

PRESS RELEASE

IN YOUTH IS PLEASURE

22 September - 23 December 2023

Private view: 21st September, 6 - 8pm

Genius is nothing more nor less than childhood recovered at will.

Charles Baudelaire

Vendelmans is proud to open its new gallery at 6 Conduit Street with *In Youth Is Pleasure* - an exhibition dedicated to portraits of children.

The exhibition's title refers to DENTON WELCH's eponymous novel from 1945 which follows the stream-of-consciousness of a fifteen-year old boy named ORVIL PYM. The novel explores - in a similar manner to the present exhibition - the concept of childhood memories and the importance of preserving childlike wonderment. Further context is given through the work of writers and artists who have also considered these themes, such as MARCEL PROUST, ASTRID LINDGREN and the photographer JACQUES-HENRI LARTIGUE. Simultaneously, it is a concise survey of child portraiture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - a time during which the notion of *childhood itself* changed dramatically following the writings of JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU.

Thus, the exhibited works function both as art and artefact. Whether a portrait of a promising young monarch, or an obliging Flemish farm-boy, we must consider that these portraits are as much a representation of their sitters as they are a reflection of the adults surrounding them. For each work was made by a grown-up artist, and usually commissioned by the child's hopeful parents. *Hope*, in fact, is omnipresent in these works. Hope that these small people will go on to bestow honour upon their families. Hope that they will lead better, brighter lives. Hope that they return their parents' affection. Or simply the hope that they are happy.

Selected highlights include a life-size portrait of two embracing brothers by the Belgian neoclassicist FRANÇOIS-JOSEPH NAVEZ, a small oil of NAPOLEON II as an infant, and a work on paper of the early 1880s by PAUL GAUGUIN.

The accompanying catalogue contains essays by Dr JENNIFER SLIWKA (Keeper of Western Art, the Ashmolean) and MICHAEL DIAZ-GRIFFITH (author of *The New Antiquarians*), as well as ALESSANDRO NICOLA MALUSÀ PhD and AARON ARTEM.