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FORUM: ON MOTHERHOOD, ART, AND APPLE PIE

We asked a diverse group of women artists who have had children for their responses to the following questions on the intersection of motherhood and art:

Views of motherhood as the primary domain of female creativity have shadowed women's claims to creativity in art. And we live in a society which gives little practical support to women who want to work and be mothers at the same time. While we realize that the topic of motherhood has often been somewhat taboo for women artists to discuss in public, we would really welcome the inclusion of your point of view at this time. We have come up with the following questions, but please feel free to discuss this subject from whatever point of view strikes you as most significant and relevant to your experience.

How has being a mother affected people's response or reaction to your artwork? How has it affected your career? Have you encountered discrimination from other artists, dealers, galleries, art schools, critics because of motherhood or pregnancy? Did you postpone starting your career or stop working when your children were young? How would you describe the differences in treatment of male artists with children or of women artists without children?

Did having children enhance your creativity or affect the direction of your work?

In previous issues over the past six years, M/E/A/N/N/G has published four forums. The response to this forum on motherhood is worthy of note. We have received by far the highest percentage of response to this forum which grew out of discussions between the editors, one of whom was pregnant with her second child, the other who does not have children. Further, many artists expressed enthusiasm and gratitude for the opportunity to write about this subject: "Your letter went straight to my heart," "Thank you for validating this experience," "I cannot thank you enough for giving me the opportunity to write about my experiences as a mother and an artist," "Bravo to you for providing this forum." However, the subject proved too painful for some artists who couldn't write responses. More than one artist wondered how we'd found out that she had a child, so separate had children been kept from art world life.

Finally, it should perhaps be noted that these texts refer to many other aspects of experience including issues of time, economics, child-care, prejudice against women in general, contradictory views on women who don't have children, societal expectations of fathers and male artists, and the experiences of the children of artist mothers.
Raising two children while maintaining my identity as an artist introduced me to the concept of "superwoman." But I am reluctant to talk about the intersection of motherhood and art as an arduous experience lest I betray the reality of the lives of the black and minority women I know and idolize. Unlike southern white women's fabled lives as "ladies of the manor," unlike early TV sitcom detergent-queen moms, my heroines were expected to work outside the home. Black women were either domestics, or educated to become teachers or social workers, the main professions open to women. My experiences juggling art, work, and home were no more harrowing than those of my college-educated mother, who was owner and partner with my father in her family's business, a drugstore. Both my mother and I had/have secure and accomplished husbands who participated in parenting more than was called for at the vastly different times of our childrearing.

Motherhood caused me to postpone my career in art for about ten years, and then I had to relearn being a painter. Just after my first child was born, I gave up my painting studio. I couldn't take the baby there amidst the paint fumes to concentrate on ideas, color, form, and feedings. When I was able to leave Nicholas after the first year's nursing, I went back to work part-time at my old job as a textile designer and weaver. I continued making prints in my home silkscreen studio, but gave it up three years later when, pregnant with daughter India, the solvent fumes caused a near miscarriage. It was also at this time that I received a novel brush-off from a 57th Street dealer who visited my studio at the suggestion of an artist friend. The dealer told me I could have a show if I painted a whole new batch of work. (The baby was due in just over a month!)

Managing a toddler and a nursing infant is a full-time job, but it leaves plenty of time for boredom and a feeling of isolation. I sewed, learned to make quilts, taught weaving, and designed crafts kits. Always a printmaker, my sanity was often as I could afford to leave the children with my husband or a sitter. I tell about being exhausted, about worrying about fumes causing a near miscarriage. It was also at this time that I received a novel brush-off from a 57th Street dealer who visited my studio at the suggestion of an artist friend. The dealer told me I could have a show if I painted a whole new batch of work. (The baby was due in just over a month!)

When I talk to young artists on the road or at Rutgers University, I tell them about how my paintings tightened up when my only painting time was after the children were put to bed. I tell about being exhausted, about worrying about fumes and inhaling pigment dusts, about the need for private space and time. I know few males, artists or otherwise, who talk about their children in connection with their work. Men are taught to seek success by separating work from family and home. What do male artists say when asked about fatherhood? There will, of course, be ragged edges and missing threads—even everyone has them—but there are great rewards. Thanks, kids. Thanks, husband. That Nick and India are attractive, well adjusted, accomplished adults makes choosing and living our priorities worthwhile.

Within the cultural body lies another corpus, the unwritten textual authority of the value of flesh...its color, pigment, muscular tone, gender, age. As a laboratory defines specimens, so does the power-at-large forms a taxon of its constituents, through classification systems of identity and taboo. That great mystery, motherhood, is at once glorified and shunned. Creativity is not shut out by motherhood, nor is it usurped by it. Essentialist arguments defining women by and through their bodies can of course be developed in Wagensberg's terms: where the meaning of a thing is concomitant with its use. However, when singular definitions are re-examined and opened to include identity beyond biology, identity is revealed as constructed rather than determined. Only then is the meaning of women extended to include functions of motherhood as well as characteristics not connected with it.

Creativity emerges from everywhere. Everywhere, including motherhood. Metamorphosis and transformation are not strangers to women whose bodies change several times over the course of their lives...the development of breasts, the inauguration of the menarche. As artists we watch our work outwardly transmute, we follow the evolution of our ideas, its ontogeny. So too as mothers, we experience a recognition of the body, not in terms of vesselized genotypes, but in terms of alterity and transfiguration. Motherhood is not reducible to a single activity. Its nature changes with age, circumstances, culture. Even as an archetype it is mutable. Motherhood is difficult, protracted. So is identity and selfhood, as such, regardless of gender. As individuated subject, woman forms the locus of a career, developing and exchanging systemic controls and expenditures. These activities of motherhood and creative work are certainly more alike than different, more connected than separate.

Both the woman artist and the mother operate in constrained terrains, tracts contaminated by propositions entwined with age-long tales of social and determin-
ist Darwinism. To be a woman artist is to be a taboo. Is that not wonder enough? To represent rarity, commodity fetish, and anomaly? If such characteristics form the semantic of aesthetic exchange within political economy then how does it come to pass that these characteristics are of little economic currency when applied to the female of the species? Is it not odd, that those very characteristics of the commodity fetish, that is, rarity, unicity, and power do not apply to woman as subject? Answers to these propositions lie in the labyrinth of female identity and its cultural locality.

Women's roles in art production, reproduction, and gender construction operate within a sheltered domain dominated by misogynist fear. "To control women's sexuality and reproduction is the ability to control cultural transmission in general," writes Susan Mizruchi in "Reproducing Women in The Awkward Age," an analysis of Henry James' 1899 novel. With clearcut accuracy, Mizruchi recognizes maternal icons as representations of male desire and control, locates the female voice within an excluded category, which, thus, leaves intact the requirements of culture. To view motherhood within this proposition keeps cultural autocracy in place. To control women is tantamount to controlling the future. To control motherhood, to constrain it into sanctified space, to objectify it as glorious teleological performance, is only one of the means to reinforce the subservience of the flesh...women as flesh factories. That is not to say that motherhood is not a glorious experience. It is. But it is not to be the capital of the reigning power as the predominant avatar of female sensibility and being. Patriarchal culture is heavily invested in the myth of motherhood. Like the beauty myth, the myth of the Madonna is a double agent, self-censoring its practitioners. The pedestal is a prison.

Artifacts, theses, and precepts, the products of civilization, are conspicuously apparent as projections of the body. Double-barreled, ironically, these cultural motifs also form the matrix for agencies of control. As ever present and ambiguous cultural myths, these propositions lie dormant in all cultural institutions and their by-products. By projecting socially constructed values back onto women's sexuality and reproduction is the ability to control cultural transmission of culture. To view women, motherhood, and creativity within this mold is to objectify it as glorious teleological performance, is only one of the means to reinforce the subservience of the flesh...women as flesh factories. That is not to say that motherhood is not a glorious experience. It is. But it is not to be the capital of the reigning power as the predominant avatar of female sensibility and being. Patriarchal culture is heavily invested in the myth of motherhood. Like the beauty myth, the myth of the Madonna is a double agent, self-censoring its practitioners. The pedestal is a prison.

Reproductive technology is swiftly entering the world of motherhood, combining organic processes with electronic and mechanical ones. As power broker, the cultural organ unmistakably and in its own self-interest infuses the biological body with a viral coup d'etat. Capturing the cell's nucleus, the cultural body camouflages its own intent, forcing its biological hostage into false and sometimes tortuous acknowledgments. Whereas motherhood, which once was the domain of mystical and religious ideology, now requires the cultural operation of bio-logic: the control of cells, the engineering of organs, the commodity warehouses of spare parts. If evolution is in part our destiny, by bringing indeterminacy and relativity within postmodern scientific practice, then motherhood must be removed from its mechanistic status. If we take science to be an operational truth, then social systems, which are highly reflective of philosophical ones, can reinvent a notion of motherhood corresponding to actual subjective practice. To the contrary, if we do not take science to be operational truth, if we are wedded to more theological concerns, then the relationship between the body, the self, and spirituality are still fertile territories in this ongoing discussion of life. Regardless of one's particular anatomy of belief, questions around motherhood are becoming increasingly complex. Transgenic species, recombinant DNA, and surrogate wombs have become operational in reproductive technology. Re-viewing motherhood as machine, focuses on a future of the cyborg, a scenario grounded in the invention of nature, fusing the artificial with life science.

Andreas Huyssen activates the metaphor of the automation in "The Vamp and the Machine," where he writes:

In 1748 the French doctor Julien Offray de la Mettrie, in a book entitled L'Homme machine, described the human being as a machine composed of a series of distinct, mechanically moving parts, and he concluded that the body is nothing but a clock, subject as all other matters to the laws of mechanics. Such materialist theories ultimately led to the notion of a blindly functioning world machine, a gigantic automaton, the origins and meaning of which were beyond human understanding. Consciousness and subjectivity were degraded to mere functions of a global mechanism. The determination of social life by metaphysical legitimations of power was replaced by the determination through the laws of nature. The age of modern technology and its legitimatory apparatuses had begun.

This modernist drama—the control and surveillance of nature—clearly continues its historical ambition, orienting us towards an Enlightenment construction of medicine. Huyssen goes on to say:

Just as men invent and construct technological artifacts which are to serve him and fulfill his desires, so woman as she has been socially invented and constructed, is expected to reflect man's need and to serve her master. Woman, in male perspective, is considered to be the natural vessel of man's reproductive capacity, a mere bodily extension of the male's reproductive powers. Just as men invent and construct technological artifacts which are to serve him and fulfill his desires, so woman as she has been socially invented and constructed, is expected to reflect man's need and to serve her master. Woman, in male perspective, is considered to be the natural vessel of man's reproductive capacity, a mere bodily extension of the male's reproductive powers. Just as men invent and construct technological artifacts which are to serve him and fulfill his desires, so woman as she has been socially invented and constructed, is expected to reflect man's need and to serve her master. Woman, in male perspective, is considered to be the natural vessel of man's reproductive capacity, a mere bodily extension of the male's reproductive powers.

Technological fantasy is the amalgam of origination and manipulation. This fabrication turns desire (and motherhood), as a lattice turns wood, into an accessory of powerlessness. Motherhood's future carries with it the fallacy of a "maker," masquerading either as patriarchal religiosity or scientific progress. The formation of a life-begetting organism, the creation of Mother herself, imposes upon us an authoritarian will. The construction of techno-organismic reproduction, not by inheritance, but by deterministic command, employs the sensibility of a militaristic metropolis. (Attention all gametes, roll call!) Egg farming, plastic wombs, in-vitro fertilization, and surrogate habitats are myriad examples of the promise of reproductive technology. By what myths are these covenants propagating and sustaining themselves? Who will benefit from this digitally Darwinized future? Woman must look at this equation to evaluate her choice. Who keeps the seeds?
BREAKING GROUND

I suppose, thinking back, that in my mind painting and motherhood were always closely associated. My mother Miriam Laufer was a painter and as a child I would sometimes go with her to the studio where I would get a piece of paper and some oil paints and would paint in the corner while she worked. Then, when she started exhibiting in the 60s in the 10th Street artists co-ops, I would go to the openings with her. So it always seemed to me that the odor of oil paint and turpentine and mother were paired.

Only later when I came to decide myself to have children did I realize how incompatible the rest of the world, especially the art world find these two phenomena. I think the discrimination against women artists with children is rampant and untold about. It is assumed that if your womb is active your brain has suddenly shut off. Of course, people expect you to give up your studio (too far away), your work (too physically demanding), and your intellect (not enough blood to the brain). And these assumptions come from dealers, other artists, male and female, and critics and curators. "Surely you're not going to keep on working now." "You're still painting?" "Well, this will slow you down for sure."

It seems that a woman artist's productivity, imagination, creativity, and strength of purpose is expected to vanish overnight. Unfortunately, these sorts of expectations can be self-fulfilling and may force a retreat on women artists with children.

What's not talked about much is a possible opening up of creative energy through procreation. Perhaps instead of being the handicap that it is thought to be, childbearing and rearing ought to be viewed as a source of renewable energy and inspiration. A way to open up to new ideas and viewpoints that you hadn't encountered before. Certainly I've found in my work that a reacquaintance with the imagery of childhood—nursery rhymes, fairytales, comics, pop culture—through my daughter has infiltrated my paintings and penetrated the veneer of fine art that I thought I had built up. Such influences like those of traveling or illness or new companions and other new experiences seem additive. Rather than closing an artist off from the world—these influences can be an opening to further explorations and experimentation and may be incorporated in the work.

Susan Bee

Notes
3. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

Note: This article is dedicated to my daughter Jocelyn K. Aaker. Special thanks to Christine de Lignieres and Frank Gillette.

Anyway, I would never encourage anybody to have children (or for that matter encourage anybody to start a magazine like MUSE/NEWS) since it is surely a demanding, exhausting, and often tedious business. However—I look forward to a time in the utopian future when women artists with children are accorded the same respect and sense of entitlement as is currently accorded to male artists with children.

Emily Cheng

MOTHER, ARTIST, HOMOSEXUAL, LAWYER, are all words to indicate roles, preferences, and professions which like magnets, attract stereotyping with relish. The job is to derail the cliches before they lead to assumptions and misunderstandings.

It has been difficult for me to be able to make the distinction between good old-fashioned sexist discrimination and more finite types of discrimination: being a mother, Chinese, or for any other reason.

I had always thought I would have a child after my paintings developed and my career was established. But life isn't always responsive to your own detailed planning. In my personal trajectory, getting a commercial gallery and having a baby happened to have occurred at the exact same time. Now any woman artist with a realistic sense of what's out there would be concerned with how being an artist who is also becoming a mother will be perceived in people's minds. This is where one has to be hyperconscious about what and where the pitfalls of stereotyping lie, and take corrective measures. (It wouldn't for example, be too helpful for your own image to show up at an opening wearing a pink flowered babadoll maternity dress and clutching the arm of the father-to-be. An awareness of how the semiotics in our culture function is helpful. Stereotyping is a social construction and the individual can take a role in altering other individuals' biases. I withheld my pregnant status until I resolved gallery negotiations. That took five months and I became an expert at the techniques of "Clothes as Camouflage." My opening occurred when I was nine months pregnant (no camouflage there) and I saw twenty some shows the day I gave birth. My concern was if I had a cesarean, I wouldn't be able to see the next round of shows. During my pregnancy the most commonly heard sentiment from other women artists was: "You be the guinea pig. We'll be watching..." then nervous laughter. Half the women who came to the baby shower were so alienated from the reality of a real live baby that there were only a few practical gifts, and many cute, cuddly, comforting stuffed animals, an enchanted forest of the memories of our own childhood. Did I stop working when my child was young? You bet...Two weeks. And working in my studio has never been so ecstatic as the first hour and a half back, (the amount of time between feedings). Having a baby in my life was truly amazing and wonderful. Having a baby and having my studio time was even better.

I've never been aware of the difference in treatment between men with children and myself with a child. It's either because I haven't encountered it, (unlikely you say?) or people are very subtle, or I have teflonated myself, unwilling to allow
that possibility to enter into my consciousness. Denial can sometimes be useful. Of course one can never know what people think but I do know that when women walk around with a baby, they often look like harried mothers with the hectic burden of childcare. When men do, they look like they are adorably accessorized. I also think that people don’t question how having children will affect a man’s career, but they do think about how it will impact on the woman’s work. The inclusion of this subject in MEANING/BELIEF belies this. Perhaps I don’t experience difference in treatment because of the equity of child care in our household. No one looks at me as the person whose job it is to take care of the family and the home, because it just isn’t. It’s a shared attitude as well as a shared responsibility. My parental role models were not neatly and strictly tied to traditional roles either. Having a child has not adversely affected my creativity. It does destroy the notion of an artist working and drinking until dawn and sleeping till dusk. But it makes time more valuable, and it increases my capacity to give.

