

# BEAUTIFYING BABIES

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF BABY CONTESTS AND BABY PAGEANTS

Hedy van Erp

**To a baby, vanity is unknown. Babies do not ask themselves what an older child or adult would ask himself; how will I look on the picture? A baby's world is still perfect, there are no demands, no expectations, there seem to be no ideals of beauty. Or are there?**

The first baby contest on record took place in Springfield, Ohio, in 1854. A year later, showman P.T. Barnum organised the 'National Baby Show' in New York. It attracted huge crowds, over 60,000 visitors came to view the contestants, who were judged 'especially on the crowning merit of their being genuine original American stock'.<sup>1</sup> Infants considered too poor or 'foreign' in appearance were excluded. In line with the nature of Barnum's other exhibits, including human freaks such as a giantess, it wasn't just the most handsome babies that won prizes, but also the fattest.

*First Price (sic) at the Baby Show, c.1880, Anonymous, Albumen carte-de-visite, gold toned, Courtesy of Hedy van Erp, Oudkarspel*



After his success in New York, Barnum promptly staged baby shows in other cities. Daguerreotypes of previous winners advertised the event prior to a baby show in Boston.<sup>2</sup> Newspapers reported on the controversial shows in detail, providing further publicity. In a review, the *New York Times* wrote 'Mr. EDWARDS, of New-York, exhibits a little girl, one year old. Very pretty'.<sup>3</sup> Although Barnum attempted to market the shows as grounded in scientific inquiry - parents answered questions about diet, exercise and hygiene - questions were raised regarding the appropriateness of displaying children for commercial purposes.

Baby contests were also held in Victorian England. A carte-de-visite, circa 1880, shows an infant, sprawled on a cardboard trophy with a sign attached reading "First Price (sic) at the Baby Show". It is unclear if this text is ironic or if the child indeed won a contest. It does demonstrate that in Victorian England baby shows were a known concept. A ferrotype from the National Media Museum collection from Circa 1880 seems to support this. Although little is known about its origin, the lining up of mothers and babies in their Sunday best is reminiscent of American baby shows of the same period.

From the early 1880s, Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911) concerned himself with perfecting babies on a less innocent level. Amateur scientist Galton researched eugenics, a term he coined from the Greek 'eu' meaning 'well' and 'genus' meaning 'born'. He believed it possible to create a more talented human race by breeding selectively. Galton's theories promoting the reproduction of the strong was sparked by his questionable ideology in which Anglo-Saxons were intellectually and morally superior to people of a different racial background.

Around 1895, Galton's ideas were well received in the United States, where educated Anglo-Americans began to worry about an increasing number of Eastern and Southern European immigrants, considered of inferior descent. The Americans were also alarmed by their own babies' high mortality rate, leading to initiatives promoting children's health during the first eugenic contests, held at state fairs. These fairs proved to be ideal venues for eugenicists to spread their ideas.

In rural America around 1900, the annual fair was a cultural highlight; farmers could exhibit their biggest pumpkins and win prizes accordingly. Eugenicists added an extra dimension, offering the opportunity to win *Fitter Families Contests* - and later *Better Babies Contests*. Doctors would fill out score cards, based on mental and developmental tests, various measurements and physical examinations. Winners were invariably babies of Western and Northern European origin.

The 'scientific' *Better Babies Contests* gave parents guidelines for raising healthy children, but also pushed to improve the human stock, as eugenicists believed that marriages between the most intelligent and healthy people led to the best possible offspring. In this respect, the contests differed from 19th Century baby shows, which had focussed on outward appearances.

Until 1945, the eugenicists' extreme ideas had a strong impact. In order to maintain the purity of the Germanic race, Heinrich Himmler had launched his Lebensborn (Fount of Life) programme in 1935. Aryan-featured German women were encouraged to have children by SS officers; these children were born in special Lebensborn nurseries. Needless to say, the Holocaust put an end to the eugenicists' influence in Europe. In America, too, the eugenics movement had lost power; eugenicists were accused of exploiting genetics for political motives, and the 'science' behind it came under scrutiny and attack.





