



Maternal Artivism

Mother/ing photography

Thesis

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For Pepijn, Feline and Leone



Cover: collage by Isabelle Zumbrink, 2020
Created with works of participating mother-artists in research

Abstract

Since the 1970s, the taboo on motherhood as a factor in working as a female artist has been addressed. The last ten years the fight against ‘the mother-shaped hole in contemporary art discourse’, as mother-artist Lise Haller Baggesen calls it, has revived.

By conducting this research I wanted to know how British and Dutch mother-artists empower their mothering and artistry with their photographic maternal art, so they can fight for change in the oppressive powerstructures they (may) experience. Based on my research various interconnected layers of ambivalence became visible out of the lived experiences of the participating mother-artists within society and the arts.

The mother-artists discussed the double feelings they experienced as a (new) mother in relation to societal norms about the place of a mother within society as well as the commitment to their mothering and their artistry. The motherly ambivalence seems to be connected to the intersubjectivity of the mother and the artist. This intersubjectivity appears to relate to the “good mother”-ideal within society, the feminist-mother dichotomy and the embodied and committed presence while mothering and/or creating art.

As being a mother and an artist seems to intertwine and (re)shape each other, it is important to acknowledge the narrow and essentialist representation of motherhood in art. It seems that there are four powerstructures maintaining this dominant representation: the ongoing influence of the Madonna-motif, labelling female artists who are mothers as artist-MAMA and their art as sentimental, the lack of intersectionality and the difficult economic position of (mother-)artists.

The participating British and Dutch mother-artists in my research depict the ambivalence of being a mother and an artist through their own lived experiences of powerstructures within society and the arts. They also see and take chances to research, dissect and deconstruct these oppressive discourses with their photographic maternal art. By doing so, they do not only depict feminist mothering in their maternal art but also mother the Western arts into becoming inclusive, just and intersectional.

Foreword

I want to learn more about women artists and writers, in a social, cultural and political context. Hoping that, through their stories, work and passions and the analytical knowledge of the Master Genderstudies, I can grow as a professional female artist and be part of an important change in feminism and gender!
(Zumbrink, 2017)

In Spring 2017 I wrote this wish of enhancing my work as a collage artist in socially engaged and feminist art in my motivation statement for applying to the pre-MA Genderstudies. In the following years at the (pre-)MA Genderstudies part-time on Utrecht University I made this wish come true. By engaging with the literature, lectures and workgroups I started discussing, exploring, thinking, doubting, transforming and sometimes even unlearning what I have ever learned before within my personal and professional life. I have wondered, felt shamed and disgust, laughed, cried and been angry about powerstructures within (inter)national society and the arts I was not consciously aware yet. I gained (more) knowledge on patriarchy and motherhood, on capitalism and social reproduction, on white privilege and colonialism, on feminist qualitative research and methodology, and on intersectionality as the interconnected factor of all this. Almost three and a half years later I wrote this thesis on the lived experiences of ambivalence by British and Dutch mother-artists in photographic maternal art. Indeed I am becoming part of the important change in the position of British and Dutch mother-artists!

The last eight months of my academic thesis-journey were a roller coaster of joy, magic, fear and doubts. The magical moments with the mother-artists I interviewed, the fear of the COVID19-pandemic, the doubts whether I can cope as a student-artist-mother-wife-friend, the joy of conducting research that resonates with me. And I succeeded this academic journey, by continuing to believe in my strength and potential and with the support of those around me. I would like to honour those persons, because I would not have come this far without them.

Many thanks to several scholars from University Utrecht who have been meaningful in my academic trajectory: Ilse Lazaroms for showing me that you can be an scholar and a mother, Milica Trakilović for presenting new insights on gazes within art and visuality, Magdalena Górska for teaching groundbreaking knowledge on qualitative feminist research, Gianmaria Colpani for theories on feminist materialisms, Rosa Wevers for her kind and important support during my internship and Berteke Waaldijk for her essential feedback and support during the process of my thesis.

