

Mother/mother-*



Mother/mother-* is an exhibition of work made by artists within the years immediately following a pregnancy or the birth of a child. The exhibition includes drawings, paintings, narrative and non-narrative film and video, sculpture, an artist's book, an audio selection, and one piece of embroidery. The artists live and work in the U.S., Canada, Scotland, England, and Spain.

I might curate an exhibition of this kind as a rebuttal or rejoinder to the critical discourse as it relates to maternal ambivalence or the problem of motherhood in feminist theory. Instead, the genesis and purpose of the exhibition is more personal, less academic. My work changed dramatically, in unexpected ways, when I had a baby. I wondered if other artists had had similar experiences, and whether they would be willing to go on record—to connect their domestic, familial lives with the trajectory of their work.

It took about 18 months to search out and then sift through the submissions of the hundreds of artists who enthusiastically responded to my open call for work made in wake of a pregnancy or birth of a child. The resulting exhibition highlights the positive, additive impacts of parenting on our work. The work exhibited in **Mother/mother-*** is generated out of the restructuring of our physical and psychological selves as we transition into various states of parenthood. The profundity of the transition offers an expanse of conceptual territory as yet unmapped, even within the culturally jettisoned art-world ghetto of feminism.

The earliest works in the exhibition are a group of stunning 1975 drawings made by A.I.R. Gallery artist **Regina Granne** of her son nursing. These drawings anchor the rest of the exhibition. The trope of the nursing son is familiar; the authorship of the mother's hand in rendering this intimate act is revolutionary.

Another earlier work in the show is **Judith Van Praag's** *Bird Armor* drawing, a breathtaking testament to the inherent strength of maternity and the anguish of losing a child.

Canadian artist **Lindsay Page** provides an iconic **Mother/mother-*** image, a large-scale, color photograph of a woman leaning against a changing table, hiding her torso and face behind a framed landscape painting. Rubens's son looks on from a reproduced drawing, a swath of bright sunlight penetrating the room from an unseen window.

Fellow Canadian **Kate Wilhelm**, jauntily parks a baby in a stroller next to provocative graffiti and then photographs the arrangement, reminding us that a baby "is not a work of art." In her piece *Fuck Reality*, one wonders if Wilhelm is tired of trying to transcend the layers of cultural expectations and challenges that shackle our joy at simply "making."

Darren Floyd's quasi-documentary, *When How to Live was Undecided*, casts the pregnant young abstract painter Sarah Braman as hero to a community of young Brooklyn artists. Alternating on the same monitor is English artist **Shelley Rae's** *A Hero Ain't Nothin but a Sandwich*, a hypnotic silent contemplation of the inscrutable physical bond between mother and son.

By virtue of their glorious existence, the lush, chromatic, painterly abstractions of **Ivan Stojakovic**, **Vikki Michalios** and **Rebecca Klementovich** dispel the assumption that real painting is inaccessible to anyone grappling with another priority in life. **Barbara Campbell Thomas** allows the fragmentation of the psychological state of motherhood to reverberate throughout the physical forms of her vigorous and dynamic work.

As one walks through **Mother/mother-***, the visual experience is supplemented by the audio work of **Katherine Keltner and Petra Valentova's** *Expectant Measures*, a 35 minute conversation between friends about their experiences as pregnant artists.

Thom Hasenmeyer's sculptural index, *Dead Vegetable Factory: An Anthology of Antediluvian Work-a-Day Pictorials and Vernacular* is the product of a two-year collaborative activity shared by father and son that recasts the material world as a wide open treasure trove of visual and artistic potential.

Silvia Iturria, an artist from Spain, offers *Animals*, a photograph of herself, pregnant, crouched down in the woods. She shared with me that she felt a heightened awareness of her animal self during her pregnancy; yet was unable to capture this sensation in her photographs until *Animals*. A few hours after she took the photograph she gave birth to her son.

Karla Flórez Albor's work elucidates the joy and humor of pregnancy in a formally beautiful image of pregnant dancers posing with grinning male partners. **Erika deVries'** short film, *Rumpelstiltskin*, is a strange and endearing musing on the potentiality inherent to the pregnant body, the currency of pregnancy. In the film the artist, pregnant, dances naked in the winter woods.