Beauty-based baby shows continued in the UK, as ample photographic evidence in the National Media Museum archives demonstrates. Nearly one hundred years after Barnum's first baby show, the *Daily Herald* sent a photographer to Peckham, to report on *South London's Bonniest Baby Competition*. He captured the moment where a father exhibits his daughter on a table before a jury of four ladies, ready to jot down the baby's scores. Typical of most baby show imagery, the adults in the picture seem to enjoy the event more than the baby.

Today, baby contests in the UK are rare. In the United States, however, they are part of popular culture; possibly reflective of the fact that beauty is so highly prized in American society. American baby contests are ubiquitous, sponsored by retailers and organised by local communities, shopping malls, magazines and universities.<sup>2</sup> Modern-day baby contests differ considerably from the eugenicists' 'scientific' baby contests; babies now win prizes for the cutest smile or brightest eyes. Winners are stereotypes of their *gender*, no longer their race.

Baby beauty pageants in the United States take the notion of a baby contest to extreme ends. Colby Katz gave a stunning insight into this subcultural phenomenon in her installation *Darling Divas* in 2004. Here we see how mothers choose to dress up babies from 6 months old. Spray tan, makeup, hair extensions, and layered princess gowns are used to achieve the desired Barbie look. Older girls who are changing teeth wear fake teeth to improve their smiles. Through Katz's work, we hear how parents instruct their toddler how to pose: 'Put your hands on your hips... look this way... one more time... big smile... say moooooeee!'

Retouching studios offer their services to create pageant photos; heavily retouched images which turn babies into made up dolls. Some studios even provide a 'Total Makeover' service for babies, including added hair, facial powder and lipstick, and digitally plucked eyebrows. When asked why they have their children enter pageants, mothers declare it improves their daughters' self-esteem.<sup>3</sup> Paradoxically, baby pageant photos seem to be pushing the belief that, from the earliest possible age, a cosmetic appearance is synonymous with beauty. And that vanity does not have to remain unknown to babies for long.

**Baby, Picturing the Ideal Humam 1840s - Now**  
Gallery One, 13 February - 19 April 2009

For further information relating to this exhibition please visit our website at [nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/baby](http://nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/baby)

<sup>1</sup><http://chnm.gmu.edu/lostmuseum/search.htm?function=find&exhibit=baby&brwse=baby>

<sup>2</sup>Advertisement in Boston Evening Transcript, August 28, 1855.

<sup>3</sup>Unnamed author, 'The Baby Show - Grand Infantile Display', New York Times, June 6, 1855.

<sup>4</sup>In the case of universities, fund raising for charity is the baby contest's main purpose.

<sup>5</sup>Hillary Levey (Princeton University, PhD Sociology expected, 2009) extensively researched child beauty pageants.

#### Further reading

Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: gender, race and class in visual culture*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Annette K. Vance Dorey, *Better Baby Contests: The Scientific Quest for Perfect Childhood Health in the Early Twentieth Century*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1999.

Carol Squiers, *Perfecting Mankind: Eugenics and Photography*, New York: ICP, 2001  
Forthcoming: Hillary Levey, *Pageant Princesses and Math Whizzes: Understanding Children's Activities as a Form of Children's Work*, (2009)



Untitled, c.1880, Anonymous, Ambrotype, National Media Museum Collection



*South London's Bonniest Baby Competition*, Peckham, 1951, F. Graves, The Daily Herald Newspaper, Gelatin silver, contact print, National Media Museum Collection



Faith, Sunburst International Beauty Pageant, California, 2004, Colby Katz, Chromogenic print, Courtesy of the artist