Myrel Chernick

My twins will be entering first grade in September. I was intrigued by your letter as it is a subject of great importance to me, and I was hoping to have more time to answer it but...I had thought, when I first read it, that the deadline was August 31, and then I looked at it the other night, and saw that the deadline was August 1, not 31. That is the story of my life. Never enough time: time to be with my children, to make art, to earn a living, to see the shows and performances that interest me, to be a member of an artistic community. I often feel isolated and exhausted. My life is hectic and fragmented, and I rarely have time to catch my breath. Fortunately I have a deep commitment to my work that forces me to keep going, although there have certainly been periods since the birth of my children where I have had to put it aside. It is a constant struggle find blocks of time in which to work. The childcare system in this country is lacking. I find that in the art world, a woman is considered less serious if she chooses to have children, although some of this is my own prejudice, because in my youth I knew I would never have any. I often feel, myself, that I have less commitment than women who have chosen not to have children. Yet I feel that the intense emotions connected with motherhood—passion, love, anger, joy, despair, frustration—have had a beneficial connection to my work, creating a spontaneity that enhances my artmaking. I have found that it becomes important to me to connect the different areas of my life. Theoretically, motherhood has created new interests for me. In psychoanalytic and feminist writings concerning mothers, motherhood, and creativity, I find a connection to my own life and many exciting directions for possible works. I have become more involved with myself from my children. Their natural creativity and imagination, the fantasy play that sustains them for great periods of time, their continual questioning of everything they hear and their constant pushing against the limits, testing me and everyone else in their lives, their thirst for knowledge and information, as well as their spontaneity and sense of humor, are qualities that I strive for in my work, and that keep me from growing complacent. It has been said of men that they create art because they cannot have children, and this has often been used as an excuse for the oppression of women. I wish it were not quite so difficult in this society for women to both create and procreate. I have observed that men (fathers or not) have greater freedom to "play" in their artwork, and to be taken seriously as artists for doing so.

To answer one of your questions specifically, I feel that my career has been directly affected by having children. Although I continue to make art (at a slower pace, to be sure) and to show my work, there is little time left to make contacts, go to openings, call and meet people, arrange studio visits, those things that are necessary to keep oneself visible, to be considered for shows. It is also very difficult for me to travel, and as I make installations, this has closed down an important venue for me. The fact that, as a conceptual artist, there is little possibility of making money from my work, thereby necessitating my "other" work, which takes anywhere from 20 to 30 hours per week, contributes to the lack of time.

This has been difficult to deal with, but as I see no other possibilities at the moment, I try not to become overwhelmingly frustrated. No one is going to support me. This I know for sure: the children grow up, and so quickly that time with them becomes an even more precious commodity. And the artworld will not go away. When the children no longer have such a great need for me, I will again feel the luxury of having TIME for myself.

I have neglected to mention my husband’s role in this enterprise. Fortunately he supports my work and my need to continue to make art. Without this support, both emotional and physical (we share all childcare duties) I would not be participating to the extent that I am now.

Peggy Cyphers

The dualing extreme psychological states of vulnerability and power are my strongest recollections of being big bellied with child. Cultural brainwashing scared me into thinking my artistic lifestyle and creative drive would crumble away with the demands of mothering. Out of fear or jealousy came statements from friends and strangers encouraging me to take a year off—that I won’t have my own mind because the instinctual biological urges would overpower self motivation. Others would say just the opposite; it will bring you good luck, great things will now open up to you, you’ll get more work done than ever because you’ll be focused. Somewhere in the middle of these extremes lies the truth. I have found that the impulse to create is also an instinctual biological urge, as potent as the instinct to procreate and nurture.

Happily, a year into Motherhood has proven positive to my creativity and my career. Most skeptics seem amazed at my ability to produce and to be active as an artist. If there has been discrimination, the seeds of it were probably there before the pregnancy, rooted in male dominant culture’s attitude towards woman as the “weaker” sex. While spending two weeks away from my family at the Triangle Artist’s Workshop this summer, a prominent collector asked me how I could find time to paint in between the responsibilities of caring for a child. I explained that I
was the “orchestrating caregiver,” who found empowerment sharing responsibilities with babysitters and the child’s father. The collector appeared unconvinced. From his cultural perspective, I would suppose the possibility of producing a truly “great” work of art was next to impossible for a woman, with or without a child. Meanwhile male artists like Julian Schnabel bombastically pose with their offspring, content that the role of Fatherhood has empowered men. I for one, and many of my generation of women artists are rejecting these cultural stereotypes and redefining Motherhood/Fatherhood based on equal partnership. As shared orches­trator of my child’s development, I don’t have to play every instrument to be assured that my child is happy and healthy. The unfolding experience of Motherhood has reaffirmed how versatile and self-willed is the female gender and presented a new definition of “having it all” for the woman artist.

I was in my studio up until a week before the birth of my son and back in there a month later. To my relief, my creativity and intellect had not been drained out of me, as would be possible in some nightmarish Star Trek episode. I feel relaxed about my new role and able to move with the flow, taking cues all the while as to which direction this “partnership” will take. This new friendship with my son is not about dependence. Rather, it proves that strong love relationships can take us into the future ready and able. In the words of the Starship Enterprise, ready and able to “explore new worlds and go where no women have gone before.”

Stephanie DeManuelle

During my twenties and thirties my focus was on developing myself as an artist as well as (to a large degree unconsciously) struggling to deal with the constraints and definitions imposed on women. So I was really shocked by the issues I was faced with in choosing to be a mother. When pregnant I found myself very self-conscious on the professional level especially where I teach. I felt that I was a representative of pregnant women and was fighting the stereotypes of pregnancy as a handicap, that pregnant women can’t do the job, etc. So I made sure that I didn’t miss a day of teaching and, between sips of ginger ale and bites of crackers, and a couple of miscarriages, I had a child during semester break. Being heaped with the problems of oil painting and queried by an acquaintance:

watercolors for a few years until I finished pregnancy and nursing as a way to deal with the problems of oil painting and queried by an acquaintance: “You are going to stop painting for a while aren’t you?” I think I can group a lot of this material during or after pregnancy under the heading of “this tells me more about the source of the opinion than it does about myself.”

As a mother who must work and is an artist, I at times feel like a magnetic field—a battleground where the definitions that are up for grabs are being grabbed at. Women who did give up pursuits, interests, voices large and small to raise children often respond to me with ambivalence. I sense the tug in them of “I am glad its different now” versus their anger, resentment, jealousy, and uncertainty of whether one can be a good mother, work, and be an artist. I can understand their feelings, but especially when it’s a woman connected in some way to my profession I’d rather not be the brunt of these feelings. In my role as an art teacher with students of varying ages, I can see that I’m an exemplar in a very positive sense and then need to shift to being more open about the complexity of my life—for them.

This is a shift from considering the impact of my motherhood on my professional life. I often find myself making sure my child is not visible during a studio visit or being sure I leave him at home when going to an opening, because I still believe that women artists without children are perceived to be more serious. In the past women felt they had to choose family or career and in some peculiar way were respected for that—choosing one kind of creativity over another instead of this unsettling androgyny of being both mother and artist. I do sometimes envy women artists without children, knowing that I’m thinking about painting, dinner, basic design, and the intense connection to my child. I just have to be more focused and more efficient. And it’s possible that the complexity enriches my work.

I would say that the direction of my work has definitely been affected by having a child. The intensity of the experience of both pregnancy and childbirth has found its way into my work making it generally more focused and more intense. It has an edge. Until a few years before I became pregnant I had been a painter of still lifes, interiors, and landscapes for almost twenty years. My work had started to shift because of a discontent with what I couldn’t get at with those genres. My ideas about the meaning of painting, that it was a reflective activity through which I created ideas of order and essentially a shield against the world around me were able to shift through the experience of my miscarriages and pregnancy. I was able to move more strongly into the aesthetic of chaos, disorder, randomness, and ugliness. My work had been moving in a semi-abstract direction for a time but something about this experience let me into a realm of why, of content that has propelled me since that time. Not that I’m painting miscarriages, but the interior/body metaphor, the what-you-can’t-see that is beneath the physical surface of reality was the metaphor I needed.

Yes, my life and work have been changed by having a child I am thrilled to have. But it makes me aware of so many issues I was asleep about and on the professional level complicates things a great deal. I feel uncomfortably like a pioneer when all I want to do is be a mother and artist. There was an article in The New York Times recently about women newscasters (by a woman). The drift of the article was that the public’s awareness of a female newscaster’s pregnancy or childbirth harms her professional career and that women should keep the child aspect of their lives quiet, private. It made me mad. I felt she had it backwards. Maybe the problem really is why don’t we know that Dan Rather is out because his kid has chicken pox? I might not have noticed this article a few years ago—this is how my life has changed.
Jane Dickson

Now that my kids are in their first day at day camp I have time to answer your questionnaire.

The issues of work/motherhood for me all center around time and identity. Motherhood profoundly changed how I see myself and how I spend my time—much more than I imagined it would. I now see myself as having two primary and competitive identities, artist/mother and trying to satisfy both is an eternal dilemma.

I postponed having children to establish my career, as I was less sure of myself as an artist I had to develop that first or I thought I’d be swallowed by maternity and never resurface. (Of course I have been swallowed anyway but it doesn’t seem so fearful and permanent now.)

These questions seem to imply discrimination against mothers in the artworld. I have not experienced any increase in the constant resistance to women being taken seriously since I became a mother. For me the new enemy is time.

An art career requires enormous amounts of time. Thought, research, and production of serious work is more than full-time. Then schmoozing/networking/hustling to get the work out into the world is another big job. Kids, even with help, are another big job. Successful male artists, or successful male anythings, put their work first. They don’t miss a meeting because the kid has mumps. Non-mother women don’t have to make a choice, but working mothers no matter how rich, must juggle their children’s needs and their work. I have had less opportunities since I had kids because I’m out there less developing opportunities or following through less and out of sight is out of mind in the artworld.

I have not stopped working since I had kids; though I teach less. Before I painted mostly at night and fooled around during the day. Now I paint when the sitter is here, or my husband is on duty, in any scrap of time I find. My children are 5 and 6 1/2. This is the little one’s first day of preschool and I think I see the light at the end of the tunnel, after very challenging years of long hours and hard choices. I never guessed how much time and attention loving two more people would take. I often resent their interruptions and demands and they resent my productivity. As for content, I continue to be drawn to macho subjects, but my primary subtheme has shifted, I notice, from alienation and isolation before children, to the complexities and conflicts of interrelationships now. It was no accident that my work’s demands. And, of course, I feel guilty. They forced me to grow up, make responsible choices, let go of procrastination, and get on with my life.

As for context, I continue to be drawn to macho subjects, but my primary subtheme has shifted, I notice, from alienation and isolation before children, to the complexities and conflicts of interrelationships now. It was no accident that my first postpartum show was demolition derby paintings; as I felt my two lives endlessly crashing into each other leaving me battered and dazed.

Finally, before having kids, I always felt like a misfit—a feeling the role of artist, of course, enhanced. Becoming a mother felt like joining the human race, for better or for worse. It’s the most common denominator in the world.

Mothers and Art—I thought long and hard and kept flip-flopping back and forth between subjective memories and somewhat less subjective observations. The memories later, first the observations: While the images of both Artist and Mother are overly romanticized and revered in our culture, the Artist is construed as complex, sexually potent, and creative, the Mother as selfless, non-sexual, and nourishing. The Mother the boundless giver, the artist the deserving taker. When a male artist has children, it’s viewed as an extension of artistic potency and often is used to round out and soften his public image: we’re all familiar with magazine photo essays of the artist at home with his adoring family. More often than not it’s his wife that takes care of the children. When a woman artist has children, it’s a conflict because usually she is the primary caregiver of the children and despite her creative claim as an artist, it’s assumed that motherhood should take precedence over her art. Many women artists see this conflict and choose not to have children. Many have families and do not mind that fact very public. Few are able to integrate the lived reality of both roles. With the exception of Alice Neel and several other women artists, how often is an experienced view of pregnancy and motherhood a subject for art? Not that this has to be exclusive imagery for women artists who are mothers, but I think it is significant that it is so neglected.

If a woman artist is also a mother, then there is no difference between the artist and the mother. She is the same creative person.

My life, my memories: I have one child from a marriage that I ended after one year. My daughter’s name is Moira and she’ll be 22 years old this August. Growing up, she always lived with me and I was her sole financial support—a working artist and teacher (a painting/drawing professor in a university art department). I never thought I was a good mother. It seemed I was always too distracted and drained. During the day I was helping between 50 and 75 undergrad and grad students and at night feeding and taking care of Moira and the man I lived with for 10 years. Eventually my relationship with him ended and it was just Moira and I again. She was with me through my promotion and tenure battles, pre- and post-exhibition anxieties and always the work in the studio.

Two remembrances stand out: The first was when Moira was around 18 months old and just beginning to walk (more like a barely controlled run forward at a 45-degree-angle.) I came home late and very drunk from a party. I managed to get Moira changed and into her crib before I staggered into the bathroom and passed out on the floor wrapped around the toilet. I don’t know how long I lay there before I was awakened by the soft sound of her bare feet pattering into the bathroom. She covered me up with her tattered security blanket that she wouldn’t relinquish to anyone, patted my throbbing head and went back to her crib. As far as I knew, Moira wasn’t able to climb out of, let alone back into her crib! I remember laying there feeling like the worst mother in the world and at the same time, amazed by my daughter. Years later, Moira called me at 2 a.m. to pour out her troubles and at one point in the conversation said, “Mom, I tell you things I can’t tell anyone else. You’re my best friend.” I realize that she is mine. Maybe what I, as an artist, have given my daughter is a life revealed not hidden. Moira is now a
Your question is two-fold. One has to do with my private experience of being a mother, the other has to do with how I perceive other people’s perception of that role. The first is much easier to address: it was very natural for me to marry and have a child. Raising a child was nourishing in every way and the child that I raised is nourishing to me still. The richness of that experience is so much a part of myself that it cannot be separated from the self that is an artist.

The second question is perilous terrain for an artist to discuss in public. So much of what one speculates about in this area may seem, or in fact is, self-serv­ing rationalizations for one’s fate in the art world, and it’s often difficult to distin­guish between the two. However I will say this: though every single person encounters obstacles in making their way in the world, I have specifically encountered in cer­tain individuals, both male and female, a slowness in regarding the wife of an artist as serious in her own right. As roles multiply, in my case, from daughter of an artist, to wife, mother, teacher, political activist, cook, gardener, you name it, the doubt, or the excuse for doubt increases. Most often, I would guess that the reason given would be a question about time spent outside the studio. But I don’t believe this is the heart of it. I understand what hard work and concentration in the studio is. Also I’m very familiar with the infinite ways men distract themselves and stay out of the studio. I do believe there is a deep-seated, often unconscious, invisible questioning of the seriousness of a woman’s relationship to her work and the more visible her “other” activities, the more easily the suspicion can be rationalized.

It’s interesting to speculate on the prejudice against the multiplicity of roles that traditionally have been assigned or undertaken by women as opposed to the romance of the singularity of role and purpose in men. It is a widely and deeply held belief that only extremely obsessive singularity of purpose produces the best work, and therefore the best work is produced by men. While there are certainly excellent examples of this kind of art making, it does not describe all good, or even great art. It is a myth that is not a reality even for many men. To the extent that multiplicity of roles is most often and most extremely experienced by women and is very visible, it is one more convenient rationale for a dismissive attitude towards women’s work. To my mind multiplicity is not a negative, but broadens, deepens, enriches the context for interesting and relevant work.

Hermine Ford

Mimi Gross

TIP OF THE ICEBERG — TABOO TOPICS

I. Revolution
Life divided: Before having child / After.
Much later: Revolution / Child leaves.
(early shock)
Soft touch,
Tenderness.
Subconscious education / Travel.
What is another person?
Total respect for: knowing someone best.
Intimacy, relaxed intimacy, physical intimacy.
Looking into: talking about anything, everything.
Infinite references, subtlety: signals.
Recognizing her sturdy courage, humor, intelligence, perspective.
Re-reading childhood.
Knowing, the time(s) of caring.
Consistency of quality.
(I learned to calm down to quality with child, to work at home, see less friends out, see less events outside.)
Little child accepts eccentric life: its own world, the work around the house, working all the time.

II. Baby became included as image subject matter. Or baby as papoose working on show installations. Baby radically changed relationship and work relationship with husband/father. He had less/very little time commitment with baby. Always urgent deadlines. Never discussed my time. I loved baby, baby life. Interruption of daily work cycle noticed after one year: stayed in the country, found many ways to do pickup & putdown painting; kind of filling in colors. In retrospect—did new human depth poetic, overlapping, images. Later, swallowed into newer collaborations with husband/father.

III. 1 & ½-year-old with 3” wide brush paints bathroom door yellow while no one looks. She makes intentional collage on floor with by-roads & stop stations using cornflakes, flour, & other foods: Hailed as prodigy! Baby tot has big table with crayons, scissors, paper, glue, paints. I am inspired by delicacy, details, textures, directness.

IV. Tot has friends: time off. New fun with work, euphoric few hours daily. Babysitters (circa '71-'76, urban hippies, performance artists, artists, groupies): huge energies; inspired me, encouraged mother/woman identity; accredited my collaborations with husband/father; questioned worldly emphasis on his work. He became "the father with the kid in the studio" looking for his mother is there, too, any number of helpers are there, too!