A pair of drawings by Scotland's **Sharon Thomas** were made at the kitchen table with the grinds left over from the coffee she enjoys each morning during her daughter's nap.

NY artist **Vicki Sher's** drawings of windows convey the sense of looking out at the world one used to inhabit from the domestic seat of motherhood. British video artist **Rachel Howfield** also uses her work to remember her pre-parent life, wistfully becoming her alter-ego "the silver-dress woman," a fun-filled character unburdened by the relentless work of parenting.

Hayley Hara and **Xiaowei Chen** contribute exquisite, highly personal drawings that make one feel less alone in the sometimes harrowing mother role. Ms. Chen's drawing *9 Months 10 Days* recollects in the language of the page the sensations of late pregnancy. Explains Ms. Chen, "I drew them for every mother. And I drew them also to preserve the memory for myself." Ms. Hara's narrative drawings illustrate her struggle to simultaneously embody the changing roles of mother, daughter, spouse, and self.

Abbey Williams' 2 channel DV *Don't Let me Down* is a startling expatiation on the cultural placement of pregnancy through the casting and recasting of pregnant women as a series of cultural stereotypes, monsters, and myths. **Jan Johnson's** embroidery work, *You, Me, the Baby, the Guest, and God*, uses traditional, motherly craft to plumb the sacred aspects of the process of bearing new life.

With **KRISTINA - filmmaker**, LA photographer **Parisa Taghizadeh** bookends Lindsay Page's fraught image of the mother in retreat with a recently taken portrait of a working mother. The subject of the photograph faces the camera directly, not confrontationally, but utterly, inescapably present. A child's red wagon stands abandoned in the background. Like the other mothers in the working mothers series, Kristina is a hero.

Brooklyn poet **Leah Souffrant's** manuscript/artist book, *Essay for Elsa*, a momentous work of word and image, invites and allows patterns and processes of parenting to inform every aspect of the poetic work contained therein.

Kakyong Lee's films rely on a time-consuming process of hand drawing and redrawing progressive images with graphite on paper, and filming the work sequentially, to eventually portray in moving image some of the mundane aspects of life as a parent—posing for an impromptu family photograph, deftly harnessing a toddler in a backpack.

Connecticut artist **Monica Bock's** construction *Postpartum Miniature* replaces nostalgic images of mothering with a photograph of placenta, framed, on a shelf. For many years Ms. Bock has bravely made work specifically related to the processes and patterns of motherhood.

The exhibition concludes with Tennessee artist **Liz Dierdorf's** stunning photograph of a baby asleep on a bed made up with blue linens; a reminder of the quotidian, transcendent, and transformative rewards of parenting.

On December 12, 2009, A.I.R. Gallery will hold a screening, open to the public, of additional video works that augment the selections that comprise the month-long **Mother/mother-*** exhibition. The films screened on December 12 are a critical component of **Mother/mother-***. They are: **Ilana Rein's** *Julie*, a documentary shot over the course of seven years and edited in 2008. *Julie* chronicles the emotional journey of a family as they experience and attempt to deal with the unexpected death of the title character; Julie's brother confronts a world of guilt, anger, and irretrievable absence. **Marie-Francoise Theodore's** *Rebel in the Soul* is a stirring narrative film that traces the deep connection between a contemporary African-American artist and a Georgia sharecropper's wife lynched in 1915. **Emilie Upzak's** *Weaning Gideon* documents the physical changes associated with weaning, alluding to the lifelong process of letting go that is an inherent part of motherhood. Finally, **Ingrid Berthon-Moine's** *Midriff* is a short film comprised entirely of a close-in shot of a woman twanging the blue string of her inserted tampon in time to the song *Slave to the Rhythm*. Screened at the 2009 Venice Biennale, *Midriff* posits that biological reproductive processes, if largely invisible within the culture, can also be achingly hilarious.

JENNIFER WROBLEWSKI
CURATOR AND A.I.R. FELLOW
OCTOBER 17, 2009

PHOTOS LEFT TO RIGHT:

Silvia Iturria, *Animals*.
Abbey Williams, still from 2 Channel DV *Don't Let Me Down*.
Xiaowei Chen, *9 Months and 10 Days*.
Lindsay Page, *Untitled*.
Ivan Stojakovic, *Life of Abundance*.
Parisa Taghizadeh, *KRISTINA-Filmmaker*.