Pageant photo, c. 2008, digital image, www.phojoe.com



# MADONNA & CHILD: IDEALISED REPRESENTATIONS OF MOTHER AND BABY

Iris Sicking



Maria With Child, 1999, Frank Krems - Chromogenic print, Courtesy of Frank Krems

Research on the representation of the baby in photographic history revealed that photographers and parents aim to portray the baby in a desirable, idealised pose.<sup>1</sup> These portraits are not always made intentionally. Changing conventions in portrait photography and beauty ideals have influenced both parents and image makers. This article focuses on iconic Christian representations of Mary and the baby Jesus which strongly shaped photographic depictions of mother and child portraits. An example of a portrait in which these iconic elements are at first glance absent is a *carte-de-visite* by Isidore van Kinsbergen from 1865. The gesture with which the mother holds her baby's head against her face shows their impending but inevitable separation in the future. According to art historian Julia Kristeva, this pose in Renaissance-style Madonna and Child painting symbolised the symbiotic relationship between mother and child.<sup>2</sup> In studio photography from the mid-19th century to the present day this pose, that stresses the intimate bond between mother and child, can be found regularly.

Painting greatly influenced portrait photography in terms of composition, light and the pose of those portrayed. In the case of mother-and-child portrait photography however, there is more going on. These kinds of images also reflect excepted notions of motherhood that exist in Western society. This iconography stands as a symbol for the cherishing mother (Mary) who devotes her life to the child (baby Jesus). Large numbers of educational experts in the 19th and 20th centuries suggested the mother was the one responsible for the care and upbringing of the child.<sup>3</sup> One exception aside, in the 1940s Dr. Spock believed that the father could play an important role in the child's upbringing, it was the job of the mother to ensure that the child had a healthy and happy life.

The Madonna and the Child in 14th and 15th century paintings, by amongst others the Italian painters Giovanni Bellini, Raphael and Titian, gradually lost their divinity. Mary was increasingly depicted as an ordinary mother, neither did the baby Jesus raise his hand in a gesture of blessing but turned lovingly towards his mother. In 17th and 18th century painting, this trend was continued and every religious reference disappeared.<sup>4</sup> Art historian Anne Higonnet argues that motherhood in these representations is to a certain extent enveloped in a holy shroud. After all, if Mary, the mother of God, is a simple mother, then all

mothers are holy.<sup>5</sup> Reverting to the archetypal figures of Madonna and Child, which are familiar to us through these paintings, in photographic portraiture, helps us to maintain the idealised image of the mother-child relationship.

Mainly due to economic progress during the 19th century, women in the middle classes could dedicate themselves completely to caring for their homes and children. Around 1900, the motherhood cult reached its zenith. Family life and the central role of the woman as a mother in it, was being idealised and glorified. Female Pictorialist photographers (Pictorialism was a movement within photography that aimed to emulate painting) specialised in making romanticised representations of motherhood. These female photographers often used themselves and their own children as models. The English amateur photographer Emma Barton, for example, posed with her own son in *The Awakening (Self Portrait with her son Cecil)*. The work was awarded the Royal Photographic Society Medal in 1903. The transparent veil referenced a divine Madonna. The baby, however, looks at the viewer, a detail Barton appears to use to point to the zeitgeist: the child was placed on a pedestal and presented as a fully developed person.

Within the genre of 20th-century documentary photography, it is specifically the images that are based on the iconography of Mary and Child that are regarded as meaningful. The portrait *Migrant Mother* (1936) by Dorothea Lange is a powerful example of this. This is also true for more contemporary photojournalistic and documentary photography. Tom Wood, chronicler of Liverpool in the 1970s and 1980s, captioned the portrait of a teenage mother with her baby *Titian Mother* in a reference to the work of the 15th-century painter Titian. The baby has wrapped its arm around the mother's neck and stands on her lap, its feet warmed between her clothes. The pose refers to the *Mater Amabilis*, also known as Mother of Love which became popular from the late 14th century, in which baby and mother hold each other tenderly.<sup>6</sup> However the inward-looking gaze of the mother in Woods portrait - references the divine Madonna from earlier paintings who is aware of the heavy task before her.