Authors as Andrea O'Reilly, Susan Bright, Patricia Hill Collins, Frances Borzello, Andrea Liss, Adrienne Rich and more wrote valuable knowledge on feminist motherhood, maternal and feminist art, intersectionality and powerstructures I am so grateful for.

Amy, Eliz, Csilla and Eva: thank you so much for your kindness, trust and opening up your hearts to tell me your lived experiences.

The last five years my artistic network has developed into an (inter)national supportgroup where as a feminist mother-artist I am connected with like-minded artistic people. A special thanks to Spilt Milk Gallery, Mothers who Make and M/Other Voices for being my artistic guidance's.

I stand on the shoulders of artistic foremothers who fought for change in the arts so I could become and be a mother-artist in the 21st century. Thank you Paula Modersohn-Becker, Mary Casset, Alice Neel, Julia Margaret Cameron, Ata Kandó, Martha Rosler and many more for your significant historical work on maternal art. Many thanks to my contemporary artistic role models Lauren McLaughlin, Lorna Simpson, Renee Cox, Carmen Winant, Elinor Carucci, Sally Mann and Carrie Mae Weems. We continue to fight for an equal and just position for mothers and mother artists all over the world.

Last but not least, my children Pepijn, Feline & Leone and my best friend Fatima Jadir: thank you for loving me for who I am.

Isabelle Zumbrink
August 2020

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Wordcount: 18.382, including chapters Introduction, Theoretical Framework, Methodology, Balancing your Mothering, The Maternal in Art, The Creation of Art, Conclusion and Recommendation

Introduction

I don't think I'd be making work (if I were a mother). I would have been either 100% mother or 100% artist. I'm not flaky and I don't compromise. Having children and being a mother... It would be a compromise to be an artist at the same time. I know some women can. But that's not the kind of artist I aspire to be. There are good artists that have children. Of course there are. They are called men. It's hard for women. It's really difficult, they are emotionally torn. It's hard enough for me with my cat. (Emin, 2015, Red Magazine)

[...] I have no husband, no family, I'm completely free. [...] I had three abortions because I was convinced that it would be a disaster for my work. You only have so much energy in your body and I should have shared it. I think that's why women aren't as successful in the art world as men. There are a lot of talented women. Why do men take the important positions? Quite simply: love, family, children – a woman doesn't want to sacrifice all that. (Abramović, 2016, Der Tagesspiegel, translation: Zumbrink)

These statements by performance artist Marina Abramović and conceptual artist Tracey Emin (re)started the debate on being an artist and a mother. Since the 1970s, the taboo on motherhood as a factor in working as a female artist has been addressed. The last ten years the fight against 'the mother-shaped hole in contemporary art discourse', as mother-artist Lise Haller Baggesen calls it, has revived. The myth of the childless artist within the Western arts still haunts female artists who are/want to become mothers. According to fine art photographer and mother of two children Keliy Anderson-Staley, this myth relates to an age-old feminist issue for every mother in any profession: 'can she "have it all?"' (2015, Women in the World) Diana Al-Hadid, multidisciplinary artist and mother of one child, was asked by an interviewer if becoming a mother changed her work: 'I said: "No, my work hasn't changed and you wouldn't ask a man that question". No one presumes it's going to change [a man's] work – their work is their work and their private life is their private life.' (2016, Artsy) Lenka Clayton, conceptual artist, educator and

mother of two children, says that 'in my experience, it's still a choice that people feel they have to make, the choice of: Can you continue to be taken seriously as an artist and be a mother? That's not a foregone conclusion in any way.' (2016, Artsy)

Not only mother-artists challenged the childless artist-myth, several journalists also critically discuss this. Marina Cashdan, editorial director and journalist at Artsy, questions Abramović' statement if her thinking holds back women into becoming/being an artist and perpetuate an other myth of the loner who suffers for creativity, while male artists can uphold this illusion while also be parents and partners. In the podcast *Motherhood, Art and Children* she questions 'what can be done to finally debunk the myth that child-rearing and a successful career are incompatible.' (2016, The Artsy Podcast) Richtje Reinsma, journalist at Metropolis M, asks herself how she can define the contemporary initiatives on motherhood in art: 'Can maternity [within the arts] be seen as a genre, theme, network, activist movement or rather a perspective?' (2018) Jacoba Urist, art & culture journalist, headlined her article on mother-artists in response to the statement of Abramović: 'Why can't great artist be mothers?: A group of rising artists strongly rejects the all-or-nothing, children-versus-art premise.' (2015, Women in the World)

