

Formative Embrace (2006)

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In the Victorian days of photography chemical film processes were far more expensive and slower than they are today. Camera exposures took a long time; meaning people had to pose for long periods, aided by a neck brace to keep their heads still. Having a portrait taken during this era therefore not only implied status, but also required a certain preparedness and self-control.

Although the fleeting moment and the snapshot is now embedded in our modern visual vocabulary, the photographic pose, found in even the most every-day photograph, reveals our conscious and unconscious needs to present an image of ourselves to others. As an act of communicating with the outside world, posing (via body language, expression and gesture) is our chance to express how we feel we fit into the social scheme of things.

This project takes as its subject the modern family photograph album. It explores the family photograph as a medium for communication between private and public worlds, as a way of presenting an image of private family life to outsiders, and as a way of reaffirming that image to those on the inside.

Every photograph in this series originated as a traditional family portrait sitting that was directed largely by the respective family group. But digital manipulation processes transform these family portraits and draw us to the pose and gesture each parent slipped into when asked to hold their children for a photograph. This project treats the parental pose found in the traditional family portrait as an object of psychological and social study, as something that alludes not only to the wider family group but also to the social idea of Family itself.