In our time, the development and independence of the woman, alongside her

motherly duties, are important as well. Her domain is no longer limited to the home and children. Frank Krems shows his *Maria with Child*, 1999, in a powerful embrace. The mother appears to be smothering the child in her love. Perhaps this is her only child in whom she invests all her expectations about being a 'super mother' raising a model child. Annie Leibovitz portrayed celebrity Jerry Hall with her youngest son. In the original representation of Mary feeding the child, the *Madonna Lactea*, Mary is looking at the child. In this image, in contrast, Jerry Hall (the Madonna) looks provocatively at the viewer. She is not involved with her child but rather is flirting with the viewer. The subtle eroticism of her pose is also strengthened by the decoration of the room, the red colours and the clothes she is wearing. Both Krems and Leibovitz depict mothers for whom motherhood is not the only aspect of their lives and in so doing discard the Madonna-referencing poses of the holy aura surrounding the mother.

These mother and child portraits, which for a long time have disseminated the idealised image of motherhood, appear to be making a return through the interpretation of such photographers. A change these photographers make due to the changing ideas in our society about motherhood and the way one should take care of a child.

**Baby, Picturing the Ideal Human 1840s - Now Gallery One, 13 February - 19 April 2009**

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<sup>1</sup> Curators of the exhibition *Baby, Picturing the Ideal Human 1840s - Now* Hedy van Erp and Iris Sicking, conducted this research entitled *Innocent Human*.

<sup>2</sup> Photographic portraits of babies from 1839 to present day at Leiden University in 2005

<sup>3</sup> Kristeva, *Desire in Language. A semiotic approach to literature and art*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1980

<sup>4</sup> C. Hardyment, *Dream babies. Child care from Locke to Spock*, London, 1984 and *Perfect parents. Baby-care advice past and present*, Oxford University Press, London, 1995

<sup>5</sup> The painter Benjamin West for example, used the same composition for the portrait of his wife and child (c.1770) as Raphael's famous painting *Madonna della Sedia* (1512-1514). However by naming it Mrs West and son he stripped any religious meaning. For a more elaborate introduction to this subject matter, see Anne Higonnet's book *Pictures of Innocence* (1998).

<sup>6</sup> A. Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1998, p.42

<sup>7</sup> Hall, *Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art*, Primavera Press, Leiden, 1992 [Dutch edition]



*Untitled*, 1865, Isidore van Kinsbergen, Batavia, Albumen  
carte-de-viste, Courtesy of F.C. Schüller, Bergen, (NL)



*Titian Mother*, 1985, Tom Wood, Chromogenic print, Courtesy of the artist



*The Awakening (Self Portrait with her son Cecil)*, 1903, Emma Barton, Carbon print, National Media Museum Collection



*Jerry Hall and Gabriel Jagger, New York City*, 1998, Annie Leibovitz, Chromogenic print, Courtesy of Annie Leibovitz

NARRATIVES:

# BABY

## PICTURING THE IDEAL HUMAN 1840s - NOW

Exhibitions should stimulate the mind - offering us the opportunity to re-evaluate our ideas, opinions and assumptions. This section of *archive* draws together the responses of a group of curators and writers to a selection of images from or inspired by the exhibition *Baby, Picturing the Ideal Human 1840s - Now*. As you will see, the photographic representation of babies is open to wide range of different interpretations. This exhibition provides the ideal platform for the further exploration of this thought-provoking subject.



  
COVERED  
COMFORT

Hedy van Erp

Top left: *Carroll baby*, c. 1870, American & Australasian Photographic Company, Glass photonegative, State Library of New South Wales

Bottom left: *Tesla*, 2007, Blommers / Schumm, C-type colour print, Courtesy of the artists

How do you get a baby, obviously unconcerned with the purpose of a camera, to sit still and pose restfully? Mid 19th century portrait studios made use of toys like rattles and jumping jacks to catch the children's attention. Towards the end of that century, manufacturers of studio props supplied baby chairs with holes in the back, through which the mother could hold her child upright. There were also artificial walls and pedestals available, on top of which the infant, held firmly by a crouching but often visible mother, could be photographed. Less flourishing studios simply used a piece of rope to tie the baby to a chair.

However, nothing makes a baby as cooperative as the palpable presence of a parent. Some studio photographers used dark curtains to conceal them, creating eerie images of babies on the laps of hidden, or not so hidden, mothers. Photographers Anuschka Blommers and Niels Schumm in fact honoured this tradition in a series for children's fashion magazine *Kid's Wear*. Schumm, dressed in a black cat-suit that also covers his face, serves as a comfy chair for Blommers's baby daughter, clad in a designer dress, and perfectly at ease.