Research question

What I noticed in the critical reactions and questions on the statements by Abramović and Emin that the main topic of discussion is on the artistic discourse of a mother-artist. As Reinsma stated as final argument in her article, motherhood in art has (again) gained considerable attention in the academic world and by initiatives of mother-artists, 'but the time seems right for the 'motheristic' revolution.' (2018, Metropolis M) The artistic discourse of a mother-artist is the main focus in the contemporary discussion, so what about the mothering discourse of a mother-artist? How does mothering influence, interrupt, enhance and/or subvert the mother-artist in her ambitions, wishes, affects, etc.? This ambivalence of making art and mothering is too often left out in the discussion on the daily personal and professional lives of mother-artists as well as in feminist art research. As Myrel Chernick and Jennie Klein explain in their *The M Word: Real Mothers in Contemporary Art* (2011) that the artists and writers in this publication 'explore the complex and ambivalent emotions

associated with motherhood, countering the pervasive and popular myth of unconditional, all-sacrificing mother love.’ (2011, p.3) Chernick and Klein also argue that ‘by representing through their work the range, complexity and contradictions of their conscious and unconscious desires, artist mothers contribute to the recognition of multiple maternal subjectivities, to help encounter the cultural ideology of motherhood as an idealized selflessness.’ (2011, p.5)

After visiting a gathering of Mothers Who Make –a growing national initiative in the United Kingdom supporting mothers who are artists– in the summer of 2019, I noticed the growing network of British organizations and communities engaged in empowering the position of and giving (peer)support to British mother-artists and making their artistic (maternal) work visible. An extensive (support)network for mother-artists in the Netherlands is currently lacking.

By conducting a feminist research I contribute in empowering the position of British and Dutch mother-artists. I focused on mother-artists who make photographic art about their own maternal subjectivity, as I am a photographic artist in maternal art and a mother of three children myself. I wanted to know how their photographic maternal arts empowers mother-artists as mothers and as artists, so they can fight for change in the oppressive powerstructures they (may) experience. As a result of my feminist research, I wrote a recommendation for relevant organisations with which British and Dutch mother-artists in the photographic maternal arts empower and regain (maternal) agency on their roles as female artists and as well as their mothering. The main question of my thesis was therefore as follows:

How do contemporary British and Dutch mother-artists depict the ambivalence of being a mother and an artist in their photographic maternal art?

In order to answer this research question, I aimed to answer the following sub questions:

1. How do the participating mother–artists speak about being a mother and an artist in their daily personal and professional life?

Do they identify with being a mother–artist? Are motherhood and artistry united with and/or separated from each other? How is being a mother influence making art? How is being an artist influence their mothering? Which other axes intersect with their motherhood and artistry?

Aim: explanation of being an artist and a mother

2. Which powerstructures do the participating mother–artists experience in their artistry and mothering?

How do these powerstructures interact and shape each other within their lives? How does the mother–artist influence these powerstructures, as artist with their art and as mother through their mothering? How does the mother–artist relate to political, theoretical and feminist texts on maternal art?

Aim: explanation of the experienced powerstructures

3. How do the participating mother–artists express maternal subjectivity in their art?

Which subject(s) do they depict in their art? Why and how did they come to this decision? And how is this subject expressed in their art? How does the mother–artist relate to art history and its traditions, movements, etc.?

Aim: explanation of the personal and artistic choice for maternal arts

Theoretical Framework

For my feminist research I worked with academic publications by feminist scholars and art historians on feminist maternal art and with publications about or by mother-artists with photographic art on maternal subjectivities. By conducting a literature study with these publications, I gained more insight into the existing knowledge about art and motherhood from different perspectives.