Artwork becomes more self-identified, stronger time discipline, more alone.

VII. Child becomes intimate. Travel together, influences cross. I learn to divide 
travel time, not only art/architecture/history viewing. Equal time: toy stores, parks to play. While traveling, child criticizes what she sees with excellent objectivity.

VIII. Teen life OK. Meet & love child's school friends. (I meet my life/love/companion through my daughter's friend.) I learn how to teach about art, & about what it is. Independence/dependence. Interdependence

IX. Adult child becomes peer. After college graduation, makes separation, works 
far away from root-home: I respect her autonomy. My artwork becomes deeper, less subjective, I stand alone with some new dimension.

Addenda: Ending childcare, attending parent care / leaving rare — the spaces etwixt. I try to keep the priorities in perspective & find the spaces between the 
spaces again.

Yvonne Jacquette

THE INTERSECTION OF MOTHERHOOD AND ART

The anxiety about unfettered time for painting pushed me to simplify my 
work in the early years of motherhood. The first year I discovered that time spent 
nursing became a period of visual meditation as well. When I could get to work the 
image was clear in my mind. Generally my paintings were more focussed.

I never could bear stopping work for any length of time; luckily with my hus-
band working at home too we could share childcare. Another boon: meeting other
artist-mothers. Cooperating about babysitting and gathering to talk about art creat-
ed a network of influences. We were learning to "play" with our art as our kids were 
learning to socialize. In the late 60s several of us set out to take slides and photos to 
dealers hoping to interest them in a readymade group show. The response was 
"A women's show? Never." Several years later women's shows became the rage.

Entry-level galleries seemed to be more obvious in any possible discrimina-
tion against women who were also mothers. One pregnant friend was told her 
work if shown would be priced very low because "she would probably be lost from 
art soon anyway." I encountered difficulty with curators and critics understanding 
that visits to my studio (then away from home) had to be carefully scheduled so I 
could arrange coverage at home. One critic stood me up for many hours while Tom 
was home sick, never even calling.

The positive side is how one's thinking is broadened. Having a child creates 
an unseen link with history—past and future. Take world events; eventual threats 
such as nuclear waste stockpiling unsafely catalyzed me to explore my worries in 
drawings and subsequent paintings.

My use of pictorial space noticeably altered in my paintings as Thomas grew 
older—from intimate close-up space to vast aerial panoramas. I wonder if fathers 
(also artists) experienced that gradual widening of space? To me it represented the 
general distance of the child to the parent.

I also feel that the pace of a child's growth is such a constant reminder of the 
possible joy in gradual change. Allowing for changes in my work has a perspective 
from this. The petty frustrations of childcareting disappear in memory when the 
overall sensation is one of great thankfulness. Can I see my daily struggle in the 
studio in this way too?

Having a child was for me of great importance and pleasure. One unexpected 
benefit is that my artist son is one of my strongest critics with a very helpful spirit.

Joyce Kozloff

Giving birth to my son Nikolas, in 1969, was probably the most positive 
experience of my life. (I used to feel embarrassed to talk this way, but there comes 
a certain freedom in middle age.) That event also marked the transition in my work 
between derivative post-student painting to the beginnings of what would become 
my own way of representing things. In retrospect, I believe that he gave me an 
extraordinary gift.

During my pregnancy, I feared that this child would take over my life and I'd 
cease to be an artist. After all, this had happened to women I knew. My (male) ther-
apist kept suggesting that I stop going to my studio, because my body was "creat-
ing life." This sent me into a work frenzy and an emotional roller coaster. After my 
son was born, my time was chopped up, but I used it better. I took responsibility 
for my professional life, as I assumed responsibility for his care. In other words, I 
grew up. It was difficult: I remember that whenever I was working, I felt I should
be mothering; and whenever I was mothering, I felt I should be working. The amount of guilt that our culture lays on women is boundless.

My paintings became smaller, more detailed, more intense, and more expressive. I ceased to worry about whether people called them feminine or decorative, as these adjectives took on a positive meaning for me. I had the great fortune to come of age as an artist and woman coincidently with the last wave of feminism, and I was in support groups throughout the 1970s. We saw the juggling and struggling as inevitable in a society that does not provide child care, rather than the results of a personal failing. And I discovered other women artists who had experienced a rebirth in their art after having a child. This very interesting phenomenon has not been publicly explored, to my knowledge—and should be.

Ellen Lanyon

I was one of the artist-mother-artist breed of the 1960s. I began to work and exhibit professionally for several years before I married and it was another six years before children were introduced into my life. I had had time, therefore, to establish a very sound base for a highly motivated routine in the studio. I married an artist and it was our whole world. We really wanted to have children and by the time they came we were well prepared for the adjustments that would be necessary. I was house-bound with the studio in the living room, a bedroom or whatever space I could carve out. My work was accomplished during nap-times or at night and my days were spent in the most ordinary way: up at six / dress the children / feed the children / off to school / take a walk / buy the food / make the beds / tidy the house / do the bills / plan the meals / take a walk / fetch the children / feed the children / help the children / make the dinner / greet the man / feed them all / clean the mess / tend their lessons / ready the beds / drop dead /

But, being an artist in Chicago was good for me, the heavy hand of male-dominated attitudes was not there as it was in New York. My imagery was always very personal, representational, and metaphysical. The ethnic and cultural climate has historically generated and nurtured these sensibilities and a bias against gender was not part of the politics of that art community. Instead the battle raged between the object and non-objective with the "second city" syndrome resting heavily on "big shouldurers." My early work was rendered in egg tempera, the content was drawn from the city that I had always known but after having my two children my territory changed and so did my imagery. The Conservatory and the Zoo introduced the world of flora and fauna. The impact this had on my sensibilities was profound. I exchanged oil for the egg tempera and small-scale for a large format. The stroke became very broad and gestural; I introduced the world of flora and fauna. The impact this had on my sensibilities was very personal, representational, and metaphysical. The ethnic and cultural climate was experiencing a new maturity and confidence in the work and I can honestly say that my being a woman who was married with children (although they were on their way to becoming adults) created a different level of casual rapport than that directed towards the male artist or audience. There was more "women talk." Not that I consider this a negative element of my relationship with women, but it does take the edge off of a vital professional intercourse.

The pictorial content of my work has most certainly evolved over the past decade. It has become more universal and more overtly directed towards global and environmental issues. This does have a lot to do with the singular status I have assumed in New York where I spend each winter teaching and working in my own studio. My children now share my adult world and I have no responsibility for them. My current Chicago dealers are two men who are completely unbiased. In New York, I have had five different affiliations, all with women and in all five cases, save one, they closed their galleries due to personal conflicts. While it is a little scary to think it would, one was a very positive experience. I felt, however, that my being a woman who was married with children (although they were on their way to becoming adults) created a different level of casual rapport than that directed towards the male artist or audience. There was more "women talk." Not that I consider this a negative element of my relationship with women, but it does take the edge off of a vital professional intercourse.

I cannot imagine life without my family. I value their input and their camaraderie. I do not, nor have I ever considered giving birth a substitute for making art nor vice versa and I have no reason to believe that art making and motherhood cannot coexist. I must agree that complete freedom to focus on a career would have, most likely, made a difference as to where I stand today. If I were of child-bearing age now I can't be sure that I might not decide to remain childless. That decision would be based on so many contemporary variables, the economy, the state of the environment, the mores of the times, and the acceptance of an individual's right of choice. I admire all the women I know who have opted to be childless in lieu of their work because I am sure that it is, ultimately, a sacrifice for them not to experience having a link to a future generation. I have that connection well established. My body and my art have survived.
Betty Lee

I have never "hidden" the fact that I am mother to a young daughter. I strongly believe in not excluding her from my imagemaking milieu because she is an inherent part of my life and of my life as an artist. That's not to say that my work is about parenthood, and I'm not saying that it is a less than honorable topic in imagemaking. But I am saying this if we are to consider what informs us as artists, parenthood definitely can be a large part of that process. If we live on a planet where we do not mate, procreate, and care for our offspring, then it would be a different issue. But here on earth meaningful relationships are very much part of our lives, and that includes the relationship of mother and child.

My parents emigrated from China and started new lives here in the United States. They had developed an extremely tough work ethic because their physical survival depended on it. However, they had children even before they felt their personal finances were sufficiently stable. While my parents worked, my grandfather, the patriarch of the family, took care of us. From all of that I understand clearly about work and about family. The two go hand-in-hand as to what is vital in our lives. I understand completely what I am willing to do to continue in that fashion. Consequently, when my daughter was born, I thought of nothing but of making work and being parent to my offspring. Being a mother did not interfere with work or vice versa. In fact, I strongly believe that working is the best example I can set for my daughter, just as my mother did when I was an infant. Work is vital activity because it realizes empowerment. There was a special form of energy that emerged when my daughter was born, and I made a deeper commitment to my work. I made less excuses for myself and plowed forward.

I am extremely fortunate to exist in an extended family structure where children are looked upon as gifts and parents are fortunate because of them. That's the Chinese part of me that helps me function. Even so I am not immune to the swirling sentiments of how difficult it is to be a mother, Asian culture notwithstanding. I am fortunate to have a lot of support from friends, many who are artists themselves. I know it sounds trite as I say this, but knowing that I am in company of those who share and understand needs no further explanation.

I am aware that there are those who view parenting as a totally separate and irrelevant issue from art making, that its inclusion in any form is deemed unprofessional. It almost operates on the same level as listing your hobbies on your CV. But this sentiment has never been articulated directly to me; many of those in charge of spaces in which I have shown work expect my daughter to attend and are surprised when I don't bring her. People seem to take interest in the fact that I have an art career, job, and a family. They are interested in the nitty-gritty. When do I go grocery shopping? When do I go into the darkroom? In the same breath I am asked if I use cloth or disposable diapers and whether I prefer Kodak or Ilford photographic papers. When I teach, these types of questions surprisingly crop up often in the classroom. I am happy that young women ponder such issues because I see it as a sign of questioning the validity of those barriers that continue to confine women. It is extremely difficult for women to be mothers because there is so little support, and on so many levels. Government does not acknowledge women in the work force and the lack of support systems reflects this. And the age-old question of whether to stay home for the benefit of the child or to return to work is more an influence of societal factors than of instinctive ones. You can stay home and be mother. You can go to work and be mother. Somewhere along the line, this issue got blurred with all the arguments of what women ought to be and do. The fact is women work, at home or elsewhere, and are mothers to their children.

I am personally gratified when I read interviews about women who have done meaningful things in their lives and discuss their family life. Artist Elizabeth Murray is an example of this. In almost every article about her there is always some reference to her family. When I read that she has two young daughters, signals go to my head saying, "See, some artists are not from Mars." Normal is not the descriptive word. Full is. When Elizabeth Murray feels free to divulge this type of information about herself, I view it as affirmation for other women artists with children.

Lenore Malen

I became a mother in my early twenties when I was a graduate student in art history at the University of Pennsylvania. Having a child makes for huge changes in one's life and I was truly unprepared for most of them. Except that this juncture was the catalyst for my abandoning a career in art history and becoming an artist.

When I moved to New York after graduate school I continued to teach art history. After teaching and taking care of a baby there was really a minuscule amount of time to make art. I remember painting in my bedroom when Josh napped, and eagerly waiting for those naps! I rented my first studio when Josh was in school all day, rather than one half day. When I wasn't teaching I frequently made two round trips on the subway between home and studio, mornings and afternoons. I remember begging Josh, and bribing him with toys, to come to my studio during school vacations so that I could work. At the same time being a mother required from me a huge amount of patience and letting go of sense of self. Yet it is precisely that sense of self that must be developed if one is to be an artist. And so for a number of years I experienced a very painful deferral of my desires and ambitions. For this reason I always thought it would have been better to wait until I was older (and hopefully more established) to have a child, but there are disadvantages with that choice too.

As for other people's "reaction" to my identity as a mother, I rarely talk about motherhood in the company of artist friends. Most of my friends have forfeited the option of having children, so it seems inappropriate or irrelevant. And I seldom talk about my private life with the various gallery dealers I know because I have sensed the subtle but pervasive stigma of motherhood among the old guard in the art world. Just recently an art world impresario who has been around for a long time asked me: "Was I so-and-so's mother?" I detected in that seemingly innocent question an unmistakable put down regarding both my age and gender. But there seems to be a real shift in attitude among some younger men and women. This goes for artists, critics, dealers.

Regardless of attitudes surrounding motherhood, the essential problem facing most women artists is an economic one. How does a woman make money,
Ann Messner

THOUGHTS ON GIVING BIRTH, RAISING A CHILD, AND MAINTAINING A CAREER simultaneously while balancing on the head of a pin

I have a twelve-year-old son. His name is Ben. I have been a single parent for ten years, since he was two. I have raised him on my own. I am also an artist. It has been and is a tremendous commitment to raise a child. No other animal on this planet takes eighteen years to mature. To take care of, to nurture, to stay and help someone grow slowly over time is a lot of work. Even more so as a single parent with a career. Giving birth and raising a child is similar to the slow process of creating art.

The externals have seemed at times hellish. I have felt myself to be in the midst of a whirlwind of simultaneous activity; of a phenomenal act of balancing and a continuous reevaluation of priorities. There is the ongoing ritual of preparing two people for the day, of negotiating with teachers and bus drivers when things are not going well, of providing new clothes for a rapidly expanding body that cannot slow down, of making do on a budget that is laughable, of being wise and able to explain the lessons of life, and then...to maintain a studio, a place to work, to keep the focus on this work despite all of the available distractions, to keep my work in the “public” domain and to participate socially when there is really so much else to do. Sometimes it has seemed next to impossible to balance what often feels like two complete and very different lives—mother and artist. I have had to make many compromises. Some days I have felt overwhelmed by work and responsibility, engulfed by self-pity.

When my son was very young I experienced hesitation from my women peers towards my motherhood. None of my friends had children. It was uncommon. It was uncharted territory within our community. There was unease. I was somewhat in shock myself, at finding myself with a child. I had never considered this one of my options. Partly, these were reactions to the external reality of added responsibility (time and money). More importantly was the internal reality. This act of birthing brought up a lot of questions that were perhaps more conveniently left masked. It is easier to address external difficulties than to acknowledge the internal fear. I was afraid my career would slip away. That if I were in fact truly committed to my work I would not have embarked on this escapade. I feared the loss of my creativity; how many times had I heard the statement “my art is my child.” I see this today as an extension of a myth of exclusion and scarcity, of a myth that informs us that artists can only be men because the “creativity” of women is biologically channeled elsewhere, of a myth that art need be a restrictive intellectual pursuit, not inclusive of and even threatened by the complete human experience. I can gratefully say that my experience has proved to be very different from these preconceived notions.

My son was born at a time when I did not know any more why I was working or what I wanted to say in that work. I had reached a point of painful noncommitment in my life. Giving birth was a phenomenal experience for me—epic in proportion. Going through it radically changed my life. It was literally as if I had changed the vantage point from which I viewed the world. The experience of giving birth and mothering a child gave me an understanding of who we as human beings are; a direct glimpse of the evolution of the species; of a need to have a future, which, for me, growing up in the drug culture of the 60s, had been highly questionable. Having a child gave me the knowledge of what I needed to speak about in my life and a motivation to do so that I had not had before. It helped me to see life as something serious and to accept my responsibility for what I say and do. This has been a tremendous gift.

The recurring theme of domesticity in my work would not be there if I had not had that life experience; nor my preoccupation with protection, covering, defining territory; nor would I perceive so acutely the estrangement between the external realities of our culture and the internal stability of the home. If I had not lived life as radically as I have these themes would not have become important to me. It was not so much a conscious decision of mine to work this way. It has become a part of me because being a mother tints the way I look at everything. I am a caretaker, a teacher. I have had to make decisions about what is important to teach, what is better left behind. I have had to learn to communicate on a very simple level, clearly. I have had to find and learn to participate in a community that nurtures me. This has given me a sense of being a part of society. This has provided a platform for me in opposition to the popular myth of the artist as the estranged, the “madman”—“madwoman”—within the culture. Yes, I am an artist; I am also a woman, a single parent, a person. I have common problems. I have common strengths. The one thing that is unique about what I do is that, as an artist, I take that common experience and use it directly as the material for what I produce.

We live in a very competitive society. We compete for territory and possessions between (and among) the sexes. We are not generous in spirit. We will never have enough. The cavities inside us can never be filled. Our culture is based on the worship of power and the insatiable desire to control. Behind the need to control there is always fear.

I believe that bearing and raising another human being is an extremely empowering act. It takes a deep commitment to being human; to the validation of internal human experience. Ultimately these primal instincts are much stronger forces than the intellectual drive.

Creativity is coveted. I believe women are feared because of the creative power inherent in bearing the young of the species and because men have little control over that power. Within the constructs of the dominant culture this is as much creativity as women dare be given or take—a false myth of the limits of what we are capable of becomes pervasive.

