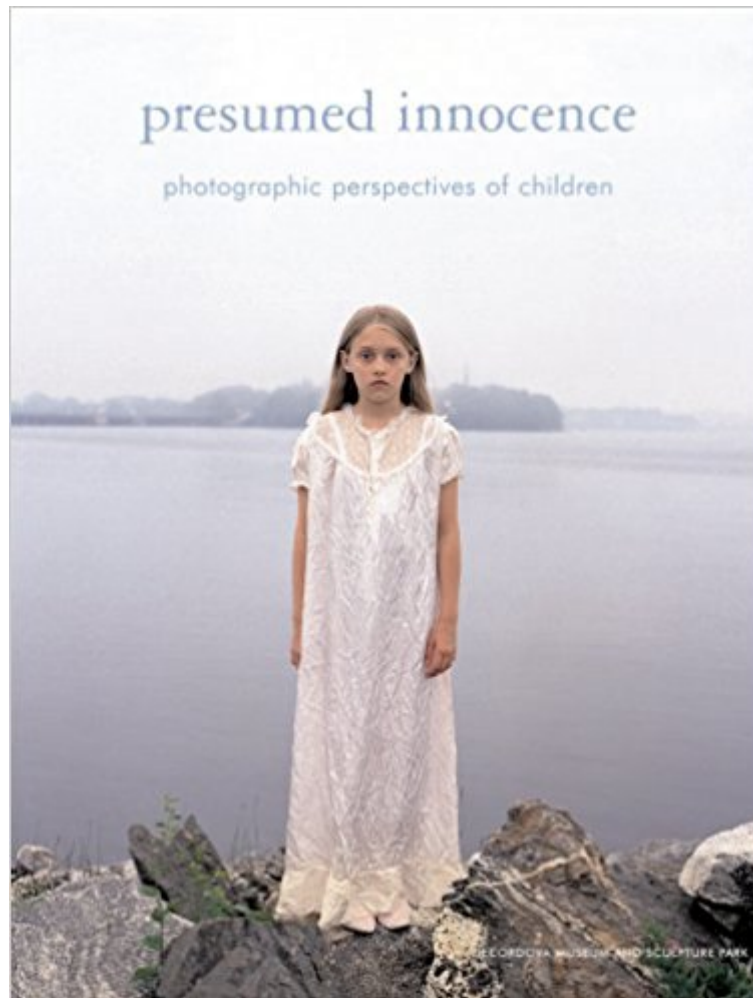


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# Presumed Innocence



## Synopsis

From Ansel Adams' harrowing 1940s documentary photographs of transient migrant workers' children to Sally Mann's simultaneously erotic and innocent portraits of her adolescent children and other pre- and postpubescent girls, images of children have fascinated and frustrated viewers since the inception of the medium. This excellent collection of vintage and contemporary photographs, spanning from the early twentieth century until now, covers all of the relevant genres, from documentary reportage to digitally manipulated constructions. It includes well-known black-and-white images by renowned masters, as well as very recent color work by American and European photographers alike. Among the 85 photographers included are Ansel Adams, Diane Arbus, Julie Blackmon, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Bruce Davidson, Rineke Dijkstra, Elliot Erwitt, Lalla Essaydi, Larry Fink, Robert Frank, Emmet Gowin, Pieter Hugo, Dorothea Lange, Gillian Laub, Helen Levitt, Sally Mann, Mary Ellen Mark, Tina Modotti, Abelardo Morell, Martin Parr and Doris Ulmann. Scholarly essays by Rachel Rosenfield Lafo of the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park and Barnard College's Anne Higonnet discuss the history of photography and changing concepts of childhood in visual imagery, respectively.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Spanning several continents and encompassing nearly the entire history of photography, *Presumed Innocence* examines the other side of childhood through the eyes of some of the most notable photographers in the history of the art. Not too surprisingly from the title, the outlook leans towards

the bleaker side, with many of the youths pictured appearing wise, worldly, and sometimes merely old beyond their years, often because they had no choice. The collected images offer a counterpoint to the abundant smiles decorating mantles, wallets, Christmas cards and shoe boxes (or the digital equivalent thereof). Sometimes sad, sometimes disturbing, often poignant and occasionally amusing, this study of childhood demonstrates that children see, understand, and experience far more than adults are willing to give them credit. Given the Tag Suggestions as I write this review, I would stress that this book is far more representative of the American Deep South styles of photographers such as Sally Mann, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, and Dave Anderson, and the urban styles of Diane Arbus and Bruce Davidson than the romantically eroticised visions of David Hamilton or the idyllic naturism characteristic of many of the Russian schools.

Presumed Innocent is a catalogue of photographs whose dates of creation range from the birth of the medium to the present decade. The artists contained within its pages are from a breadth of backgrounds as diverse as the above mentioned dates. The visual content of the book is contextualized by an excerpt from Anne Higonnet's book: Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of the Ideal Childhood in which she explains the history of the child as a subject and how the vocabulary of the "pure" child entered the visual arts, as well as the controversy surrounding the use of children in photography. While the subjects of the photographs are all children, they offer us a wide scope of these popular yet controversial sitters: child prostitutes, children from lower classes, revolutionary symbols, social documentary work, or highly produced images. The photographers use most of these children as personas: symbols for the changing definition of innocence that the photograph inherently captures and preserves. The author of the forward, Rachel Lafo has categorized the images in a few groups including: children alone, children at risk, rites of passage, constructed narratives. An example of this is Loretta Lux, who photographs young girls and digitally alters their proportions to be more "pretty" Lux exaggerates their features with large heads and eyes, accompanied with doll like limbs. When we initially look at the photographs the girls charm us, but we soon become uncomfortable. The viewer gets a sense that something is slightly off, and soon the photographs become haunting. This sort of subtle confrontation challenges our similarly constructed social ideas of childhood innocence.

a collection or an exhibition doesn't necessarily make a good book. Flipping the pages made me somewhat uneasy and it took some time until I recognized what it was - there is no connection between the pictures, no red line except that they are all part of a collection. Some of the pictures

belong to Sally Manns "Immediate Family", but here they are out of their context, so their nakedness doesn't make sense. I didn't read the introduction (may be I should have), but usually a good book doesn't need it to be good. No, collections are fine (who else but collectors will pay the artists?), sharing your collected art with the world is also a good thing, but this book will only collect dust in my shelf ...

No Problem

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