Feminist Maternal Art

The last fifty years considerable amount of feminist knowledge is produced on the representation of the idealized motherhood in the Western arts. On the representation of motherhood within the feminist arts I worked with the publication *Feminist Art and the Maternal* (2009) by American feminist scholar Andrea Liss. Liss focuses on feminism, feminist art and the representation of motherhood. This book is the first work to critically examine the dilemmas and promises of representing feminist motherhood in contemporary art and visual culture. Liss also argues how feminism and motherhood were opposed concepts for a major part of the second-wave feminist movement: 'Feminist motherhood confuses the normalized order of gender and power.' (2009, p.xvi) In my opinion, this confusion applied to both patriarchy and to second-wave feminists who argued that motherhood was an oppressive power structure. Liss states that 'one crucial aspect of being a feminist in the 1960s and 1970s that is still vital today is for women to fulfil their own desires and potentials to the fullest extent possible and to reject patriarchal limitations.' (2009, p.xvii) By saying so, I find the confusion and crucial aspect of the second-wave feminist movement contradictory. What if you desire to become a mother *and* you wish to reject patriarchal limitations?

Throughout her publication Liss elaborates and critiques the dichotomy of feminist and mother within the 1970s until the 1990s by discussing embodied maternal art made by several well-known mother-artists.

Feminist knowledge on mother–artists as a specific group within the Western arts develops slowly; most research on imagery of motherhood and on mother–artists in maternal arts are with fine–artists (painting, drawing, sculpturing), performers, writers or poets. Mother–artists in the photographic maternal arts have been less of a subject in art or feminist research practise, in contrary to (feminist) research on photographic narratives through family photo albums. The only publication on photography and motherhood by professional mother–artists I discovered so far and studied for this research is *Home Truths: Photography and Motherhood* (2013) by British writer and curator of photography Susan Bright. The publication, resulting out of an exhibition, aims to investigate the complex and demanding experience of motherhood. Photography is at the centre of our historical and contemporary visual culture. Bright argues that contemporary photographers ‘emerged with a different relationship to representation, psychoanalysis, feminism and the other issues that dominated images of the mother in the 1970s and 1980s. This new generation responds instead to a complex twenty–first–century backdrop of less–defined gender roles and less certainty when it comes to meaning and interpretation.’ (2013, p.10) I agree with Bright’ statement of this shift in the meaning and value of photography. Especially due to the discourse of ‘We are all photographers now’ since the emergence of the smart phones with camera, the internet and social media. Bright’ focus is therefore on ‘the recent photographic thinking of excess and loss in terms of structural or material division between analogue and digital objects, between real and virtual space.’ (2013, p.18) Bright presents (fe)male artists who are mothers or caregivers themselves or those who portray their mothers. I would say there is a minor lack of intersectionality as there are no black or physical disabled (mother–)artists with maternal art represented in this publication.

Next to this publication, there are several international mother–artists who published their photographic maternal art such as *My birth* by Carmen Winant (figure 1), *Mother* by Elinor Carucci (figure 2) and *Immediate Family* by Sally Man (figure 3). These books were and remain a source of inspiration for why mother–artists choose their maternal subjects in art. Two mother–artists within my research both mentioned Winant’ work and I linked the work of Sally Mann to the work of one of the participating mother–artists. I would say that these artistic

publications and those of other mother-artists I found during my research are essential for the recognition and acknowledgement of the maternal art created by mother-artists and to gain new perceptions of motherhood in general. Not every mother-artist has the opportunity to publish a book through an official publisher. So some mother-artists choose to self-publish their work, as one of the participating mother-artists in my research did.

There are two recent publications that focus specifically on mother-artists in contemporary visual art. These publications contextualized mother-artists in photography within the contemporary visual arts. The first publication I studied is *The M Word: Real Mothers in Contemporary Art* (2011) by mother-artist and writer Myrel Chernick and art historian Jennie Klein. This American publication includes personal essays, critical and historian writing, interviews and artwork of mother-artists of all ages, races, ethnicities and classes. Chernick and Klein researched the relationship between the maternal and the practise of art. They argue that mother-artists contribute to the recognition of multiple maternal subjectivities, which are still not been fully theorized in the psychoanalytic discourse. I agree with this statement, above all through the historical image of the mother figure as holy, good and devoted. By the art of contemporary mother-artists this stereotypical representation can be transformed in an affect-embodied representation of lived experiences by these women.