Sometimes it's not immediately clear why a particular photograph is compelling. This photograph is not dramatic because of the blood or the nudity, elements which usually have great stopping power, but because the baby, only a few seconds old, *looks us in the eye*. He thus makes contact, and with his eyes he seems to want to testify the violence he has just endured while entering this world. He spreads his arms in a reflex, and seems stunned by the sensation of space he suddenly experiences. At the same time he seems helpless; he desperately tries to find the protective confinement that covered him until now.

The child is surrounded by white; the latex glove, the nurse's apron, the towels; he seems to be bathed in the light like a heavenly creature. The hands of the people around hold and support him. All the arms we see are directed towards the child's face, making him the center of his new universe. With his slanted eyes he resembles the well known representations of the aliens that some believe to have landed in Roswell, USA, in the 1950s. Only via the umbilical cord is this alien still connected to the mother ship.



AN ALIEN  
HAS LANDED

28 March, 2000, Koos Breukel,  
Gelatin silverprint, Courtesy of the artist



In times of personal setback or general low spirits, it may help to know that things could be worse. This Polaroid, from the Institute for Concrete Matter in Haarlem, the Netherlands, always does the trick for me. After all, the good thing about found photography is that you can indulge in carefree interpretation.

At first glance, this image depicts an extremely happy moment, one of the highlights in life; the birth of a healthy baby. However, there is a dark edge to this photograph, and not only literally. We see a man that not just shows his newborn baby, but he decided to do so in a particular corner of his house. By choosing his rifle collection for a background, the meaning of this photograph changes dramatically; his wife and newborn baby become his hunting trophies.

The contrasts in this photo make it even more powerful; a figurine of a baby lies sleeping against the trigger of a shotgun. The tiny innocent baby is a bonsai version of his impressive father, with matching hairlines. The man's strangling clasp forces his wife to show her affection in an incapacitated manner. We can only hope they had a long and happy marriage.



HAPPINESS  
IS A WARM  
GUN

Untitled, c. 1960, Anonymous, Polaroid,  
Courtesy of the Institute for Concrete  
Matter







*Skopelos (Bruno 1994)*, 1993, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Ektacolor print, Courtesy of Philip-Lorca diCorcia and David Zwirner, New York

A baby lies on the ground in a forest. His arms and legs are raised slightly from the ground. It is not clear what the cause of this movement is. It could be a reaction to a noise nearby, of a snapping twig maybe. It looks as if the baby has been left entirely to his own fate. I immediately associate the oppressive atmosphere the image evokes with violence against and sexual abuse of children.

The work of Philip-Lorca diCorcia is characterised by the tension he is able to create in his unsettling exhibitions. His photos occupy the space somewhere between snapshots and cinematographic stills in which so many things still have to happen. Or not?

The title of this photo is *Bruno, 1994*. It is the photographer's son. So perhaps this baby is not lying abandoned in a forest, but in a shaded spot in the photographer's garden. The movements of his limbs could also be a sign of relaxation. Just before a baby falls asleep, or is already asleep, its muscles often momentarily contract. When observed from this perspective, the image shows the unqualified trust a baby has in the world around him. The perfect example of the innocence of the still-unknowing child.

## INNOCENCE

Iris Sikking



*Four girls and a baby, Hackney, London, 2007*, Nick Danziger, Gelatin silver print, Courtesy of Nick Danziger / Neil Burgess Pictures

Four young girls lean against each other, posing a little provocatively for the photographer. Only the girl on the right of the photo does not look at him. Her gaze is serious, sombre even. She is 19-year-old Kerry-Anne and mother of two-year-old Reece on the left of the photo. Does she feel as if she doesn't really belong here, as if her youth is over?

During his journey through England, Nick Danziger regularly encountered teenage mothers, including these friends in Hackney, London. More than once he met small groups of young people hanging around on the street. When there were babies, they often were passed from hand to hand. The love that they miss at home is lavished on these little ones, the photographer noted.