As a women artist and mother I have not had historical precedents available to me. The most important influences on my work had always been men; certainly none of them were mothers. Within these constructs to have both a career and a child in my life becomes revolutionary.
If art is the telling of the complete human experience it becomes in a sense our responsibility as women artists to use all our experiences, including this primal act of regenerating, as creative fuel. We have a right to a creative process of inclusion in our lives. As artists we are in a unique position to take this internal reality and translate it into the external creatively. One act of creation does not necessarily take away from another. Bearing a child or acknowledging the desire to do so is not a cross to bear, or something that makes us less than men, to be ashamed of. It is empowering. It is a choice that we deserve. This knowledge is part of what I have come to understand life to be. It is important to me. It is part of my identity as a woman, a human being, and an artist. I also believe that it is knowledge that our culture is very much in need of for its survival not only physically but also in spirit.

In closing I want to say that separate from my experience and opinions about having a child, there is a young boy gathering his own experiences and opinions. And he learns from what he sees in me.

**Diane Neumai**

It's August 19, 1992, Family Values Night at the Republican National Convention. Tonight motherhood will be deployed (again) against women. Marilyn Quayle has just been presented to us as a cookie baker, by Major Dad, whom Marilyn says she wishes could meet Murphy Brown. (Is this a sit-com or a sound bite? Hollywood or Washington? Is there a difference?) Marilyn declares women's rewards are different. Raising happy children is Marilyn's reward. Most women, she says, wouldn't have it any different. (I say we have no 'choice.') Marilyn doesn't, as she proclaims liberals do, want to be liberated from our essential nature. (Whoops, where did the 'choice' go?) (The camera pans vehemently applauding happy women, presumably happy mothers whose family values made them what they are today—Republicans.) Well, the truth is, I'm often a happy mother, with an often happy child. In spite of being a mother, I am a productive artist. And, while motherhood, the most distracting condition imaginable, is virtually unrewarded, it feels rewarding. What else can a mother say? Marilyn says, "God Bless America." I say, thank god my kid is out tonight so I can meet your deadline—hope not out too late to check my spelling....

**Nancy Pierson**

Two and a half years ago, when I was 40, I had our son Toby. My husband and I had married late, and until then I had never wanted children, my career as an artist being all to me. Much to my surprise, it turns out to be a wonderful thing to be a mother.

Motherhood is also frightening and isolating. Having fallen out of the L.A. art world, I sought a community of other mothers of small babies to enter into for comfort and advice, and for a buffer against loneliness. It was wonderful for awhile to have so many new acquaintances, but over time our individual personalities, variations in our ages and backgrounds, and our natural female competitiveness began to erode the numbers. Ironically, because our son has lately developed a serious learning disability, I have felt relieved to drop out of the 1990s yuppy competition for the best child. I have recently found a quite different community of parents and teachers who are heroic and inspiring in their love for troubled children.

The community of women, and their attitudes and behavior toward one another has become the subject of my work now. Over the past year and a half, I have produced a group of large drawings of middle-aged women, many of them mothers. I feel I must now "cover" this group, as I am inside looking out. I feel the double pariahdom of my own position in our culture and wish to convey the emotional goldmine I am discovering here in the outland. The women in the drawings appear in pairs or small groups. They have aging faces, imperfect bodies, are badly dressed or wear Puritan-like uniforms. These are my own invention for a censorious, desexualizing 'Mothers Guild.' (I am amazed at the process by which motherhood ages and desexualizes women, and by women's complicity in this process.) The women are in various cases, consoling, supporting, excluding, and reprimanding one another. The grouping schemes are derived from photographs of scenes from opera. I developed an interest in opera around the time Toby was born, as its over-the-top emotionality resonated with my own state.

As a middle-aged woman and a mother I feel my own lack of stature in the art world sorely. I am not a very aggressive person to begin with, so in some ways I embrace the opportunity motherhood gives me to retire from the scene. Because we plan to have another child soon, I will, for the most part, be spending my 40s raising small children. Some may consider this a waste of an artist's prime, but I am considering it life experience which I probably need to go through in order to make anything which will be worthwhile looking at. I believe I may be right in this, as this last body of work has received the most excited critical response I have had so far, though the subject matter damn sales.

I can't help but be annoyed by the glamorous magazine ads I see, photographs of middle-aged male artists dandling their tiny offspring. There never seem to be any artist mothers (much less same over 40) given such romanticized treatment! Besides (I am sorry) but we know who's doing the real work of raising that little child...the one that's not in the picture... (or the Latina nanny)! The male artists I know who have babies or children have never broken stride in the studio.

Artist mothers out there who want to spend plenty of time with their young children and continue to work, often find themselves, as I did, trying to work out an almost impossible formula of job, studio time, and child time. In my case, it turned out that I taught to pay the babysitter so I could teach. Now I use savings to work in the studio two days a week, and those two days have become much more intensive and fruitful work days for me than any pre-child studio days. I am very fortunate to have a supportive husband (who is not an artist), who is willing to sacrifice more than a little financial comfort to see that I continue to have time for my work.
Ultimately, every artist has to put more faith into his/her work than into the system which accepts or rejects it. Having studio time to escape the enormous pressures of motherhood has kept me relatively happy, and helped me fend off some potentially deep despair. On the other hand, my anger, even bitterness, over my situation has turned out to be good fuel for my work. It is too bad that the happier emotions don't seem to inspire such good art, maybe it's because they are so simple, thoughtless, and so very fleeting. The most successful way I manage my own life is to save my unhappiness for the studio, and to give my happier self to my family.

Barbara Pollack

PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST AVOIDING THE MOMMY TRACK

Rather than join the ranks of Princess Di and Ivana Trump, I will not sell my tragic tale to the tabloids. I may not have jewels or a country estate or even a dealer, but I am a "have," or at least a "having it all." Wife and mother, that's me, revamped by the 1980s into a status symbol, the apex of privilege. So, I'll keep my complaints to a minimum.

Everyone knows that statistically I beat the odds. When Newsweek announced that a single woman over 40 has a better chance of being shot by a terrorist than getting married, I had no need to worry. When Dan Quayle attacked Murphy Brown, I did not have to take it personally. If you believe the media, I have no chance of getting AIDS, no desire to see pornography, no need for access to an abortion, and no right to complain. Since politicians from both parties promise to "have family values," my biggest worry is how to vote for them all. Right?

When I gave birth to Max in 1988, I had no idea that I was entering a privileged state. As an artist and a feminist, this has meant a major adjustment of my self-image. It is hard to fulfill the expectations of the American Family Association while maintaining respect within the avant-garde. But, this dilemma is my own creation. I can hardly blame the artworld for my petty problems.

After all, the artworld did not create Demi Moore. When I was nine months pregnant, I could have posed for the Venus of Willendorf, not the cover of Vanity Fair. Dealers and critics gave me the cold shoulder, but who could blame them? Such refined sensibilities should not have to gaze on the unaesthetic form of a short, pregnant woman. They had grown accustomed to the signifiers of birth represented in the media; you know, fashion models with pillows in front. The rest of us were what pregnant women had always been—fat. In fact, it was downright rude of me to attend openings in this condition.

Also, the artworld did not cause my economic situation. While women make 68 cents for every dollar a man makes, women with children are making 42 cents. This doesn't worry me because I am an artist, above economic considerations. Nor does it bother me that single women with children are the largest sector living below the poverty level. After all, I have a husband. I used to believe that economic independence was an important factor for my self-esteem. But, I've trained myself not to think about that anymore. It's just too frightening to consider the alternative.

Along these lines, I must thank the Pollock-Krasner Foundation for making me understand that daycare is clearly an extravagance. Other women need daycare, because they have to earn a living. I only needed daycare so I could go to my studio. (By the way, the request would have only covered two days a week.) But, I was clearly out of line. It is, after all, much more important for other (male) artists to travel or complete loft renovations. Daycare can hardly be compared to those necessities.

And, even if it can, it is wrong for me to ask for government or foundation support for what is clearly a family responsibility. Better yet, since I do what I love—make art—for no money, why shouldn't my babysitter who loves her work, do it for no money? Women usually agree to such arrangements, but I didn't have the heart to ask. So I cheerfully pay more for daycare, much more, than I make from my multiple jobs and art career.

At times, this arrangement gets me down. I even think that this is so insane that I should give up. Many of my friends in other professions, even doctors and lawyers, came to that conclusion and are "taking time off" until their children reach school age. But, a true artist never takes time off. Picasso and Matisse did not let children stand in their way, so why should I?

Those friends, I just mentioned, are grateful that their employers allowed them the option of the Mommy Track. For those unfamiliar with the term, this means they were able to have an extended parental leave and return to work on a part-time basis as long as they agreed to be removed from the partnership track. (A very nice, very legal way of terminating a woman's career.) Frankly, I am so grateful that the artworld does not have a Mommy Track. I did not have to apply for a pregnancy leave. Nobody noticed how long I stayed home after I delivered. In fact, nobody noticed that I returned to my studio within three weeks. For years, curators kept saying, "I suppose you're not getting any work done with a small child at home."

Of course, there are times when my fantasies run wild. I imagine quiet days in a studio, uninterrupted hours of concentrated work. At times like that, friends suggest I get away to an art colony. This is a most helpful suggestion. How are they to know that only one—Cummington—provides facilities for children? And Cummington does not accept children under 5. But who needs an art colony when she has the idyllic setting of a toddler by her easel? An advertisement for Pampers shows a male artist cheerfully playing with his child in a pristine white studio—the premier example of parenting and creativity. It was obviously a failure on my part that I could not achieve this perfect balance.

Which brings me to Jesse Helms, the man I have to thank most of all. In the final analysis, Jesse Helms got me daycare. When Max was an infant, I brought him with me to the studio fairly often. With the onset of the attack on the N.E.A., I began working with sexually explicit subject matter. One day my husband visited his wife and child in the studio. The walls were covered with photographs appropriated from porn magazines. He did not wait for an explanation of post-modern strategies. Then and there, he decided that Max needed more time with his babysitter.
Since then I have lost my pregnancy weight and I have shown my obscene art. I delight when critics, curators, dealers and other artists react in surprise, “You’re a mother?” At least, they aren’t saying that I paint like a man...Or are they?

Erika Rothenberg

I don’t know if being a mother has changed my work, but it definitely has changed how my work is perceived and how it is made.

As for the former, before my daughter was ever born, when I appeared, eight months pregnant, at the opening of my 1989 show at P.F.O.W., strangers came up to me and exclaimed, “Your work is so different now that you’re having a baby, so maternal!” Of course, several pieces in the show were created long before I got pregnant.

When my daughter was two, a babysitter canceled at the last minute and I had to drag her to the studio, where I was scheduled to show some work to the acquisitions committee of a big university collection. As my kid sat at my desk, drawing, I said to the group, “This will be an interesting test for you. Instead of me trying to put forth the stereotypical image of the brilliant artist—tortured, tormented, alienated from society, giving ‘his’ entire soul to ‘his’ work—you have to judge my work while seeing me as I really am, just another middle class mom.” The group tittered. They did not, however, buy a piece for their collection.

Now for the changes in how my work is made: one of the best parts of being an artist and a mother is that I can’t work all the time. B.C. (Before Children), I worked constantly. Now, I quit at 5:30 every night and rarely work weekends. The art/life separation has been good for me; it’s made my work better.

A last thought: I have been very, very lucky to have been able to afford childcare, enabling me to work every day, travel for exhibitions, and so on. I like to think that, without childcare, I would still have made the decision to have a child. But would I have been able to have my career too? We need more, affordable childcare in this country.

Miriam Schapiro

REMBRANDT AND ME

Motherhood is a word so fraught with contradictory meanings that to write a personal testament is to face ultimate feelings of love, guilt, isolation, incompetence, and anger.

Little did I realize how anxious I would become when I finally gave birth to my baby. In 1956 I was not in therapy and had no feminist support groups to listen to my grievances and advise and counsel me. Only updated Victorian tenets of perfect motherhood in combination with my Russian, Jewish background reminded me of my duty. More than that—centuries of prohibitions made me guilty for even dreaming that I might be an artist as well as a mother...
women in a small space in the balcony. It has been said that the synagogue was an early men's club. Orthodox Jewish men thank God daily for not having made them women. Of course, times have changed and women now play a fuller role in Judaism but not at that particular time in history—not when I needed validation for wanting to be a mother and an artist with equal fervor.

My mother and her mother and my aunt were a triumvirate when I was a small child growing up. It was a cultured environment and my father, who was a socialist and an artist, supported my wish to be an artist saying that there wasn't much difference between men and women if the desire was to achieve. Yet the old myths about women's duty towards their husbands remained. Baum, Hyman, and Michel in The Jewish Woman in America remind us:

As long as the woman followed her prescribed course as a devoted helpmeet to her husband and responsible household manager and mother, she was accorded great respect. Should she seek to stray from what was defined as the female role, however; into the male's domain of study and prayer so central to Jewish civilization, she was demeaned and often ridiculed.

After my baby's birth my struggle was exacerbated by the daily routine of my life. I was lucky to have been aided by my mother and my mother-in-law. Each one, for years gave up two days a week to sit with our son so that I could have time to go to the studio for four hours each day. But as time wore on they were not always available. My husband had his routine, he taught extra hours to support our expanded family. As an artist, his hours in the studio were also curtailed but he helped us nevertheless—although the child was (as children were in those days) primarily in my care.

I also began to teach in order to earn money for a babysitter—for studio time. A circular solution. But when I finally reached the studio the devils came to drown me in guilt: "Should I have left him? Is the babysitter really a competent, warm, and loving person? If not, will something happen to him?" It was a difficult time for me and for my son. I felt isolated, pressured to spend time in the studio yet I was not always productive there and that felt worse—I was wasting my time and could have spent it better at home. I bit my nails and looked outside the window at 14th Street which seemed to reflect the world as going about its business.

Six years ago, after realizing that the perfect moment for motherhood would never arise, I became pregnant. I was fearful of becoming a mom. I had been content balancing teaching, studio, and my marriage, and was resistant to change. Motherhood has meant embracing constant change. I am one element in a family that is chaotic, unpredictable, messy, noisy, fragile, and quite wonderful. Over the edge, being stretched, feeling full, I wanted more—I had a second child.

Being an artist no longer defines me. It is now one component of my life. This simple redefinition has been surprisingly liberating. Art and life have become fused and both feel more urgent. I am less cautious. Throughout the life changes of the past six years, I have continued to spend a good deal of time in my studio. There have been some obvious stopping points and lots of shorter unanticipated ones. I am frequently frustrated by not having long stretches of predictable studio time. Though I am a sculptor, I have given considerable time to developing a language in drawing for its more immediate gratifications. I resist using the signs and symbols of motherhood in my work because that iconography strikes me as simplistic shorthand for a complex experience.

My teaching job buys me childcare and my husband does a lot. I do not go to openings or many studio visits, phone calls are minimal, WAC meetings come at story time. This relative sequestering from the mainstream has taken its toll on my art "career." From a professional point of view it is clear that to be an artist and a mom is double trouble. Two professions requiring lots of work without pay and recognition. Men contributing with chores and childcare are heroes. Women can never do enough.

It is not possible to experience discrimination within the conservative art establishment. I have pretended not to be pregnant and have hid my kids at various low points in my art dealings. I received one day sick leave from my teaching job for each pregnancy. A few women in my department at school have one child, most have none. Most of the men have two or more. Society seems to say that a man is more complete having fathered offspring and a woman less accomplished. I anticipated institutional discrimination (private dealers included) but it is depressing to encounter condescension from other artists. The taboo against motherhood (and/or speaking of it) seems fostered by the male myth of art as separate from and above all else. This is old stuff. It is sad when women adopt this stance. In my experience art and life have gained spirit and meaning by becoming enmeshed.

There are natural lifestyle schisms between those with and without kids but in order for women to be fully empowered, there needs to be a spirit of inclusivity and generosity toward both groups.
MOTHERHOOD

Like morality, good manners, and a criminal record, motherhood has nothing to do with making art. Its presence neither improves one's ability, nor does it sap one's creativity like Nietzsche's worried model of having one's vital powers drained from sperm ejaculations. Giving birth does not automatically mean giving up. Having said that, I'd like to retrace it. There are limits in the world and nothing proves it like a serious illness or having children.

Wait: a minute—that's too vehement. I adore my children. I never knew real passion until I had my first child. The smell that emanated from the deep recesses of her neck literally intoxicated me. I would lean over that crib and bury my face in her neck and inhale her smell until my back gave out or I began to hyperventilate. I don't wonder how it is that wild animal mothers can always identify the smell of their own offspring, differentiating them from the smells of all seemingly identical babies. The smell of your own offspring is more real and potent than any other sensory experience. I doubt that this instinct comes from the more highly developed or intellectual parts of the brain, but nevertheless, I have rarely had more concentrated pleasure.