The second publication I studied is *Reconciling Art and Motherhood* (2012) by American art historian and mother-artist Rachel Epp Buller. The essays by art historians and mother-artists in her book focus on global representation and intersectional experiences on maternity within visual art. Buller states that the voices of mother-artists were often separate from the art history written by art historians. In her publication, Buller describes the diversity of maternal experience depict in contemporary art by mother-artists and in contemporary research by art historians. Male artists produced art and imagery of 'the all-loving, all-forgiving and all-sacrificing mother' to construct a narrow and essentialist presentation of motherhood. (Buller, 2012, p.1) By doing so, she gives space to the broadly defined maternal-child relationship in contemporary visual arts as well as 'the cultural or political implications

of motherhood or the negative of deviant possibilities of mothers.’ (Buller, 2012, p.141) I agree with her statement for differences in experiencing motherhood, I question to what extent intersectionality is included in this.

At the start of my research I assumed that the common thread between these publications was the contemporary narrative and representation of motherhood by mother-artists in the visual arts and the oppressive powerstructures they experience within the arts and their maternal being. This turned out to be the case, although I notice differences in nuance between the publications. Liss focuses on mother-artists from the 1970s until 1990s, while Bright gives space to contemporary artists from the last 20 years, as did Buller, Chernick and Klein. These last three authors focus more on an intersectional perspective. The publications of Liss, Epp Bull, Chernick and Klein are theoretical and/or academic writing, in contrary to Bright’ publication and publications of the mother-artists where the focus is on presenting maternal art and narratives of mother-artists. By applying sources from both scholars as mother-artists I gained a more interdisciplinary perspective on feminist maternal art.

Knowledge production on mother-artists in photographic maternal arts is being developed, especially with feminist research in the USA and several countries in Europe. The position, possibilities and support system for mother-artists vary from country to country. As Buller mentions, a diversity of narratives is important to acknowledge intersectional experiences of the ambivalence in being a mother and an artist. My research was therefore focused on the stories and experiences of two specific target groups: British and Dutch mother-artists in the photographic maternal arts. British mother-artists are minimally represented in the above-mentioned literature, while Dutch mother-artists are not yet present in this same literature. In my feminist research, their photographic narratives are given space to be heard.

Interdisciplinary perspective

In order to realise an interdisciplinary perspective within my feminist research, I worked with (academic) theories from the fields of genderstudies and of the arts. Within my present and future research I give space to (un)known and/or unheard voices of feminist scholars to

break an ongoing quotation of popular and mostly male voices as authority of knowledge. Therefore I focus on female voices on feminist maternal art as a source of knowledge.

When I first started my research, I worked with three theories, namely the 'Politics of Location' by Adrienne Rich, the 'Matrix of Domination' by Patricia Hill Collins and the 'Politics of Representation'.

In her essay 'Notes toward a Politics of Location' (1985), American poet and essayist Adrienne Rich discusses the location on the world and the form of her body in relation to society, politics, health, justice, etc. With her concept you hold yourself accountable of your background. My personal and academic background influences my work as a mother-artist and as a researcher. So therefore it is essential to be accountable for my own background in relation to my academic and artistic work. In practising the politics of location as a way of accountability, I acknowledge how my locations – as in being a white, cis-gender, heterosexual and low/working-class woman with an invisible disability – shape my perspective on for example powerrelations and social constructions. Within this research I discovered my accountability within interviewing the participants and my perspective on the importance of cultural artifacts and role models.

Within her 'Matrix of Domination' (2000), professor of Sociology Patricia Hill Collins connects intersectionality to how powerrelations are organized and operates. Professor in critical race theory Kimberlé Crenshaw coined 'intersectionality' in her essay *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. (1989) Marginalized communities can experience oppression and powerrelations through the interlocked and/or simultaneous axes of identity as gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, class, age and religion. Collins states that by acknowledging how power organizes and operates, marginalized communities can develop a politics of empowerment for their inclusion within institutions, politics and society. Collin' 'Matrix of Domination' beholds four domains, i.e. the structural (e.g. laws, economy, religion), disciplinary (e.g. bureaucracy), hegemonic (e.g. ideology, education, culture) and interpersonal (e.g. relationships, experience of self and others). Within my research I applied domains of

the matrix within experienced powerstructures by the participants in their motherhood and artistry.