An explanation given for the high number of teenage pregnancies in England is that some young girls see becoming a mother as a way of escaping their often desperate situation. Danziger believes, however, that this argument only played a role once they were pregnant. The freedom that comes with building one's own family then becomes tempting. But in reality, for many young mothers this appears to be an illusory freedom; and so also for the inward-looking Kerry-Anne.

## IF LOOKS COULD SPEAK



Hidden deep in the body of the mother, the foetus tries to find a comfortable position in the warm amniotic fluid. At 28 weeks, he doesn't know where to put his arms and legs. His gaping mouth is frozen in a cry for more space. Only a decade ago, expectant parents proudly displayed a blurry black-and-white photograph in which they themselves pointed out the head, the arms and the legs. As a result of today's high quality 3D ultrasounds, which, in moving form gain a fourth dimension, the foetus is now visible, down to the smallest details.

The desire to make visible the physical processes that are invisible from the outside is age-old. An ultrasound has become one of the standard procedures carried out during a pregnancy. It is no longer just a medical examination, but also functions as an opportunity to get to know the future family member. The very private moment that takes place inside the body has found its way to the outsider. The 'portrait' that is made during the ultrasound is added to the baby photo album and distributed over the internet to share this event with family and friends. In the age of the internet, the (unsuspecting) YouTube visitor can also become acquainted with an unknown baby that has yet to be born.



THE FIRST  
PORTRAIT

4D antenatal ultrasonography,  
3:30 min, 2008, Baby Vision, Delft, DVD,  
Courtesy of Baby Vision, Delft



In the National Media Museum's Collection are two images which illustrate the story behind Oscar Rejlander's *Ginx's Baby*; the original polychrome chalk drawing c.1872 and the published heliograph, 1872.

Rejlander was commissioned by the scientist Charles Darwin (1809 - 1892) to produce a series of photographs to illustrate human emotion in his book *The Expression of the Emotions* (1872). The most difficult emotion to capture was a crying child, due to the slow exposure of the available photographic techniques. Therefore when Rejlander produced the first albumen print of the crying child it was hailed as an unprecedented photographic achievement.

As a talented draughtsman, aware of artistic techniques, Rejlander manipulated the image. He made a transparency of the original, which he projected onto a canvass and then traced. He produced a large chalk drawing in black, white and sepia chalk. He enhanced the face, hands, legs and clothing and added a chair. The drawing was re-photographed to produce a convincing facsimile.

In addition to the sale of 7000 copies of Darwin's book, Rejlander sold 250,000 carte-de-visites. *Ginx's Baby* was popular for two reasons - it was believed to illustrate the popular novel by Edward Jenkin's *Ginx's Baby, His Birth and other Misfortunes* (1870) and secondly it was widely acclaimed for its instantaneity and was felt to be a great photographic achievement. Neither Darwin nor Rejlander dispelled this myth.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Phillip Procter, 'Rejlander, Darwin, and the Evolution of 'Ginx's Baby'', pp 260 - 268, *History of Photography*, Volume 23, Number 3, Autumn 1999.

Top left: *Ginx's Baby*, c.1872, Oscar Gustav Rejlander  
Polychrome chalk drawing, The Royal Photographic  
Society Collection at the National Media Museum

Top right: *Expression of Suffering: Weeping*,  
*The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animal*,  
1872, Oscar Gustav Rejlander, Heliographs, National  
Media Museum Collection

THE MYTH  
AROUND  
GINX'S BABY

Philippa Wright

HIDDEN  
MOTHER



*"One year old infant shipwrecked once in the Madras Surf & again in the wreck of the Colombo Steamer" Julia Margaret Cameron*

This is a portrait of Georgina Anna Mary Pictet, the daughter of Captain Francis Pictet of the Madras Native Infantry and Rose Prinsep McKenzie, Julia Margaret Cameron's niece. From the inscription we learn that in her short life Georgina had survived two shipwrecks; firstly in the Madras surf, tidal waves off the coast of India and secondly on the Peninsular & Oriental Company's SS Columbo, which ran aground in the Indian Ocean on November 18, 1862.

Georgina is sitting on a woman's knee, probably her mother Rose. The nape of the woman's neck is visible behind the baby. It was common to see the presence of an adult, usually the mother, steadying the babies in early studio portraiture. Cameron used a wet collodion negative process to make an albumen print. This needed a long exposure to capture the portrait.

Cameron has deliberately thrown the mother out of focus and has cropped the print to an arched format; the mother was never intended to feature in the photograph and is only there to physically support the baby. Many techniques were used to disguise the mother's presence; she would be hidden under a cloth or curtain, or behind a pedestal or plinth, or simply masked out on the negative. Unfortunately even with her mother's support Georgina has moved her hands so they appear blurred in the photograph.

*Baby Pictet, 1864, Julia Margaret Cameron  
Albumen print, National Media Museum Collection*



*The Moor Hospital Lancaster*

*"I love this baby,  
He's just arrived in Lancashire  
He's just starting in 'Punch'  
He can take care about I think off"*

*Ian Beesley*

*The Moor Hospital, Lancaster,  
1994, Ian Beesley, Gelatin silver  
print, National Media Museum  
Collection*

MEMORIES  
THROUGH  
PHOTOTHERAPY

Dolly is shown here aged 99. She was committed to The Moor Hospital, aged 16, the reason, she had an illegitimate child. She died at 100 years old having never left the Hospital.

Ian Beesley worked as artist in residence at The Moor, a psychiatric hospital near Lancaster. There he captured emotive images of institutionalised patients. Through phototherapy sessions Ian attempted to stimulate the long term memory of patients with senile dementia. He used photographs of local places and magazines to assist the patients in recalling memories.

This moving photograph depicts how powerful images can be when used in phototherapy. Whilst flicking through a magazine Dolly had a strong reaction to a photograph of a baby. Ian noticed how all images of babies moved her; she held this photograph to her cheek and stroked the baby's face. She did not know the child in the magazine; however it provoked memories and emotions. Dolly's own baby was taken away from her at birth. She had no photographs of her own baby.

The 'poem' underneath the photograph was spoken by Dolly. Perhaps she was preparing to die and in contrast feels the baby in the magazine is just beginning life's journey. Dolly expressed a sense of continuity of life through this baby. Sadly she had made her journey through life alone in The Moor without her own baby.



POLYFOTO -  
'ONE OF THEM  
MUST BE GOOD!'

Colin Harding



In July 1933, *The British Journal of Photography* announced 'an important innovation in portrait photography, a thing that portrait photographers cannot afford to ignore'. The name of this new form of portraiture was both simple and descriptive - Polyfoto, meaning, literally, 'many photographs'. For over thirty years, Polyfoto studios were a common sight. The distinctive photographs they produced - forty eight different poses, each little bigger than a postage stamp, found their way into millions of wallets and handbags.

Polyfoto originated in Denmark. The first British studio was opened in Selfridge's in London in 1933. It was soon followed by others in most cities and larger towns, usually located in department stores. The studios were very simple. A space about twelve feet by six housed the camera, lights, sitter's chair and background. The camera operated by turning a handle. Each revolution activated the shutter and moved a glass plate so that forty-eight photographs could be taken in quick succession.

Every day, studios sent their exposed plates to a factory in Stanmore to be developed and printed. After receiving their proof sheet, customers could select the pose that they would like enlarged. As the company slogan said 'One of them must be good!'

In 1969, Polyfoto went into liquidation. Today, it is no longer a household name, but it remains a fascinating example of mass portrait photography and a source of nostalgia and personal memories for millions of people.

*Polyfoto*, c.1960s, Gelatin silver print, contact sheet,  
National Media Museum Collection



THE BOY ON  
A MUSHROOM



In 1900 George Eastman, the founder of Kodak, launched a camera that was to transform photography into a truly popular pastime. Costing just five shillings (25p) it was the first camera that practically every family could afford to own. Eastman named it the 'Brownie' - not in honour of its designer, Frank Brownell, but after pixie-like creatures popularized by the Canadian children's author, Palmer Cox. Ever the shrewd businessman, Eastman wanted to cash in on their popularity and make the camera appealing to children.

At first, Brownie advertisements and packaging used drawings of these little characters. One such advert was seen by the artist, George Alfred Wyatt. Somewhat unkindly, perhaps, the Brownie illustrations reminded him of his baby son, Frank, who had prominent ears. A keen amateur photographer, Wyatt resolved to photograph his son as a Brownie. Frank's parents made a mushroom from bent canes, cotton wool and fabric and his mother made him a little silk Brownie outfit. The portrait was duly taken and the negative sent to Kodak Ltd. Although it was never used as an advertising image, it was subsequently reproduced in a popular magazine of the time, *The Bystander*. Amazingly, carefully preserved by the family for over 100 years, the little Brownie outfit worn by Frank was donated to the National Media Museum in 2002.

*Baby with a Brownie camera*, c.1900, George Alfred Wyatt, Gelatin silver print, National Media Museum Collection



Top left: Princess Diana, Prince Charles and Prince William at Kensington Palace, 1983. Tim Graham. Colour postcard, © Tim Graham / Getty Images

Bottom left: *Diana, Dodi and Baby*, 1997, Alison Jackson, Artists proof, Courtesy of Royal College of Art Collection, London, © Alison Jackson



FICTION  
FACTORY -  
PHOTOGRAPHS  
OF ROYAL  
CHILDREN

Greg Hobson

These photographs, the first by Tim Graham the second, Alison Jackson, offer both similarities and differences that pose fascinating food for thought. Immediately worthy of consideration is the premise that both photographs contain actors playing out their, or their photographers' dramas.

Graham's photograph of Prince Charles, Diana and William was taken in 1984. An official Royal image, it was widely distributed in the press and as a collectable postcard. Showing the loving couple, with Prince Charles cradling the recently born William, Graham's photograph invites us to share in the apparently private, though momentarily public world of the new Royal family. William is a perfect Royal; strong, healthy and 'fit for a king'. Charles' position shows us that he is the father of the child; the true Royal, extending the bloodline by providing a son for the throne. Princess Diana is posed behind the couch, subjugated and demoted to the role of Royal child-carrier, for which she beams approval. In the early 1980s the media, and a public hungry for reassuring stories about our Queen and country, largely embraced this view of these Royals as a resolved and happy family unit. The birth of William was an affirming legacy of this - a child born of love, honour and duty.

By the mid-1980s, around the time of the birth of Charles and Diana's second son Harry, stories began to emerge about deep rifts between the couple. These were fuelled by the rumoured long-standing relationship between Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles. At some point between then and 1986 Diana embarked on an adulterous relationship with Captain James Hewitt, beginning what was to be a very public demise of Charles and Diana's marriage.

Alison Jackson's photograph *Diana, Dodi and baby* asks us to consider a controversial proposition; if Diana had lived, she might have borne a child with Dodi al-Fayed. Diana had begun a relationship with Dodi al-Fayed in 1996 and they died together in a car-crash in Paris in 1997. The photograph, taken in 1998, one year after Diana and Dodi's death, has been made using look-alike actors. By playing the parts of a deceased couple, they are no less ingenious than Charles and Diana in the original photograph, where the roles are played by their real life counterparts. Power relations are shifted however. 'Diana' cradles her child, tipping it forward for 'Dodi' to admire. This is patently 'her' child and she wants the world to know it. But in the light of a bitter enmity that had built between Charles, the Royal family and Diana, the presence of a child born between Diana and Dodi represents a vicious retaliation on the part of Diana. Coolly callous yet seemingly without malice, Diana might have felt that, with this child, she had served her coup-de-grace to the reputation of the Royal Family.

Rumours subsequent to her death that intimated Diana was planning to marry Dodi, or was bearing his child at the time of their deaths, have been widely reported and strenuously denied. Diana's 'perfect child' was never born and Jackson's photograph remains a contentious, yet elegant fiction of what might have been.

**Baby, Picturing the Ideal Humam 1840s - Now Gallery One, 13 February - 19 April 2009**

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