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Nicholas Nixon *The Brown Sisters*

**June 11th – September 5th
2021**





Nicholas Nixon, *The Brown Sisters*, 1986

Photography constitutes a central focus of Fundación MAPFRE's exhibition programming and acquisitions agenda. Starting in 2007, the collection, largely consisting of photos from the second half of the twentieth century, is centered on fine art photography, especially works made in the documentary tradition.

The Brown Sisters series by Nicholas Nixon was the Foundation's first important acquisition and it highlights a recurring genre within the collection: the portrait.

Nicholas Nixon (Detroit, 1947) is an artist who has deeply explored portraiture and social photography since the 1970s. The passage of time, human frailty and neglect are recurring themes in his work. Humanism and an interest in showing his own relationship with the world are reflected in many of Nixon's series—those representing the elderly in nursing homes, for example, and patients terminally ill with AIDS—and, especially, in his most well known series, *The Brown Sisters*. The closeness that Nixon achieves in these photographs evokes profound emotions in their spectators.

The Brown Sisters expresses both documental objectivity and emotional intimacy. We accompany this family from youth to maturity; we are the privileged witnesses to their gradual aging. The series functions as a methodical yearbook, but also as a powerful and intelligent study of portraiture and temporality. Here Nixon easily makes use of one of photography's key qualities, namely



Nicholas Nixon, *The Brown Sisters*, 1997

the nostalgia it provokes though its ability to stop time, creating art that resolutely exposes the vulnerability of his subjects and the relentless forward march of life.

The series, from its start in 1975, features repeating formal elements. Nixon always uses an 8x10" camera (20.3x25.4 cm), an uncommon format, but one to which Nixon remains loyal due to the excellent detail that it captures. The sisters are always situated in the same order, the one into which they fell by chance the first time Nixon photographed them, and, with some exceptions, they always take on a frontal pose, looking directly at the camera. In general the photographs are made outdoors with natural light that floods the composition. The series is a masterwork for its precision, clarity and overall technical perfection, and it represents a worthy continuation of the formalist tradition in American photography since the nineteenth century.

These photographs are charged with meaning. Above all, the representation of time and its elusive passage provokes an emotional reaction in the viewer through sheer repetition and accumulation. Aided by the serial structure, a key artistic strategy deployed by avant-garde artists before him, Nixon elegantly visualizes a narrative for the sweep of time. The series depicts a private realm, familial—the wife and sisters-in-law of the artist—but in the succession of images we discover an even more personal detail: Bebe, the second woman from the right and Nixon's



Nicholas Nixon, *The Brown Sisters*, 2018

wife, always fixes her gaze on the camera, on Nick. *The Brown Sisters* also functions then as an homage to the extraordinary person who has accompanied the artist for the adventure of life.

The series is one of the most noteworthy of contemporary photography and belongs to the permanent collections of important institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, and the Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris.

Nicholas Nixon, among the most renowned photographers internationally, has carried out his artistic practice parallel to a successful teaching career having taught photography for nearly four decades at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. Monographic exhibitions of his work have taken place at celebrated contemporary art centers across the globe including the Art Institute of Chicago (1985), the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1988 and 2010), the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1988), the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (1988), the San Diego Art Museum (1991), the Musée d'Art Modern de Paris (1995), the National Gallery of Art, Washington (2005), the Saint Louis Art Museum (2007), the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2015), and Fundación MAPFRE, Madrid (2017).

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Dates

June 11 – September 5, 2021

Curatorship

Carlos Gollonet

Opening hours

Mondays: Closed
Tuesdays – Sundays
(and public holidays):
11am-8pm
Last entry: 7:30pm

Visitors must leave the galleries
10 minutes before closing time

Admissions

Standard ticket: 5 €
Ticket with reduction: 3 €
Free standard ticket: Tuesdays
(except public holidays)
Groups: 3 € / per person

Audio guide services

Available in English, Catalan
and Spanish

Guided tour (cultural mediation service)

Wednesdays & Thursdays: 5-8pm
Fridays & Saturdays:
12-2pm, 5-8pm
Sundays & public holidays: 12-2pm
(Information at the reception.
Not available during August)

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exhibition: #KBrHermanasBrown

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Barcelona Photo Center