

METRO PICTURES

Jim Shaw *The Family Romance*

February 26 – April 13, 2019

Metro Pictures presents *The Family Romance*, an exhibition of five new paintings by Jim Shaw in the upstairs gallery. Known for blending personal, political, and surreal narratives, Shaw explores the realm of behavioral psychology and themes surrounding the family unit— which he describes as “the beloved core of the American dream.” The title of the exhibition refers to a psychological complex identified by Sigmund Freud in 1908, whereby a young child or adolescent fantasizes that they are really the children of parents of higher social standing than their actual parents. Shaw recalls doing this himself as a child, although, in his words, he “claimed to have been switched at birth and was really a Martian.”

Many of the works on view draw inspiration from vintage advertisements and publications, such as Alfred Barr’s famous graph from the cover of the Museum of Modern Art catalogue for *Cubism and Abstract Art*. One painting is based on the cover of a 1950s-era Christian magazine featuring a wholesome-looking middle-class family window shopping. In Shaw’s recreation of the scenario, the human family is replaced by one made out of potatoes sourced from an ad for instant mashed potato mix. In another painting, a family of six, in matching pajamas, are gathered around a patriarchal figure reading from a storybook. The pattern on their pajamas uncannily resembles the pattern of the background, which is from the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory test—a psychological test that assesses personality traits and psychopathology.



A painting titled *Macy Conference* evokes a straightforward Rockwellesque Thanksgiving scene, but each of the people pictured is actually a balloon floating in a parade like the annual one on Thanksgiving Day in New York sponsored by the Macy’s department store. For this work, Shaw was inspired by the Macy conferences. Between 1946 and 1953, the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation sponsored a series of meetings bringing together a diverse, interdisciplinary community of scholars and researchers who would lay the groundwork for cybernetics—the new science of automatic control and communication systems for both machines and living things. Many of the people represented in Shaw’s painting as balloons were direct participants in the conference, such as its chair, neurophysiologist Warren McCulloch, but others, such as Henry Murray and Frank Olson, were included for their historical involvement with personality testing and LSD mind control experiments.

Shaw was born in 1952 in Midland, Michigan, and lives and works in Los Angeles. He founded the band Destroy All Monsters with Mike Kelley in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in the early 1970s. Later in the decade, he was part of an influential group of artists, including Kelley and John Miller, who studied at CalArts. He was the subject of a major retrospective, *The End is Here*, at the New Museum, New York, in 2015. He has had additional one-person exhibitions at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams; BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, United Kingdom; Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam; CAPC, Musée de l’Art Contemporain de Bordeaux; MoMA PSI, New York; Magasin, Centre National d’Art Contemporain, Grenoble; Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; and Musée d’Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva. He participated in the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013, and his work has been included in exhibitions at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; New Museum, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

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Image: Jim Shaw, *Macy Conference*, 2019, acrylic on muslin, 60 x 48 inches, 152.4 x 121.9 cm