORE INFORMATION

### About sponsoring

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### About the exhibition and the book

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Anon., A. Adam-Salomon or L. Crémère/E. Hanfstaengl, *Enfant endormi*, 1856-1860, salt print. Collection Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

# PICTURES BABY

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Anon., c.1860, painted tintype.  
Collection H. Van Erp

Photostudio Hazeltine's, USA, c. 1870, albumen  
cabinet card. Collection H. Van Erp



Anon., post mortem portrait of mother and child,  
c. 1870, albumen. Collection H. Van Erp



Anon., c.1865, albumen carte-de-visite.  
Collection C. Schüller



Koene & Com, 'Kroesen, Cornelia Alexandra (geboren 11 januari 1893)', 1893, albumen cabinet card.  
Collection SDCF/Prentenkabinet, Leiden University



Anon., *Smoking baby*, c. 1920, postcard. Collection H. Van Erp





Anon. (Wide World Photo), Diaper Derby 'Beneath signs announcing their racing names, baby crawlers are lined up by their mothers for the start of the Diaper Derby at Palisades Amusement park in New Jersey', 1962, gelatin silver print. Spaarnestad Photo, Haarlem



Colby Katz,  
Enchanting Mermaids beauty pageant  
in Walker, LA, 2006



*Studio Gittings, Houston, Texas, Father with baby and cigar, 1930, gelatin silver print. Collection Fogg Art Museum Cambridge, MA*



*Joseph Rodriguez, 'The morning after a rival gang tried to shoot Chivo for the fourth time, Chivo teaches his daughter how to hold a .32-caliber pistol. Her mother looks on. Boyle Heights', 1993, gelatin-silver prints, Collection ICP, NY*





*Frank Krems, Maria mit dem Kind, München, 1999*





*Lennart Nilsson, fetus 20 weeks old. Collection  
Hasselblad Centre, Göteborg*



*Koos Breukel, Alkmaar,  
28 maart 2000,  
gelatin silver print*



*Ed van der Elsken, c. 1975, gelatin silver print.  
Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam*



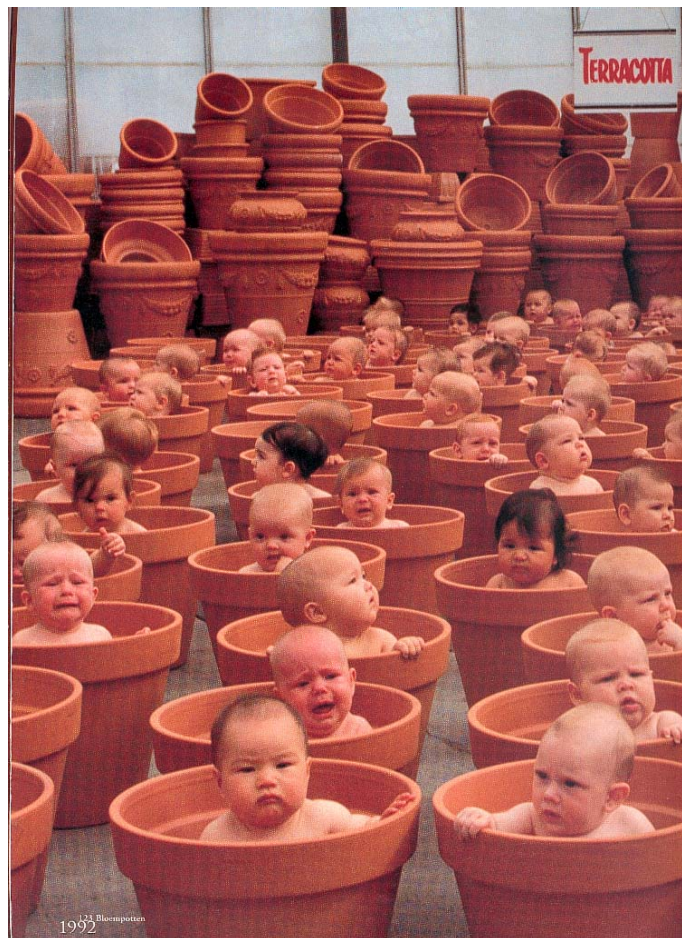
*Rineke Dijkstra, Tecla, Amsterdam, 16 mei 1994,  
chromogenic print*



*Annie Leibovitz, Model and her son, 1998.  
Cover photo of The Weekend Australian's Magazine  
in 1999*



*Anne Geddes, 123 flower pots, 1992*







*Nan Goldin, Ulrika, Stockholm 1998, Courtesy Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin*