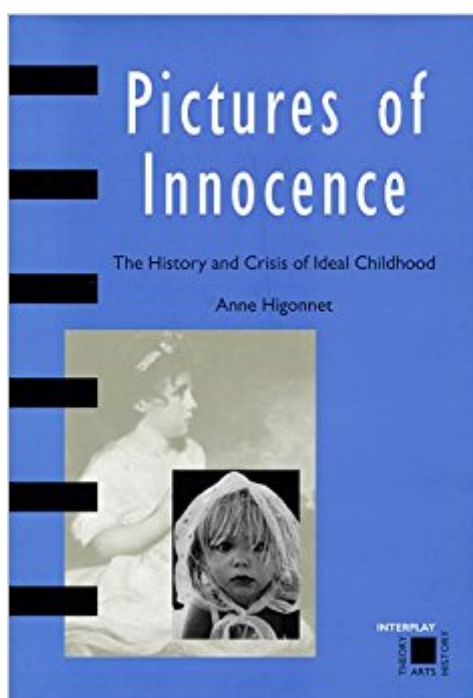


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Pictures Of Innocence: The History And Crisis Of Ideal Childhood (Interplay)



Synopsis

The ideal of childhood innocence is perhaps the most cherished concept of modern culture, all the more so because it seems to be under siege. This book explores the images that are at once the most common, the most sacred, and the most controversial of our time, ranging from 18th-century portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds to greeting cards by Anne Geddes, from the ambiguous photographs of Lewis Carroll to those of Sally Mann.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If any book of art criticism has the potential of becoming a bestseller, *Pictures of Innocence* is it. With her customary clarity of both thought and prose, Anne Higonnet, author of a biography of Berthe Morisot and *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women*, examines childhood, cultural ideals, and popular and artistic images of children. She is both brilliant and careful in her analyses of paintings, photographs, and sculptures and the times in which they were made. *Pictures of Innocence*--with 100 illustrations that range from Caravaggio's raunchy Cupid to Edward Weston's luminous, analytical nude studies of his son Neil to anonymous family Christmas-card snapshots--is the kickoff title in what is billed as "a new series of books about controversial themes and issues in the arts that cut across traditional disciplines." Higonnet marshals masses of material to develop her argument that the way we look at children and childhood is changing, and that this change affects our judgment of art, freedom of expression, sexuality, privacy, consent, exploitation, and child abuse.

"Pictures of children are at once the most common, the most sacred, and the most controversial images of our time," Higonnet writes in her introduction. Her concerns are not confined to the most obvious ones. In chapter 1, "The Romantic Child," Higonnet writes, "The image of the Romantic child replaces what we have lost, or what we fear to lose. Every sweetly sunny, innocently cute Romantic child image stows away a dark side: a threat of loss, of change, and, ultimately, of death." In "Photographs Against the Law," Higonnet points out that "since the early 1980s, photography has been increasingly implicated in the crime of sexual child abuse." Carefully tracing this thread, she asks at one point, "Why photography? Because photographs can and do document actions." It comes down to the fact that a photograph (in this case, one by Dorothea Lange) "originated in the act of clicking a camera at a real person." This complex, brilliant book will educate anyone who reads it. In its balanced, minutely detailed discussions of difficult issues, it illuminates issues that have heretofore been swamped in passionate but subjective rhetoric. --Peggy Moorman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Higonnet argues that the cultural definitions of childhood, mother, and family are changing. That change is evident, she says, in photography and society's reaction to it, particularly with regard to child pornography laws. Since photographs record images and not necessarily reality, the line between protecting real children from real acts and restricting freedom of expression needs to be carefully redrawn. In the book's largest section, a history of the child in art, she considers the commercialization of childhood imagery. Discussing the use, abuse, and intent of child pornography laws, she offers interesting explanations for the increasing concern over images from the private sphere, such as family snapshots. Contending that the Romantic ideal of childhood made children more vulnerable to exploitation, she calls for a shift from it to the concept of the knowing child, not totally innocent yet still deserving of adult protection. Higonnet may be overly dense, theoretical, feminist, Freudian, and relativistic for some, especially if they are uninterested in art, yet her unusual discussion of pornography and childhood will prove most thought provoking to others. Jennie Ver Steeg --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Pictures of Innocence is a softcover book with over 250 pages containing nine separate chapters broken down into two parts and illustrated with about 100 photos with eight of which are in color. The chapter breakdowns are follow: Part I THE INVENTION OF INNOCENCE Chapter 1: The Romantic Child Chapter 2: Every Mother's Child Chapter 3: A Golden Age Chapter 4: Innocence Inherited Chapter 5: Snapshot Families Part II AN IDEAL IN CRISIS Chapter 6: Through the Looking

GlassChapter 7: Private Pictures, Public DangersChapter 8: Photographs Against the LawChapter 9: Knowing ChildWhether you agree or not with Anne Higonnet's assertions, her book at least displays an earnest and detailed attempt at examining a very volatile and delicate subject at this moment in history. In the early chapters, the author sites many works of paintings as well as authors from the 19th century to illustrate her point. In the later chapters, she goes into some legal cases from the later half of the 20th century. Detailed, well-illustrated, and perhaps a bit controversial this book presents the reader a chance to have an open discussion about a subject that many find uncomfortable. In a free society, its citizens should have the ability to shine a light on a topic and perhaps one day set it free, this book is one possible avenue to begin that exploration.

There's a lot to recommend this book: Higonnet has you exercising your critical judgment on a plethora of everyday images, new and antiquarian, even if you disagree with her analysis. However, readers should be aware that the author substantially misstates the law in several places. She cites some interpretive dicta from a district court case in California (US v. Dost) as being the actual text of the federal law. The federal law isn't nearly as vague as she suggests. Moreover she says that the Child Pornography Prevention Act of 1995 criminalized depictions of breasts and buttocks of minors. Untrue. The final bill passed deleted these provisions. These are serious omissions to a sensitive discussion. Lawrence A. Stanley, Esq. NY, NY

I found the text of this book rather hard-going; it requires quite some concentration to read. No doubt the content of the book is very good, but it's too hard for me to read to really be able to say.

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