* For the purpose of the exhibition, the title **Mother/mother-*** also refers to father artists. "Mother" is the term I identify with, and which elicits the great frisson when uttered within the larger art culture.

JENNIFER WROBLEWSKI
CURATOR OF MOTHER/MOTHER-*

Jennifer Wroblewski is a visual artist whose work consists mainly of monumentally scaled drawing and drawing installation projects. Her work was recently included in *Timeless: The Art of Drawing* at the Morris Museum (NJ). She is the recipient of a 2009 NYFA Fellowship in Printmaking/Drawing/Book Arts. In 2008 she was selected to participate in *Radius 11*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum's program for emerging artists. Since 2006 Ms. Wroblewski has been an adjunct lecturer in the School of Art+Design at (SUNY) Purchase College. She was six months pregnant with her son when she learned that she had been awarded a 2008/2009 A.I.R. Gallery Fellowship. **Mother/mother-*** is her first curatorial project.

THE A.I.R. GALLERY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM, in place since 1993, is an 18-month professional development program and solo show opportunity for emerging and under-represented women artists. During their tenure, each fellow works with the gallery artists to staff gallery programs and activities, as well as to plan and implement their own public program or special project that meets the gallery's mission of providing leadership and community to women in the arts. The Fellowship Program gives the participating artists the opportunity to develop their work in preparation for a solo show, to build relationships with other artists and arts professionals, and to learn about not-for-profit gallery operations. They leave the program with a series of naturally forged relationships, experiences and skill sets that are critical to being successful in their professional lives as artists. For more information and fellowship applications, visit www.airgallery.org.



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CURATED BY JENNIFER WROBLEWSKI

DECEMBER 2, 2009 - JANUARY 3, 2010

WEDNESDAY - SUNDAY, 11 - 6

OPENING RECEPTION: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 6 - 8 P.M.

SPECIAL SCREENING OF FILM AND VIDEO FROM THE EXHIBITION AND BEYOND:
SATURDAY DECEMBER 12, 6-8 PM

APT: ARTIST PARENTS TALKING, NEW YORK | WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 2, 6-8 PM

HOSTED BY MOTHER/MOTHER-* ARTIST RACHEL HOWFIELD

What challenges do you face as an artist parent, what strategies have you developed to overcome them, how can we better support each other? Please come along and share in the conversation. Rachel Howfield is the founder member of APT in the UK. www.rachelhowfield.net

All events associated with **Mother/mother-*** are open to the public and will take place in the gallery.

ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE • ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN IN THE VISUAL ARTS SINCE 1972
111 FRONT ST, #228, BROOKLYN, NY 11201



Mother/mother-*

AN EXHIBITION OF WORK MADE BY ARTISTS (MALE AND FEMALE) WITHIN THE YEARS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING A PREGNANCY OR THE BIRTH OF A CHILD.

CURATED BY JENNIFER WROBLEWSKI, A.I.R. GALLERY FELLOW

SHELLEY RAE

KAKYOUNG LEE

ERIKA DEVRIES

RACHEL HOWFIELD

ABBEY WILLIAMS

DARREN FLOYD

KELTNER + VALENTOVA

KARLA FLÓREZ ALBOR

KATE WILHELM

LINDSAY PAGE

PARISA TAGHIZADEH

SILVIA ITURRIA

LIZ DIERDORF

XIAOWIE CHEN

JUDITH VAN PRAAG

REGINA GRANNE

VICKI SHERREBECCA

KLEMENTOVICH

ELIZABETH FOSTER

BARBARA CAMPBELL
THOMAS

JAN JOHNSON

LEAH SOUFFRANT

MARIE-FRANCOISE
THEODORE*

EMILIE UPZAK*

INGRID BERTHON-MOINE*

ILANA REIN*

SHARON THOMAS

HAYLEY HARA

THOM HASENMAYER

MONICA BOCK

IVAN STOJAKOVIC

VIKKI MICHALIOS

* ARTISTS WHOSE WORK
WILL BE SCREENED