Private life—not the kind that is spilled into the interstices of public life, not the "quality time" of a few minutes at the end of a distracted and hurried day—but the privacy that exists in a hermetic domestic world that has the luxury to experience the pleasure that comes from spending all day watching the wondernment of a new mind, is a world that has completely fallen out of fashion. The private realm is dismissed as a facet of existence that ought to be farmed out to those who are willing to do it by the hour. However much of the relaxed pleasure that comes from living with children in the natural slow pace of an untimed day gets lost when the private world is subjected to the circumscribed timetable of public life. Demands go up and tolerance for chaos goes down. It is not an algorithm that suits children. Babies and small children have a perverse sense of pleasure in any kind of reaction, whether it is a jack-in-the-box or a glass of milk heaved across the room, it's all equally thrilling for them. They react totally, with every cell in their bodies. Approval and cool are still safely cloistered in the unseen future. Everything is experienced in and for the moment. It is that narrowing of the world to the most private of all realms that is both the bait and the sinker.

If Philippe Aries and Georges Duby ever commission a sixth volume of "A History of Private Life" to cover our own decades, it will surely be issued as a pamphlet. An ironic side-effect of feminism has been the denigration of some of the traditional elements of the female world: the care of children and the elderly; and for the moment.

For artists, even more selfishly, there is that narrowing of the world to the private world, to the luxury of experiencing the pleasure that comes from spending all day watching the wondernment of a new mind, is a world that has completely fallen out of fashion. The private realm is dismissed as a facet of existence that ought to be farmed out to those who are willing to do it by the hour. However much of the relaxed pleasure that comes from living with children in the natural slow pace of an untimed day gets lost when the private world is subjected to the circumscribed timetable of public life. Demands go up and tolerance for chaos goes down. It is not an algorithm that suits children. Babies and small children have a perverse sense of pleasure in any kind of reaction, whether it is a jack-in-the-box or a glass of milk heaved across the room, it's all equally thrilling for them. They react totally, with every cell in their bodies. Approval and cool are still safely cloistered in the unseen future. Everything is experienced in and for the moment. It is that narrowing of the world to the most private of all realms that is both the bait and the sinker.

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But regardless of these debates about the ultimate meaning of women's parenting responsibilities, what does it say about the compatibility of having children with being an artist? I believe there are three possibilities. You can have your children when you're still a teenager and living with your mother, because she's the one who's really going to help you out. She won't cheat you on the percentage of work that she does. By the time you're 35, your kids will be grown and you'll have your life back. Or, secondly, you can have lots of money. You'll need lots of it to hire an additional woman to do the things that need to be done so you can go to the studio. It is a rare artist who has the long-term earning potential to span the years of a child's twenty-year dependency. If she is going to rely solely on herself, she would have to earn a minimum of $50,000.00 after taxes, dealer cut, and the cost of producing the work, e.g., studio rent, materials, and assistants, in order to pay the minimum wage of $12,000 costs- tently for twenty years in order to be in the studio every day. Or, thirdly, she can do what artists with children usually do: she can run herself ragged, put off washing er-in-law maintains that it's all genetic; they're just born that way. It's a depressing thought, but I'm beginning to think she may be right. You may say that tails on rats are just cultural, but if they've all got them, the argument is empty. There's a logical imperative here. Husbands never, ever, do anything close to half of the work involved in child-rearing. Now, a few of them seriously believe that they do. I've heard several properly brought up, politically correct men say that they participate fully in the duties and responsibilities of child and house care, but I've never heard a wife concur. Another critic recently told me that until his wife went out of town for a week and left him with the responsibility for their son, he had always given himself credit for doing thirty percent—a decent and liberal estimation of his own irresponsibility. But he has now been forced to revise that to ten percent. This news may not rally him to new standards of behavior but he's going to be ever so much more grateful.

I believe this universal state of affairs confirms at least one of two things: either women really are more foolish than men, or men really are more wicked than women.

Option one: men don't get themselves suckered into doing any more than the barest minimum of the detailed, shit work like grocery shopping, laundry, chauffeuring to lessons and social events, routine doctor visits, shopping for clothes, cleaning bedrooms, buying toys, setting up play dates, arranging babysitting, or confronting with teachers. Women assume these responsibilities independent of their outside workload. Even when a woman has a full-time career, the lion's share of this mountain of details falls to her. The men claim they are too busy or they simply forget, and they get away with it. This triumph could easily be viewed as a clear argument for their superiority.

This universal state of affairs may confirm the second option: men are truly scoundrels and women simply are unwilling to stoop to such depths of selfishness and inconsideration of others. Few mothers could "forget" to take their children to the doctor's for routine check-ups, or permanently neglect to do the laundry. So maybe the old-fashioned argument for female moral superiority is true.

But regardless of these debates about the ultimate meaning of women's parenting responsibilities, what does it say about the compatibility of having children with being an artist? I believe there are three possibilities. You can have your children when you're still a teenager and living with your mother, because she's the one who's really going to help you out. She won't cheat you on the percentage of work that she does. By the time you're 35, your kids will be grown and you'll have your life back. Or, secondly, you can have lots of money. You'll need lots of it to hire an additional woman to do the things that need to be done so you can go to the studio. It is a rare artist who has the long-term earning potential to span the years of a child's twenty-year dependency. If she is going to rely solely on herself, she would have to earn a minimum of $50,000.00 after taxes, dealer cut, and the cost of producing the work, e.g., studio rent, materials, and assistants, in order to pay the minimum wage of $12,000 costs-tently for twenty years in order to be in the studio every day. Or, thirdly, she can do what artists with children usually do: she can run herself ragged, put off washing
the dishes, do without to pay the babysitter, put off that studio visit to take some­
one or other to the pediatrician, and make the best of a hard situation, often with a
wage-earning husband who also feels ill used and tired.

"Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend" is the chorus line that comes to mind in
this context. Babies cost money. Add to that a profession like art that is hardly a
dependable corporate ladder, and the financial jitters are sure to rattle your night.
But it's a testament to the frailty of the human memory when all those worries and
fears evaporate into the ether of the forgettable, as that little face puckers up for a
kiss. The wonderfulness of children really does make all other practical concerns
turn shamed face away from one's consciousness: money and sustenance issues have
no place competing with that sweetness of childhood. Priorities have to be
assert themselves, and the drab absorption in everyday life must pale next to the
moments of passionate love and intense pleasure that children bring. People, in the
final autumnal days of their lives, rarely delight in their recollection of a day well
worked. It is the small yet significant events that mark the time of one's memories:
a day at the beach with one of the silly little ones covered in sand up to their neck;
the triumphant day of a first bike ride; the first birthday cake heaved across the
room. And so one becomes a mother in much the same way as one becomes an
artist: blithely and without regard for the practical consequences. And really, is
there any other way to live?

Joan Snyder

BEING A MOTHER....

Being a mother and an artist: hard. Being a single mother and an artist: hard­
er. Being a mother is being a mother is being a mother. Being an artist means doing
your work. You need time and you need help, years and years of help. It's hard
work—hard, creative, time consuming work. Lucky, very lucky, when your child is
healthy. I have a fabulously healthy, beautiful, grounded, wise, centered child who
never learned how to whine. As an infant and small child Molly was always sur­
rounded by an abundance of people who loved her. She still is. So she is lucky and
I am lucky.

In answer to one of your questions, I never noticed discrimination from any­
one in the art world based on pregnancy or motherhood. Everyone has always
seemed very supportive of this aspect of my life. It's not motherhood that triggers
discrimination in the art world; it's being a woman.

There is a quote from Hilton Kramer that illustrates perfectly the invidious
discrimination against women in the art world:

The whole phenomenon of Neo-Expressionism, and particularly the
American aspects of it—Schnabel, Salle and Eric Fischl, and people of that
generation—really has to be understood in relation to minimalism and color­
field abstraction, which by the 1970s had established a standard of visual
anemia in art. There was a longing for a kind of art that was richer in visual
incident. It was an invitation to the next generation to say, We're going to fill­
up those surfaces with everything we can lay our hands on.

Except that it wasn't the male artists who were working that way then—WE
WERE! Women were. Mothers were. Women, who were working in isolation in uni­
versities with only male faculty who didn't begin to understand our new language,
were. Women all over the country in their studios—again in isolation because very
little attention was being paid to them—were. It was women artists who pumped
the blood back into the art world in the 70s and 80s, not the men Kramer toured. At
the height of the Pop and Minimal movements, we were making other art—art that
was personal, autobiographical, expressionistic, narrative, and political. It was
women using words, cutting, pasting, building layer upon layer of material, experi­
menting with new materials, and, to paraphrase Hilton Kramer, filling up those
surfaces with everything we could lay our hands on. This was called Feminist Art. This
was what the art of the 1980s was finally about, appropriated by the most famous
male artists of the decade. They were called heroic for bringing expression and the
personal to their art. We were called Feminist (which was a dirty word). They
called it neo-expressionist. It wasn't neo to us.

In answer to another of your questions, being a mother affects your work
because it affects your whole being—your body your mind your heart your soul­
and of course your work. But what it's really like is that you live two lives, yours
and your kid's. Every day. Maybe the hardest part is the "maintenance" because
children keep eating and growing. So every six months or so, no matter what, they
need new clothes, new shoes (you have to go through and get rid of the old ones),
new haircuts, new dentist and doctor appointments, new playdates, and even new
friends. I have done it all for thirteen years. I have gone to every one of Molly's doc­
tor, dentist, hygienist, and orthodontist appointments. I have suffered with her
every high fever, headache, stomach, and earache. I have enjoyed every school
play, dance recital, concert, performance, and teacher's conference—alone—for
thirteen years. You need lots of help but the help doesn't do that stuff... You have to
do it... (even friends and lovers don't do it.) So it sounds like all of this cuts into my
time and work. No kidding. (While Julian Schnabel was painting away.) But I never
felt that my work suffered for any of it. Because being a mother is being a mother
is being a mother is BEING.

P.S. Saturday, July 18—I have just taken my 86-year-old mother and my 92-year-old
father for haircuts, new sneakers, and out to dinner.

Tuesday, July 21—I have just taken my mother to the emergency room of
Kings Highway Hospital in Brooklyn. My sister has run to care for my father. I call
my brother to tell him about Mom.

Thursday, July 22—My mother is operated on and is in critical condition in
the ICU unit of the hospital. I visit her three times a day and run to my father in
between visits. My brother telephones to see how everyone is doing.

Sunday, July 26—I put Molly on the bus for camp for three weeks... Mom
still in ICU.

Being a mother is being a mother and being a daughter is being a daughter.
None of this has anything to do with the art world... it all has to do with my work
and time.

The bottom line is that you don't have to be a mother or a daughter to be dis­
credited against in the art world... you just have to be a woman.
Elke Solomon

The late 60s and early 70s produced an attitude of either/or in me. A child or total concentration on work. By the late 70s, I could give myself permission to have a child. Women have been trained to stir the pot, diaper a child, and write a novel simultaneously. When Alex was born my priorities were—he needed to be fed and changed when he needed to be fed and changed. That’s it! I became very disciplined. I basically went underground, or mid-underground, where I could be both a serious artist and serious parent. I now realize how isolated I was.

I learned from the mothers who were my friends in the late 60s and early 70s in the midst of the ardency of the new feminism, that as new feminists we were not being sensitive to “their” needs. In the 80s we are still learning from mothers and other women, that there is still not enough real support for daycare, mandatory leave, prenatal care, maternity leave, child support, battered women support, planned parenthood, sex education in the schools, single parenthood, sex and gay and lesbian parenthood.

It’s supposed to be “natural” to be a mother if you’re a woman. Our bodies are made to be mothers. Only women can be mothers. Men can be caregivers. If you have a child before a certain age, or after a certain age, in the art world, you’re abnormal; if you don’t have a child, you’re abnormal. And men make art. How many men have been told not to bring their children to galleries, or openings, because they would not be taken seriously? Men caring for babies, an additional job to their natural job of making art, are treated as rare and wonderful superheroes, and women artists with families are treated as though it comes with the territory rather than assumed by the free exercise of their will.

I love and hate being a mother. It’s positive, enriching, optimistic, and excruciatingly difficult. We care for/for another human for the rest of our lives. I love and hate being an artist. I do not love being a woman artist in the art world. Making art takes time, having babies take time. As children become more independent, another kind of attentiveness is needed for parenting, and more time becomes available. Alex has taught me, in the most palpable way, that things change all the time—situations, focii, and priorities, that life precedes art.

Nancy Spero

CREATION AND PRO-CREATION

We (Leon Golub and myself) have three adult sons, Stephen, Philip, and Paul. The first two were born in Chicago in the early 60s. My consciousness was not “raised” at the time, but I was acutely aware that after having an autonomous role at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and after functioning as a young artist in Chicago, I was treated differently as a wife and mother.

The stigma of motherhood had struck. It seemed even artist friends regarded me differently as if there couldn’t be two artists in one household. My work was virtually and sometimes conspicuously ignored in the 60s (see CV)—particularly when the male half was honing his skills in theoretical explanations of a powerful oeuvre, recognized as a “young Turk.” My art was more lyrical and layered, less accessible—coming from a female sensibility? Less accessible meaning the Chicago art world that I knew was unwilling to grant access. The 50s, like the 80s, was an era of macho roles. I was hidden behind the nuclear family, and the general denial of validity to women artists, particularly mothers.

Having a primary responsibility with the children—Leon’s consciousness needed a lot of raising in that era—I never stopped working and always late at night, proving if only to myself that I was an artist.

In 1969 we went to Paris where we lived and worked for five years. Our third son, Paul, was born there. The Parisian art world opened for me as it hadn’t in Chicago. Perhaps because I wasn’t categorized as “wife” or “mother.” I had three solo shows at Galerie Breteau and exhibited in various group exhibitions in France and Switzerland.

In 1964 we returned to the United States—to New York. The Vietnam War was raging, and I was upset at the US involvement and actions in the conflict. Also I was intensely rethinking my position as an artist. Did I want to reiterate timeless subjects, employing an extended, lengthy process, or did I want to address the excesses of violence in war—its potential for total destruction? Perhaps motherhood was part of a political, personal choice in my changing mediums and content. I started working rapidly on paper, angry works, often scatological—manifestos against a senseless obscene war, a war that my sons (too young then) could have been called up for. Those works were excoriums to keep the war away.

I felt silenced as an artist, with no dialogue, as there were no venues—other than a few anti-war shows and benefits. The silencing of women’s voices in society is pervasive. In the “War Series,” angry screaming heads in clouds of bombs spew and vomit poison on to the victims below. Phallic tongues emerge from human heads at the tips of the penile extensions of the bomb or helicopter blades. Making these extreme images, I worried that the children might be embarrassed with the content of my art, what “their mother” might be doing as an artist.

They must have realized what I was painting (the “War Paintings” and the “Codex Artaud”). But they were at ease about the art, largely ignoring what both of us were doing, taking us for granted, occasionally as they got older displaying a relaxed acceptance. But I learned years later that they were much more concerned that I didn’t appear or dress in more conventional or conservative feminine attire.

In the “Artaud Paintings” (1969-70) and “Codex Artaud” (1969-72), I used fragmented quotes from Antonin Artaud—of his desperation, humor, misogyny, and violent language. He speaks of his tongue being cut!—silenced. I fragmented these quotes with images I had painted—disembodied heads, defiant phallic tongues on tense male, female, and androgynous straitjackets, mythological or alchemical references. I’m literally sticking my tongue out at the world—woman, silence, victimized and brutalized, hysterical, talking “in tongues.” These descriptions of women fit Artaud’s writings and behavior. But as a male character, he is canonized because of his “otherness”—his disruption of language.

I became an active participant in the art world in the late 60s and early 70s, joining women artists action and discussion groups, such as WAR (Women Artists in Revolution), the Ad Hoc committee of women artists, and A.I.R. Gallery, an all-
woman's cooperative gallery founded in 1972. We analyzed women's status in the art world, the collusion of power (galleries, museums, critics, collectors, auctions) how the "heroes" are kept on top. [I joke that I joined the women artists groups as I was the only woman in an all male household—even the dog was male!]

We took action, picketing the Whitney Museum [in 1970, women artists represented only 4% of those exhibited at the Whitney Biennial], we wrote manifestos for parity and more exhibition opportunities, joined pro-choice marches, and so on.

By different roads, Golub's career and mine have become equal. My art now for the most part has crossed the boundaries from the private into the public domain (from the feminine ghetto into a man's world?). The work that was ignored in the 50s and 60s became "relevant" in the 80s. Leon was consistently critically supportive of my work, and we continued to have an ongoing dialogue. In the early 80s, I had (gave myself) a three-gallery show (A.I.R., 345 Gallery, and Art Galaxy)—a mini-retrospective so that my art was then seen to have a history. And too, there was the continuance of the dialogues with women artists, historians, theorists (even if women artists were again more dispersed and isolated in the 80s, the Reagan/Bush years, Kinder, Küche & Kirche—conservative times without much group political action, with the exception of the Guerrilla Girls). Now in the 90s, with women's political action groups such as WAC (Women's Action Coalition), many women artists are joining together as there is an almost universal anger and frustration with the system.

I have not been too involved with the "problems" of motherhood for well over a decade-and-a-half. I have a step-granddaughter—a young, able businesswoman, and my eldest son and his wife have just adopted a half-white/half-black baby girl. I am a multicultural grandmother now.

How many artists are fathers? How has it affected their work, people's response to their work, their careers? Did Jeff Koons or Frank Stella postpone their careers in order to take their responsibilities as fathers seriously? Did Peter Halley's pater-nity record?

May Stevens

How many artists are fathers? How has it affected their work, people's response to their work, their careers? Did Jeff Koons or Frank Stella postpone their careers in order to take their responsibilities as fathers seriously? Did Pace, Castelli, Sonnabend, or Mary Boone discriminate against Schnabel, Salle, or Marden because of fatherhood? What does Gagosian think of fatherhood among artists. In the present, when women bring up their children, they are asked whether they are "serious" artists. Now in the 90s, with women's political action groups such as WAC (Women's Action Coalition), many women artists are joining together as there is an almost universal anger and frustration with the system.

I will be very happy to discuss questions of motherhood after your journal seriously researches fatherhood among artists. In the present, when women bring up children alone and bear primary—often sole—responsibility, financial and emotional, for the next generation, it's fatherhood that needs looking at.

Carol Szymanski

My daughter, Davida, is now 10 months old. So far her existence has not had any discernible influence on my art. But there is a parallel between one aspect of my experience as an artist and being a mother. After I have made an object, when the work leaves me and is out in the world, I have a hard time recognizing it as "mine." I no longer "own" it in the same way I did when it was a nascent idea, it is no longer a part of me. I am always somewhat surprised when I see a work of mine up in a gallery, how distant it seems from the fact that I made it. This is like what I am experiencing with Davida. She embodies the space I am in, separate yet continuously in relation to myself. I do not have a notion of what it means to be a mother.

In the same way, I do not have a notion of what it means to be "Carol." In either case, it is simply a question of a name which serves to identify me in the eyes of other people. "Mother" is who I will be for Davida more than for myself. What exactly is this feeling of motherhood that my friends and colleagues so often ask about? A rerouting of expectations of the role of mother based on our assumptions about what our mothers felt about being mothers.

Martha Wilson

How has being a mother affected people's response or reactions to your artwork?

I was the one who thought my career would be over as soon as the baby appeared. It was Ellen Rumm who said, "You're a performance artist—you're body is your medium. Why don't you just consider the baby to be an extension of your work?"

How has it affected your career?

I spend a lot more money than I ever thought I had on child care.

Have you encountered discrimination?

No, but I am self-employed.

Did you postpone starting your career or stop working when your children were young?

I'm glad to be an old lady with a baby, even though I sometimes get called "grandmother." I would be difficult to baby yourself, which is what starting your career requires, while minding a baby.

How would you describe the differences in treatment?

Don't know.

Did having children enhance your creativity?

All my work is about seeing from the female perspective anyway, and having a baby is one of those things a man can't do. I was interested in the unknown. What do I know now? It's more fun than I expected, more fun than my mother gave me to understand, raising me in the afterglow of World War II. And I suspect that although I "created" a being, he is 100% himself and I have perhaps zero influence. Having a baby is how the vast number of women who are not artists get to blare, the creative "play" state to which art gives us access.
Motherhood's restrictions on my life (and that includes my creative life) came from within, and not as the result of the way I was treated by others. When my daughter was born something inside me which had long been slumbering, kicked into gear. It has been functioning, neurotically and unbidden, ever since.

In practical, non-analytical terms I could name this "something" the loss of selfishness, that trait so absolutely essential to those of us who attempt to create. I felt robbed, crazed. Suddenly, I responded as if I were a puppet to the needs of someone else—she came first, I'm still not sure who came second, or whether I was even on third—the game plan had changed entirely, overnight, and to this day I haven't figured out the rules.

There was virtually no support system. My then-husband was not liberated (it was 1969), my parents lived hours away, and my in-laws were completely out to lunch. I identified with my infant: the world was a hostile place, there was no help, and it was my job to protect her, forever!

This attitude did not give me peace of mind. I had access to my studio. I was only working part-time. The problem was me. If my child was sick, or needy, I simply fell apart. I was lovesick and had lost control of my life rhythm. My place was with her, period. Not everyone sees the world the way I did. Some find it friendly, and are capable of trust. They know their child won't die if they go to work and leave her in the care of others.

Besides the new selflessness, the thing which had been slumbering in me was little Barbara, who woke up with explosive force when I became a mother. I had to assuage her/my fears as well as those of my child. My daughter's birth put me in touch with all kinds of repressed childhood fears I'd done just [me without had to assuage her/my fears as well as those of my child. My daughter's birth put me in touch with all kinds of repressed childhood fears I'd done just [me without

So what's the good side? All this anxiety and confusion threw me right back into therapy, where I figured out some things. I tried harder than before to get my work out because I needed to prove that motherhood would never stop me from pursuing my career. My daughter made me ecstatic; my love for her eclipsed any other.

Having a child was a crisis. Crisis is the only thing which creates fast, substantive change. I've never been the same since, nor, by extension, has my work and its process.

Barbara Zucker

CARTOONS OF THE SELF: PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MURDERER ART SPIEGELMAN'S MAUS

NANCY K. MILLER

"A writer is someone who plays with his mother's body."
—Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text

Autobiography by women is said to differ from autobiography by men because of a recurrent structural feature. Historically, according to academic critics, the self of women's autobiography has required the presence of another in order to represent itself on paper: for women identity is constructed "by way of alterity." From the Duchess of Newcastle to Gertrude Stein the acknowledgment and "recognition of another consciousness" seem to have been the necessary and enabling condition of women's self-narrative. Unlike, say, Augustine or Rousseau, the female autobiographer rarely stages herself as a unique one-woman show; as a result her performances don't quite fit the models of individual exemplarity thought to be a defining criterion of autobiographical practice. The number of women's autobiographies that display this construction of identity through alterity is quite remarkable. Yet several recent autobiographical performances by male authors—Art Spiegelman's Maus, Philip Roth's Patrimony, Jacques Derrida's Circe confessed, Herb Gardner's Conversations with My Father—have made me wonder whether we might not more usefully extend Mary Mason's insight that "the disclosure of female self is linked to the identification of some 'other' rather than restrict it to a by now predictably bi-polar account of gendered self-representation. What these male-authored works have in common is precisely the structure of self-portrayal through the relation to a privileged other that characterizes most female-authored autobiography.

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Self-representation in these memoirs of the other is not thematically the designated subject of disclosure. In Maus Spiegelman sets out to tell his father's story; his own is necessarily subordinated to that purpose. But the son's struggle with his father proves to be as much the subject of Maus as the father's suffering in Auschwitz. In what follows I show some of the ways in which this double paradigm operates at the heart of the Maus books as a form of self-narrative. I argue further that the father/son material is intertwined with, even inseparable from two equally powerful autobiographical strands: the son's self-portrayal as an artist and his relation—both as an artist and as a son—to his (dead) mother. (It may also be that along with the entanglements of gender, the project of making autobiography is always tied to this intergenerational matrix of identity). From the first pages of Maus to the last of Maus II the figuration of the father/son relation constructs the frame through which we read (and hear) the
father's story. We can think of this frame as generative, in the sense that it literally—and visually—produces the material of the "survivor's tale." This frame has a powerful double effect on the reader because it mimics the production of testimony and naturalizes the experience of listening to it. In the frame of narrative time, which is the present of Rego Park, we are lured into the account of a Holocaust past through the banality of American domestic life. The father pedals on an exercise bike in his son's former room and asks him about the "comics business." Art answers by reminding him of his old project of drawing a book about him. His father, Vladek protests: "It would take many books; my life, and no one wants anyway to hear such stories." But Art has already incorporated his resistance into his book. "I want to hear it. Start with Mom... Tell me how you met." "Better you should spend your time to make drawings," Vladek protests, "what will bring you some money.

These opening panels announce several of the book's themes: the transformation of oral testimony into (visual) narrative, the role of the listener (and then the reader) in that production, the place of his mother Anja in the family imaginary (Art holds her photograph as he speaks to his father), and the failure or success of Art's work as a cartoonist. The generative frame in which these problems about art and life, life and death, death and success, are sketched out also works at allaying the anxiety of the readers and critics who may enter the space of the Maus project with misgivings about its premises: who wants to hear such stories, and as comics, no less? How could a reader fail to be captivated by such self-deprecation?

The first page of "Time Flies," the second chapter of Maus II, lays out the terms of Art's self-portrait as an artist. The top half of the page is divided into two symmetrical panels. On the left, Art, wearing a mouse mask gazes at his drawing board and thinks: "Vladek died of congestive heart failure on August 24, 1944... Françoise and I stayed with him in the Catakills back in August 1977." On the right, the time flies buzzing around his head, Art comments on his sketch: "Vladek started working as a tinman in Auschwitz in the spring of 1944... I started working on this page at the very end of February 1987." Again, on the left, Art says: "In May 1987 Françoise and I are expecting a baby... Between May 16, 1944 and May 24, 1944 over 100,000 Hungarian Jews were gassed in Auschwitz..."; and on the right, Art looks out at the reader: "In September 1986, after 8 years of work, the first part of MAUS was published. It was a critical and commercial success." Below the matching panels is a single frame. Art, in despair, leans on his arms at his drawing board, which now is at the height of a podium. The bottom half of the panel is occupied by a flattened pyramid of mouse corpses, above which the flies continue to buzz. Art complains: "At least fifteen foreign editions are coming out. I've gotten some offers to turn my book into a T.V. special or movie. (I don't wanna.) In May 1968 my mother killed herself. (She left no note.) Lately I've been feeling depressed." And an ageless bubble of words tries to get his attention: "Alright Mr. Spiegelman... We're ready to shoot.

What does it mean to make (cartoon) art out of Auschwitz, money from the Holocaust? Is it possible to visualize and then represent a world designed to connect and destroy the human imagination? These are the questions that Maus explores, wrestles with, and displaces through a set of concrete choices. Spiegelman's strategy for crafting this piece of the challenge to the ethics and mate-
Art's representation of the Holocaust testimony itself. In "Of Mice and Menschen: Jewish Comics Come of Age," Paul Buhle makes the important point that one of the "less discussed, but more vital" reasons for the extraordinary success of *Maus* (beyond the brilliant decision to render the insanity of the Holocaust as a cartoon) "is the often unflattering portrait of the victim-survivor Vladek." The father, Buhle goes on to argue, "was not a nice guy, ever"; and (as he observes that Spiegelman commented to him) "the mainstream critics seem to have missed this point entirely, quite an important one to the artist. Perhaps they can't accept the implications." *The Nation* 's reviewer, Elizabeth Pochoda, flagging Buhle's review, emphasizes his "political point...that more sentimental critics have missed: Vladek began as a typical selfish bourgeois with no politics and no ideals..." In *The New Yorker*, Ethan Mordden offers one case of this mainstream "sentimental" reading: "Through his increasingly astonishing composure in retelling these adventures, Vladek becomes oddly heroic...Perhaps this is the reason Art is so forgiving of a father who was overcritical when Art was growing up and is now, not to put too fine a point on it, a real parent.

Despite these differences of interpretation, both Buhle and Mordden identify the panels I've described above as emblematic of the *Maus* project. Buhle chooses them to illustrate his remarks: "The reflexive work of Art Spiegelman probes the perils of success and the burden of survival"; Mordden to make his point about the fathers/son relation and its classical pedagogies: "the son trying to learn from the father." Mordden, I think wrongly, separates "Art...a man wearing a mouse mask" from "Art, son of Vladek." He distinguishes between the son and "Art Spiegelman, artist, passing himself off as some kind of Jew—huddled over his drawing board on top of a heap of mouse corpses." The work of a son, or the work of an artist? This question of genre played itself out in the best-seller lists of *Maus* when Spiegelman himself challenged their categories and had *Maus* moved from fiction to non-fiction. The man in the mouse mask is precisely the figure of the *son as the artist* and nothing makes the difficulty of that dual identity more visible than his representation of Vladek as Art's father.

The success of *Maus* is due to a double audacity. The first is the choice to represent the Holocaust as a cartoon; the second to cast its star witness as a victimizer in his own world, a petty tyrant at home. In *Maus II* Spiegelman, who is an acutely self-conscious artist, agonizes over this problem of representation in a conversation with his father's second wife, Mala, and Art discusses Vladek's stinginess. "It's something that overcritical when Art was growing up and is now, not to put too fine a point on it, a real parent.

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The highlighting of that act not only points to the ways in which the question of Anja's story has haunted the *Maus* project from the start but also serves to guide the reading of its second installment.
Art's quest for his mother's diaries punctuates the dialogue with the father out of which Vladek's testimony is produced. The inclusion of "Prisoner of the Hell Planet" connects the enigma of the suicide—the mother left no note—to the violence of destroying the diaries. Both gestures entail the suppression of a maternal text. As a son and an artist Art's response to this erasure is complexly layered: in "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" he blames himself and his mother for her death; in Maus he attempts to provide a measure of reparation for "murdering" his mother by putting into images what he could know from Vladek of life during the war; throughout the volumes he indirectly links his task as an artist to her body by representing as a crucial piece of the Maus recovery project his own doomed and belated attempt to figure out her reality.

In the penultimate episode of "Prisoner" "Artie" turns away from his mother's plea, "Artie... you still... love... me... Don't you?" and fantasizes that this rejection makes him responsible for her suicide. The image of his mother in a pinched retreat locks him literally into the jail of his guilt, fed by the imagined "hostility mixed in with [the] condolences" of his father's friends. "Arthur, we're so sorry." "It's his fault, the punk." But in a single panel Spiegelman also renders the impossibility of ever knowing the answer to "why". At the top of the panel Anja lies naked in a tub, under which thick capital letters spell out "MENOPAUSAL DEPRESSION." A triangle of concentration camp iconography—barbed wire, piled up human corpses, a swastika—under which HITLER DID IT! is scrawled—separates the body in the tub from the garring scene below in which three images are juxtaposed: a mother reads in bed with a little boy dressed in miniature prison garb by her side, MOMMY; a forearm with concentration camp numbers on it slits a wrist with a razor blade, BITCH; and finally, diagonally across from the body in the tub, the prisoner sits on his bunk and holds his head. The mosaic of images proposes the pieces of truth to which no single answer is available.

Replaced in the Maus books, the mother's suicide is given not an answer but other images through which to locate it. What more would the son have learned about his mother from her memoirs? After Vladek has told the story of the hanging in Sosnowiec of four Jews for dealing in goods without authorization, Art asks what his mother was doing in those days: "Houseworks... and knitting... reading... and she was writing always in her diaries." "I used to see Polish notebooks around the house as a kid. Were those her diaries?" "Her diaries didn't survive from the war. What you saw she wrote after: Her whole story from the start." "Oh... Where are they? I need those for this book?" But the book will get made without them. In the absence of his mother's autobiography, Art writes his father's. He also writes his own; or rather, through the father's murder of the mother's texts, the son seeks to repair his own monstrosity: the fatal unseemliness of surviving from the war. What you saw she wrote after: Her whole story from the start."

In the panels about the incredible success of Maus which appear in the next chapter, Art, the man behind the mask, puts his head down and remembers: "In May 1968 my mother killed herself. (She left no note.) Lately I've been feeling depressed." In the Vermont frame narrative it is Françoise's question "Depressed again?" that leads to Art's reflection about the enormity of his book venture. Toward the end of the therapy session about survivors' guilt, Pavel, the shrink, says: "Anyway, the victims who can never tell their side of the story, so maybe it's better not to have any more stories." Art, reminding himself of Beckett's comment that "Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness" (and the fact, as he puts it to himself, that nonetheless Beckett said it) seems to feel compelled as an artist to try to represent the words otherwise condemned to silence. It's as if at the heart of Maus's dare is the wish to save the mother by retrieving her narrative; as if the comic book version of Auschwitz were the son's normalization of another impossible reality: restoring the missing words, the Polish notebooks. Though Vladek tries to shrug off the specificity of Anja's experiences: "I can tell you," he gestures disparagingly, "I can tell you... She went through the same what me: terrible!"—that isn't good enough for Art, who keeps the question of Anja alive from the beginning to the end of the memoir.

What is the relation between creating Maus out of his father's words and restoring the maternal body? For the reader of the autobiographical collaboration at the heart of Maus, who wants to find the place that might exceed the artist's recorded self-knowledge, there's not much to do beyond playing second-hand shrink (and he's already got a great therapist). But if the outrageousness of comic book truth is any guide, and what you see is what you get, then we should I think understand the question of Anja as that which will forever escape representation and at the same time requires it: the silence of the victims. Perhaps that impossibility is what keeps Art forcing his father back into the memories he has tried to destroy. In one of the framing sections of Maus II Chapter 1 (which bears the heading that is the subtitle to the volume: "And Here My Troubles Began"—and which narrates the final scenes at Auschwitz) Art asks Vladek about a Frenchman who helped him in the camps, whether he saved any of his letters. "Of course I saved. But all this I threw away together with Anja's notebooks." "All such things of the war, I tried to put out from my mind once for all... until you rebuild me all this from your questions." For Vladek "rebuilding" memory means reviving the link to Anja; Anja cannot be separated from the war: "Anja? What is to tell? Everywhere I look I'm seeing Anja... From my good eye, from my glass eye, if they're open or they're closed, always I'm thinking of Anja." But this memory is by now the artist's material as well and despite Vladek's protest, Art finally extracts the images he needs from his father's repertoire in order to close his narrative, including Anja's last days in Sosnowiec and their reunion: "More I don't need to tell you. We were both happy and lived happy, happy ever after." The tape-recorder stops. Vladek begs for an end to stories and in his exhaustion from the past brought into the present, calls Art by his dead brother's name, Richieu. The last drawing in Maus II is of the tombstone... Usually I saved my mother. Do you think that's normal?" Although Françoise replies reassuringly that "nobody's normal," the question hangs fire.
bearing the names of Art's parents as well as their birth and death dates; beneath the monument the artist signs the dates that mark the production of his book: 1978-1991. The dates on the tombstone give lie to Vladek's "happy ever after" since Anja killed herself some twenty years after the war. Did she live happy ever after? Mala, Vladek's second wife, doesn't mince words: "Anja must have been a saint! No wonder she killed herself." The dates also point indirectly to the fact that Art's text keeps his father as well as his mother alive: Vladek died in 1982. Both volumes of Maus were published—and critically acclaimed—after the death of the man who thought, after looking at some of his son's early sketches of the Jews hanged in Sonnowiec that he might some day "be famous, like...what's his-name?" "You know...the big-shot cartoonist..." "What cartoonist could you know...Walt Disney?" "Huh! Walt Disney."14

Throughout the frame narrative the survivor's tale Art forces Vladek back into the past of suffering and the double loss of Anja. In the corners of the pages Art presses Vladek to continue with his narrative, and Vladek pleads: enough. Vladek dies before seeing himself "comically" reunited with his beloved Anja, and before seeing his words and deeds in some ways turned against himself (though given his incapacity for self-criticism and his talent for self-justification, he would probably have missed the bitter ironies of his portrait). And before seeing his son become the Walt Disney of the Holocaust.

The frame narrative displays an acute self-consciousness about what's at stake psychologically for the son in telling his father's story. The Museum of Modern Art show in turn emphasized the work involved in the process. Located in the "Projects" room the exhibition illustrated the detail of the Spiegelman method. In one display case the process by which Life becomes Art is broken down and narrated. "An incident from V. Spiegelman's transcribed memories becomes a page of Maus." A typed page of the transcript describing the long march out of Auschwitz is displayed and marked. The episode involves the shooting of a prisoner, which Vladek likens to a childhood memory of a mad dog being shot by his owner: "And now I thought: 'How amazing it is that a human being reacts the same like this neighbor's dog.' " The commentary in the display case deals with Spiegelman's technical process: "The incident is broken down into key moments, first into phrases, then into visual notations and thumbnail sketches of possible page layouts."

"Phrases are rewritten, condensed and distilled to fit into the panels."15

The exposition of the myriad details involved in the transformation of the father's narrative of lived atrocity into the son's comic book underscores the degree of re-presentation involved in the Maus project and the skills required for its realization. Although the son claims that he became an artist in part to define his identity against his father's—"One reason I became an artist was that he thought it was impractical—just a waste of time...It was an area where I wouldn't have to compete with him"—the boundaries between them turn out to be more permeable than distinct. Vladek, for instance, also draws early in Maus Art reproduces Vladek's detailed sketch of the bunker he designed for hiding in Sonnowiec: "Show me your pencil and I can explain you...such things it's good to know exactly how was it—just in case." The exhibit lays bare the literal dexterity entailed in the "comics business." It materializes the challenges posed to an artist committed to rendering what was never meant to be seen again. Art had to learn to draw what his father had faked in the camps: how, for instance, to be a shoemaker when you're a (fake) Tinman.16

This is part of what Art's self-portrait in the mouse mask preparing to render Vladek's stint as a tinman also points to: the work of "building" Holocaust memories. There's also a specific issue here about the ethics involved in converting oral testimony—"the ruins of memory" to borrow Lawrence Langer's phrase—into a written and visual document (let alone a comic strip!). This leads us to a final question about the making of Maus: what happens between the father's voice and the son's rendering of it as text?

In the exhibition, a tape of the father's voice was made available to the listener curious to know what Vladek sounded like. The desire to hear his voice is intensified by the inscription throughout the frame narrative of the tape-recorder—both as the mark of their collaboration (even after Vladek's death)—"Please, Pop, the tape's on. Let's continue...Let's get back to Auschwitz"—and of the testimony's authenticity. The reader of Maus—especially one with immigrant parents or grandparents (me)—is also made (uncomfortably) aware of the foreign turn of Vladek's English; the tape offers the possibility of hearing what she has been reading.

What surprised me when I listened to the tape was an odd disjunction between the quality of the voice and the inflections rendered in the panels. For while Vladek on tape regularly misuses prepositions—"I have on my own eyes," "they were shooting to prisoners," mangles idioms—"and stood myself on the feet," pronounced "made" as "med," "kid" as "key"—the total oral effect, unlike the typically tortured visualized prose of the dialogue in the comic balloons, is one of extraordinary fluency.17 It's almost as though in "distilling" his father's language to fit the comic strip the son fractured the father's tongue. By contrast, the voice on the tape has the cadences of a storyteller: it is smooth, eloquent, seductive. Is breaking the rhythms of that voice an act of violence or restoration, or both at once?

What the show allows to happen which the text as representation necessarily forecloses is that the reader of Maus gains momentary access to the voice that survived the event, freed from the printed voice of the frame. In that moment (and headphones), one is tempted to say, the father performs unmediated—to the world.18 But this would also be to miss the crucial function of the listener in the production of testimony. As Doris Laub writes in Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History:

The listener...is a party to the creation of knowledge...The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer...The listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event...The listener, however, is also a separate human being...he preserves his own separate place, position and perspective, a battleground for forces raging in himself, to which he has to pay attention and respect if he is to properly carry out his task.19

Paradoxically, then, the reader's experience of the father's voice returns her to the son's task and its realization. As "co-owner" of his father's trauma the son cannot fail to map out those places and those wars.
By forcing Vladek to "rebuild" his memory, Art becomes both the "addres-able other" necessary to the production of testimony and the subject of his own story. In the end the man in the mouse mask moves beyond his task by fulfilling it, by turning it into art, and replacing it in history. This is not to say that his losses any more than those which define the survivor's life during and after Auschwitz, are erased by that gesture: Anja will not return to explain herself. Rather, that by joining the murderers he also rejoins himself. If after the Holocaust violence and reparation can no longer be separated, perhaps this is also the form postmodern forgiveness takes.

Notes
2. In a revision of Mason's model, Susan Stanford Friedman has shown that women auto-biographers tend to locate the self of their project not only in relation to a singular, chosen other, but also—and simultaneously—to the collective experience of women as gendered subjects in a variety of social contexts. ("Women's Autobiographical Selven: Theory and Practice," The Private Self, ed. Shari Benstock. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1998.) Here again—with the inevitable measure of asymmetry that gender comparisons always present—the men's texts echo the female paradigms. In Maus (and to a lesser degree in Patrimony) this collective identity—the other Other—plays a crucial, indeed constitutive role in the elaboration of the autobiographical subject. This socially situated identity, however, is not so much a generalized masculinity as specified Jewishness. It could even be argued that the father/son relation, and more broadly the familial scenario, finds meaning primarily when plotted against the cultural figures of Jewish identity. This double proximity may mean either that at the end of the twentieth century the autobiographical model is becoming feminized, or that we need to reconsider the original theoretical assumptions of the canonical model itself. After all, one could easily see Augustine as constructing his autobiographical self in relation to his mother Monica, and Rousseau elaborating his in relation to the other constituted by his imagined reader.
3. There is from the start a tension about whose story it is. On the cover of Maus is the father/mother (mouse) couple whose joint destiny gets summarized in the singular "survivor's" tale. Although the son clearly distinguishes the two parts of the couple by asking specifically about his mother, he is limited finally by his father's plot. Maus also conforms to Catherine Porter's account of recent autobiographical films by contemporary women filmmakers (primarily post-war European directors). "These films share as a common gesture...the desire to create an intergenerational testament for the benefit of parents or children and to recount a story formerly repressed, silenced or detected...It is the desire to make restitution for past injustice, real or imagined, and to see the other as a whole individual with a separate identity that infuses these films, rather than the 'matic defense' more typical of the work of male autobiographical filmmakers" (343). "Seeing Subjects: Women Directors and Cinematic Autobiography," in Life/Lines. I think we have to complicate these patterns of gender differentiation and to articulate them with the historical demands of post-war representation. See also in Leur's (June 1992) the striking photograph of TV news-reporter Charles Stuart with his mother (the story is about her unsolved murder) and described as a self-portrait taken by himself.
7. In the upper left-hand corner of "Prisoner," in its title frame, a hand holds a nummer snapshot of Anja and Art dated 1955. It's hard to make out the expression on the mother's face, but her little boy is grinning at the camera. In the lower left-hand corner of the page in Maus on which "Prisoner" is reproduced, Spiegelman has drawn in the same hand, as if to mark the place of his own rediscovery of the earlier work. The notation also ties the hand as signature to the mother/son bond. In the photo, Anja rests her hand on her son's head; the hand that a few panels later will hold the razor blade.
8. The tension between obsessionai saving and impulsive throwing away is rehearsed earlier in Maus. After a session with his father on the pre-Auschwitz days in Sonnowiec, Art looks for his coat only to discover that Vladek has thrown it away: "It's such shame that my son would wear such a coat!" His father offers one of his old jackets as a replacement (having brought a new one for himself at Alexander's). The chapter ends with Art verifying that his coat is indeed in the garbage, and walking home alone in shock (as in after his father's revelation): "I just can't believe it..."
9. The whereabouts of the diaries are associated with the saving of junk much earlier in Maus. Art interrupts a conversation with Mala about the roundup of the Jews in Sonnowiec to track down a vague memory of having seen the notebooks on Vladek's shelves in the den. He catalogues the kinds of things Vladek saved: four 1985 Dry Dock Savings Calendars, menus from cruises, hotel stationery, etc. There's a question here about what part of this saving can be seen as a specific effect of surviving the Holocaust and what belongs more generally to a diasporic identity. I was struck by the remark in Susan Cheever's memoir of her father, John Cheever, the ultimate chronicler of goyish sensibility: "My father never saved anything. He scorned all conservative instincts." (Home Before Dark, p.51.) Like Vladek, my father always had tea-bags drying on the stove (the degraded transformation of the perpetual samovar and the tradition of what he called "sens"—the essence, presumably, of tea) and saved rubber bands, jars, broken pencils, old flower pots, plastic containers, until the apartment overflowed from the hoarding. Was this the aftermath of the Depression? A way of always being prepared—the "you never know of surviving." 10. In the scenes of Auschwitz following the therapy session Art has his father describe his fate, including a letter reproduced in one of the panels: "I miss you," she wrote to me. "Each day I think to run into the electric wires and finish every-thing. But to know you are alive it gives me still to hope..." Despite the "reproduction" of the letter—the only instance of Anja's written words—we are necessarily left as readers with the mother's voice in translation: into Vladek's English, into his idealized version of their couple, into Art's comic strip. Nonetheless, the disembodied voice verifying that his coat is indeed in the garbage, and walking home alone in shock (as in after his father's revelation): "I just can't believe it..." 53
of her family after the war. In "Family Pictures: Maus and Post-Memory" Marianne Hirsch analyzes the role of photographs in Maus and their crucial role in the "aesthetic of post-memory" that Spiegelman elaborates. She also emphasizes the ways in which the Maus project represents an attempt to reconstruct the missing maternal legacy (forthcoming in Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture).

13. The epigraph to Maus II is drawn from a German newspaper article of the mid-1930s linking the "Jewish brutalization of the people!" to the miserable "Mickey Mouse... ideal."

14. In Maus II Vladek explains how in the camps he justified his boast that he had been a "shoemaker since childhood" (in reality he had watched his cousin work in the ghetto shoe shop). He describes repairing lace-up boots in need of re-soling. Art illustrates this task with a complicated drawing. In the show above the comic drawings is mounted the technical drawing of shoemaking from which Art derived his cartoon version. Vladek draws the moral of his successful gamble: "You see? It's good to know how to do everything." Art's insistence on his impracticality—not knowing how to do anything—is undone by his accomplishment as an artist in figuring out how to draw anything. The survivor's skills honed in the camps pass on to the next generation as a matter of artistic survival.

15. It's the subtitle of his book.

16. A portion of the tape corresponds to the transcripted account of the march out of Auschwitz and thus it becomes irresistible to compare the aural and written voices.

17. There's no escaping the effect of the frame since the taped passages are just as chosen (out of the 30 or more recorded hours) as the illustrated ones.


19. Laub, p.68.

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THE DRUNKEN CONVERSATION OF CHAOS AND PAINTING

JAMES ELKINS

Chaos theory and its relative, fractal geometry, are new kinds of physics and mathematics that are strongly visual. The swirling, "paisley" patterns and "biomorphs" that are familiar on calendars, postcards, and computer screens are drawn by the computer in the same way that a parabola or a circle is drawn by a high school geometry student—except that the calculations necessary for detailed fractal forms are beyond human capacity. Both the parabola and the fractal "bug" are drawn against "x" and "y" coordinates, following relatively simple equations. (The intricacy of the fractal is not due to the equations themselves, but to the way they are calculated over and over, by "iteration.") Most of the attention in the technical literature is focussed on the properties of the equations or on their applications. But neither the scientists nor the mathematicians are free of artistic purpose, and they alter and enhance the bare mathematics in order to make their printouts into aesthetically pleasing pictures. That artistic overlay is significant for a number of reasons. The scientists who create the images tend to have an unsteady grounding in the history of art, and they draw on a nascent and uncognized aesthetics to choose and arrange their images. Writers in the humanities therefore experience the new geometry at a double remove, since they see the forms without their mathematical meanings, and with an overlay of colors and compositions that are not dictated by the equations.

My interest here is not in exploring the properties of the new geometry—which I think can only be studied along with the relevant mathematics—but in assessing the quality of the exchange that is taking place between science and art. Despite the growing literature, it can be argued that neither side sees the other in a clear light. The scientists and mathematicians who generate the images are at times unaware of the expressive meaning of their creations; and the artists and critics tend to rewrite the nature of fractals in order to fit them into artistic discourse. There are two strange attractors involved in this conversation: one, the seductive world of art, aligned, as it seems to those outside it, with "culture," "meaning," and a host of ghostly values. The other, the forbidding world of mathematical physics, empowered, so it seems to those outside it, with a wondrous new way of understanding the world. What I would like to do here is to describe this conversation as it is currently unfolding, without taking sides or prescribing ways that it might be "improved." It seems particularly interesting to me that science and art speak in this strange way: each is enamored of the other, and like lovers in a comedy, they imagine the object of their attention in whatever way seems best to them. At the close I will have a few words to say about the meaning of their odd dialogue.
Within mathematics, there is no question of the importance of the new discoveries. The "new geometry" knows itself to be fundamental: "Euclid," Benoît Mandelbrot announces in The Fractal Geometry of Nature, will be "used in this work to denote all of standard geometry."1 The unexpected efflorescence of geometry, so difficult to follow through its growing associations with physics, biology, astronomy, geology, medicine, and economics, already has wide experimental support and applications as diverse as the three-body problem, population dynamics, the neurobiology of hearing, and the contractions of heart muscle.1 It has, in addition, serious philosophical and experimental implications for the scientific method itself.2

In this context the "new geometry" is most interesting because it knows itself to be beautiful, though the nature and extent of that knowledge are open to question. Mandelbrot quotes an article in Science that makes a parallel between cubism, atonal music, and modern mathematics beginning with "Cantor's set theory and Peano's space-filling curves." He sees a roccoco phase in mathematics before the modern era, followed by a visual austerity.3 When it comes to art, he makes a poorly articulated and unconvincing historical and aesthetic reading of his own fractal inventions, according to which the extravagant, elliptical forms he has visualized are "minimalist art"—a most unlikely identification.4 There is also an unwillingness on Mandelbrot's part to mix art and science: when computer printouts are to be judged aesthetically, he gives them self-parodistic titles such as "The Computer bug" as artist, Opus 1," thereby publishing aesthetic results as mistakes, "bugs" in programs. Part of the meaning of such titles resides in Mandelbrot's mimicry of contemporary painting styles; "Opus 2" is like an angular Clyfford Still or Franz Kline. He also thinks his polychromic computer printouts are "austere."5 The reason is that they have simple mathematics behind them, and so his misidentification with minimalism is an example of non-visual thinking—what a mathematician would call "analytic" rather than "synthetic" reasoning.6 More plausibly, "thinking through a Mies van der Rohe building is a "scalebound" throwback to "Euclid" since it has only certain classes of forms, while—in a particularly strange juxtaposition of cultures—a "high period Beaux Arts building is rich in fractal aspects."

Meanwhile, mathematicians such as H.-O. Peitgen "wrap" fractal images around spheres, so their computers can generate "moon" and fantasy spacescapes that are less like the tongue-in-cheek graffiti of Kenny Scharf than they are like the serious kitsch of the fin-de-siècle. Computer palettes continue to be set in psychedelic, hokey, holographic, iridescent, heavy-metal combinations. (Colors are not part of the mathematical properties of fractals. They are chosen at will by the programmers.) The aesthetic values of the mathematicians are circumscribed by the domain of fantasy, especially medieval revival and late twentieth-century primitivism, and their formal strategies devolve from unacknowledged sources in German romanticism. They are anything but postmodern, though the artists that admire the new geometry often are.7

But if science cannot find a contemporary taste to match its new geometry, the art world has not done much better in understanding what the mathematicians are saying. The art critical discourse is marked by misuse of mathematical terminology, a love of catchwords, and the construction of more or less tenuous metaphorical bridges between the concerns of the humanities and the claims of the new geometry. The lexicon of this scienza nuova rhymes with terms already given us by post-structuralism: chaos theory, chaotic dynamics, fractal, fractoid, fractal dimension, rupture, elementary catastrophe, laminar flow, turbulence, irregularity, imbalance, iteration, self-similarity, spikes, dwell bands, connected sets, and a host of eponymous attractors (Rössler's, Lorenz's, Ueda's), all resonate with figures already at use in contemporary visual theory and literary criticism. (At the same time, the mathematicians give their creations hokey, space-age names: seahorse alley, fractal popcorn, fractal dust, midget, satellite, antenna, bushy structure, polymer glue, hysterical cycle, blue sky.)

Carlo McCormick, in an article on Mark Tansey, describes Peitgenbaum and Mandelbrot as "epic theoreticians of the new multidimensional perspective," a double misnomer: the new geometry is emphatically not "perspective" in either sense of the word; and it deals with fractional, and not multiple, dimensions.8 Maybe fractal geometry is "the disarming of the comfort of order," but it isn't "the introduction to a terrain of neither fixed absolutes nor absolute disorder"—unless one would want to claim relativity sides with order. In scientific terms, "order's loose ends" don't "refract into chaos." Nor does chaos theory teach "rational irrationalism," the "void of disorder," or the "turbulence of conflict."

Slavoj Žižek's Looking Aver describes a swishing, wreath-like strange attractor as an "ananomorphically disfigured circle." This usage takes anamorphosis (as in his title) and the misspelled word "ananomorphically" (the usual form is "ananomorphically") from Jacques Lacan's description of the gaze, and brings them into a context in which they have no mathematical meaning.9 Anamorphosis has resonance with other passages in Looking Aver, but it is interesting that Žižek does not find it necessary to remark either on the meaning of the new spelling, or on the absence of any projection in chaotic dynamics that might give the term mathematical sense. This particular kind of ruptured thinking is often accompanied by "risky" homologies (the word is Žižek's), and in this case he draws a parallel between the opposition of normal and strange attractors and "the opposition between the balance toward which the pleasure principle strives and the Freudian Thing embodying enjoyment." Both neologisms and "risky" homologies function by eliding scientific context, and the rules of those elisions are not carried over to quotations and descriptions from the humanities. Freud or Lacan, for example, are not described in such a way as to reverse or efface the meaning of terms such as "pleasure principle" or "Thing." That imbalance, in turn, is not acknowledged in the texts, producing a curious and uncontrollable interplay of lacunae, amputateless narrations, and sharply broken contexts.

Both the mathematicians and the artists are agreed on one point: that fractal geometry might somehow be applied to painting (or to film or computer graphics) because it models natural forms so well; but even that notion may not be as straightforward as it is assumed to be. On the surface, it is easy to see why some artists and computer graphics experts are intrigued by the potential uses of fractals. It's not just that the new geometry looks like everything in nature from frost forms to silver trees. It's that it looks so much like older styles of Western and non-Western painting. In one place, its forms are virtual duplicates for rococo frills and swags such as those in the Millionen-Zimmer in the Schloss Schönbrunn. Other
equations recall rocaille, Ohrmuschelwerk (cartouches in the form of ears), arabesques, and even paisley. And there are echoes of the intentional asymmetries of Coz eens and Constable, and the "leaf beauty" of Baskin. The meteorologist E. N. Lorenz, who helped found chaotic dynamics by discovering the first "strange attractor" in a simplified model of atmospheric circulation, has recently become interested in these associations. One tangle within a larger tangle reminds him of a bird in a thorn bush, but it also speaks of painting, and bears an uncanny resemblance to Chu Ta's versions of Bird and Rock. The metaphoric range appears unlimited within the domain of represented and real organic and inorganic growth. In this versatility the new geometry is the opposite of linear perspective, which has the smallest field of correspondences with natural form.

This apparently unlimited applicability may then be contrasted to the near-absence of geometric rules in modern painting. Modern art had long ago "overthrown" linear perspective, which was the traditional theoretical geometrical accompaniment of artists' organic improvisations. Postmodernism has long since forgotten that act of forgetting, and for several decades, except in the special case of geometric abstraction, painting has been without its traditional geometric foundations. Since chaotic dynamics and fractals are the first theories that purport to account for those nonlinear phenomena that were once taken to be unmeaning and beyond the reach of "Euclid," they have the potential to be far more decisive in painting than linear perspective, with its patently artificial rules, could ever hope to be. Potentially the new geometry could "ground" every organic, asymmetric, complex form in painting in a way analogous to the way linear perspective stands behind the infinite, the isotropic, the mechanical, and the architectural. In such a scenario the relation between painters and their geometry would also change: artists could no longer escape the heritage of geometry by turning to organic forms like landscapes, and conversely, it would no longer be as clear what would constitute a one or even acceptance of the new geometry, since fractals would presumably remain impractical for drawing (except by computer) and out of the reach of a small set of usable rules. There will be no Elementary Lessons in Fractal Drawing.

Mark Tansey has done several paintings with fractal themes. In one, surveyors attempt to measure a wild coastline. Their instruments are no match for their subject, especially since it is itself a gigantic version of a Julia set, one of the derivatives of the Mandelbrot set, a fundamental fractal form. The rocks pun into fractal "seahorses," forming a progression of nearly but not perfectly identical forms. The lowest seahorse, the one behind the female surveyor at the right, epitomizes the new mysteriousness by sporting an implacable sphinx's face; and beneath her hand littler seahorse sphinxes curl away into an undefined infinity. This is a new way for geometry to be with painting; instead of being "in perspective" or "in" some other geometry, the painting is "about" geometry. Renaissance painters used perspective, but didn't draw pictures of perspective. The new approach is self-reflexive, but it is also problematic, since it is not an application in the sense that fractals seem to promise. In light of these difficulties it may be that the local successes of fractals in modelling mountains, rocks, ferns, bark, and water are misleading because the very idea of application, as we have learned it through linear perspective, may have become inapplicable.

I do not mean to promote sobriety, or to say that there is some ideal form of responsible communication between these scientists and these artists. Instead I would like to suggest that we consider the meanings and the potential of our writing on the subject rather than continuing as if the new forms could simply be "applied" to the world or "imported" into art, or as if any metallic enhancement of a computer graph would make an acceptable picture. At the same time it is hard to know what is inappropriate. The relation of perspective, the outgoing geometric standard, to this new source of geometry is problematic and unresolved. It is possible that the mathematicians' dependence on fantasy art and decadent popular illustration might be close to contemporary art in ways that we do not yet appreciate. Nor does it necessarily make sense to emend the humanities' use of scientific terms for distant rhetorical purposes, since that custom is well-attested in the history of Western thought. The art world imbibes its science instead of facing it soberly, and scientists slide up to art without knowing quite what to say. In this brief example I have tried to suggest that the various mistranslations may be evidence that the exchange between geometry and painting has not yet run its course. In particular, I would like to read the metaphorization of mathematics by the humanities, and our rewriting of visual history in mathematical terms, as legacies of the unresolved—unresolvable—traditions of linear perspective.

Notes

2. The literature is expanding too rapidly to make bibliographic citations helpful. Heinz Georg Schuster, Deterministic Chaos (New York: VCH, 1984), is still useful.
3. In general terms: it challenges a fundamental property of experimental science, its predictive power, by describing systems whose future states can never be precisely known.
4. "What a contrast between the rococo exuberance of pre- or counterrevolutionary geometry, and the near-total visual bareness of the works of Weierstrass, Cantor, and Poincare! In physics, an analogous movement threatened since about 1800, since Laplace's Celestial Mechanics avoided all illustration. And it is exemplified by a statement of P. A. M. Dirac (in the preface to his 1930 Quantum Mechanics) that nature's 'fundamental laws do not govern the world as it appears in our mental picture in any direct way, but instead they control a substratum of which we cannot form a mental graph would make an acceptable picture. At the same time it is hard to know what is inappropriate. The relation of perspective, the outgoing geometric standard, to this new source of geometry is problematic and unresolved. It is possible that the mathematicians' dependence on fantasy art and decadent popular illustration might be close to contemporary art in ways that we do not yet appreciate. Nor does it necessarily make sense to emend the humanities' use of scientific terms for distant rhetorical purposes, since that custom is well-attested in the history of Western thought. The art world imbibes its science instead of facing it soberly, and scientists slide up to art without knowing quite what to say. In this brief example I have tried to suggest that the various mistranslations may be evidence that the exchange between geometry and painting has not yet run its course. In particular, I would like to read the metaphorization of mathematics by the humanities, and our rewriting of visual history in mathematical terms, as legacies of the unresolved—unresolvable—traditions of linear perspective.

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2. The literature is expanding too rapidly to make bibliographic citations helpful. Heinz Georg Schuster, Deterministic Chaos (New York: VCH, 1984), is still useful.
3. In general terms: it challenges a fundamental property of experimental science, its predictive power, by describing systems whose future states can never be precisely known.
4. "What a contrast between the rococo exuberance of pre- or counterrevolutionary geometry, and the near-total visual bareness of the works of Weierstrass, Cantor, and Poincare! In physics, an analogous movement threatened since about 1800, since Laplace's Celestial Mechanics avoided all illustration. And it is exemplified by a statement of P. A. M. Dirac (in the preface to his 1930 Quantum Mechanics) that nature's 'fundamental laws do not govern the world as it appears in our mental picture in any direct way, but instead they control a substratum of which we cannot form a mental picture without introducing irrelevancies.'" Mandelbrot, op. cit.
7. For this distinction, which is not the same as Kant's dichotomy, see my "Clarification, Destruction and Negation of Space in the Age of Neoclassicism," Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte 56 no. 4 (1990): 509-592.
9. These comments do not apply universally; an example of a visually acute researcher is Clifford A. Pickover (IBM Watson Laboratory, Yorktown Heights, NY). However the prevalence of "psychedelic" aesthetics is visible in the slides that accompany each issue of the journal Amygdala (Box 219, San Cristobal, NM 87564). Some chaotic dynamics remains nonvisual; see "Is Chaos Becoming Conventional?" Nature 341 (7 September 1990): 17.


14. For an extended analysis of these questions, see Elkins, Poetics of Perspective, Cornell University Press, forthcoming.

CONTRIBUTORS

EMMA AMOS is a painter and professor at the Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University. A print installation and paintings are travelling in a group show curated by Alison Wells to museums in Japan through 1993.

SUZANNE ANKER is a visual artist currently working with genetic imagery. She resides in NYC.

SUSAN BEE is showing her paintings at Virginia Lust Gallery, NYC in November.

EMILY CHENG is a painter who shows at David Beitzel Gallery, NYC.

MYREL CHERNICK is an artist and mother of six-year-old twins. Her work was shown in "Dirt and Domesticity" at the Whitney Museum’s Equitable branch.

PEGGY CYPHERS, a painter living in NYC, has received grants from the NEA and National Studio Award, P.S.1. One-person shows include Betsy Rosenfield, Chicago, E.M. Donahue, NY, Pratt Institute, and an upcoming show at the New York Academy of Science.

STEPHANIE DEMANUELLE is a painter who lives with her sculptor/husband and son in NYC. She teaches at Fashion Institute of Technology and Parsons School of Design.

JANE DICKSON is an artist living and working in NYC.

BAILEY DOOGAN’s most recent show "Mea Corpa" was at The Alternative Museum, NY and the University of Nevada, Reno and Las Vegas. She lives and works in Tucson, Arizona.

JAMES ELKINS is Assistant Professor of Art History at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His articles have appeared in Kritische Berichte, Word & Image, Substance, and the Journal of the History of Ideas.

HERMINE FORD is a painter who lives and works in NYC.

MIMI GROSS is a painter living in NYC.

FREYA HANSELL is a painter who lives and works in NYC. Her theater and installation work has been seen in New York. She will be showing in Paris and Athens in the coming year.

YVONNE JACQUETTE wrote about motherhood but she is also a stepmother and a stepgrandmother. She is a painter who exhibits at Brooke Alexander Gallery.

JOYCE KOZLOFF has been working on a team that includes artists Mel Chin, Mary Miss, Fred Wilson, architect Paul Willen, and landscape architect Michael Van Valkenburgh, on an urban design project called Riverside South on Manhattan’s West Side.

ELLEN LANYON is an artist based in New York. She exhibited in May 1992 at Berland/Hall Gallery, NY and is exhibiting next year at Printworks Gallery, Chicago.

BETTY LEE’s photographic images have been exhibited throughout the country. She lives in Los Angeles and teaches at the University of California, Irvine. She frequently lectures on cultural and representational issues.
LENORE MALEN is a New York-based artist and the Executive Editor of the *Art Journal*.

ANN MESSNER is an artist who lives and works in NYC.

NANCY K. MILLER is Distinguished Professor of English at Lehman College and the Graduate Center, CUNY. Her most recent book is *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (Boulevard, 1991).

DIANE NEUMAIER is a photographer and writer whose work focuses on museums and monuments. She is organizing exchange projects between the Russian Union of Art Photographers and Rutgers University where she is a faculty member.

NANCY PIERSOIN lives in Los Angeles and shows at Ovsey Gallery.

BARBARA POLLACK is an artist living in NYC who has shown at A.I.R. Gallery, the New Museum, and the Stills Gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland.

ERIKA ROTHENBERG recently created a "Projects" exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, NY and participated in Documenta IX. She lives in Los Angeles.

MIRIAM SCHAPIRO is an internationally recognized painter and femmagist. Peter von Brandenburg, her son, lives in NYC. He is the producer of *Cyberpunk*, a cult film about cybernetics.

ARLENE SHECHET is an artist, living, working, and teaching in NYC.

DENA SHOTTENKIRK is an artist and critic living in NY with 2.5 children.

JOAN SNYDER, a painter, shows at Hirsch and Adler Modern in NYC and Nielsen Gallery in Boston. She is the proud mother of a thirteen-year-old daughter named Molly Pink.

NANCY SPERO is an artist living and working in NYC.

MAY STEVENS will show work in "This is my Body: This is my Blood," at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in November, and in a one-person show at Exit Art, NYC, in March, 1993.

CAROL SZYMANSKI is an artist living in New York. She has upcoming shows at Amy Lipton Gallery, NYC, Samuel Lallouz Gallery, Montreal, and Sue Spaid Gallery, Los Angeles.

MARTHA WILSON is a performance artist and director of Franklin Furnace.

BARBARA ZUCKER is a sculptor and a professor who divides her time between Vermont and New York. She is the co-founder of A.I.R. Gallery.
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A Journal of Contemporary Art Issues

M/E/A/N/I/N/G #12, our “family values” issue, examines the intersection between motherhood and art in "Forum: On Motherhood, Art, and Apple Pie" with statements by 31 artists—Emma Amos, Suzanne Anker, Susan Bee, Emily Cheng, Myrel Chernick, Peggy Cyphers, Stephanie DeManuelle, Jane Dickson, Bailey Doogan, Hermine Ford, Mimi Gross, Freya Hansell, Yvonne Jacquette, Joyce Kozloff, Ellen Lanyon, Betty Lee, Lenore Malen, Ann Messner, Diane Neumaier, Nancy Pierson, Barbara Pollack, Erika Rothenberg, Miriam Schapiro, Arlene Shechet, Dena Shottenkirk, Joan Snyder, Elke Solomon, Nancy Spero, May Stevens, Carol Szymanski, Martha Wilson, and Barbara Zucker.

The relationship between mother and son is also one important theme of Nancy K. Miller's “Cartoons of the Self: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Murderer—Art Spiegelman's Maus.”

Also in this issue: an essay about fractal geometry, chaos theory, and art, by James Elkins.

From issue #12, Fall 1992

"As a mother who must work and an artist, I at times feel like a magnetic field—a battleground where the definitions that are up for grabs are being grabbed at."
—Stephanie DeManuelle

"Like morality, good manners, and a criminal record, motherhood has nothing to do with making art."
—Dena Shottenkirk

"The bottom line is that you don't have to be a mother or a daughter to be discriminated against in the art world...you just have to be a woman."
—Joan Snyder

"Mother, artist, homosexual, lawyer, are all words to indicate roles, preferences, and professions, which like magnets, attract stereotyping with relish."
—Emily Cheng