The 'Politics of Representation' is grounded in feminist art criticism, emerged from the feminist movement in the 1970s, which critically exams the representation of women in arts as well as art made by female artists. Feminist art historian Rosemary Betterton argues in her essay *Feminist Viewing: Viewing Feminism* (2003) that we should explore difference in position and knowledge by adapting older feminist art criticism to newer models. The politics of representation within the arts in the 1970s is about how we make and read images. This representation includes the gendered gaze, the understanding of and willingness to explore gender, patriarchy, identity and difference, the reflexivity of the representation of the self and being engaged with body politics. Current theorization in art is making a shift to adapting affect, identification and embodiment to this model of representation. As Betterton argues, this adaption 'opens up a productive space in which to explore questions of *how* meanings are made and *for whom*.' (2003, p.13) Within my research this representation is mainly related to artistry, which influences the way the participants create art and mother their children.

During my research two new theories emerged, namely the 'Institution of Motherhood' by Adrienne Rich and 'Feminist mothering' by Andrea Liss. These theories are related to motherhood and in the first chapter of my analysis on ambivalence I elaborate on them.

Artistic thesis

As a photographic artist and former graphic designer, I highlight the work of the participating mother-artists by artistically designing my thesis. By doing this, I embody feminist theory and artistic practices as well as actively engage with the work of the participants.

After the completion of this thesis I start working on an artzine in which I process my artistic insights, solutions and affects on this research and the art of the participating mother-artists into photographic art.

Methodology

For my research I combined field and desk research by interviewing and a literature study on the publications I mentioned in the theoretical framework. By conducting interviews with elements of arts-based autoethnography, I produced knowledge of meanings, understandings and ideas of British and Dutch mother-artists in the photographic maternal arts within an academic context on feminist art and motherhood. This empiricist epistemology grounds my research for the lived experiences of these mother-artists.

Participants

The mother-artists I focused on in my research were British and Dutch mother-artists. These women, or people who identify as female, are mothering one or more children living at home (any family composition possible). They may be self-identified mother-artists or, if inquiries reveal that, they fall into this category of being both an artist and a mother. If they are self-identified mother-artists, they identify themselves as a mother-artist on an artistic and/or activist base. They create maternal arts with photography as primary medium or as a main medium for photographic work such as photo collages.

Through my online network with Artist Residency in Motherhood (global), Artist/Parent Index (global), Mothers Who Make (UK) and Spilt Milk Gallery (UK), I reached out to my targetgroup in the United Kingdom (location London, due to travel possibilities) and in the Netherlands. I approached my potential interviewees with an email in which I described where I had found their name and email address, who I am, why I contacted them, what the purpose of my thesis is, why I specifically wanted to interview them, where the interview could possibly take place and about the scientific and artistic end result of my thesis. My goal to interview two mother-artists from each country was successful.

The participating mother-artists represent white, Western, 3 out of 4 cis-gendered and heterosexual, bodily abled, low- & working-class women. Unfortunately, the narratives of BIPOC, LGBTQA+ and disabled women are not represented within this research. I suspect I have not yet

searched in the right network and support system or searched well enough to reach these artists.

Interviewing

I researched various publications on interviewing. Next to useful interview techniques in several Dutch publications, my most important resource became the publication *The Artist Interview* (2012) by Dutch author Lydia Beerkens e.a. A systematic description is given on how to approach an artist' interview in preparation, interviewstructure and completion. The authors also give suggestions for questions within a specific art discipline, including photography. With this book I was able to properly prepare myself for the interviews.

I interviewed the two British mother-artists face-to-face in London (UK) by the end of February 2020. The interviews with the two Dutch mother-artists were through the online video conferencing platform Jitsi. Due to the Dutch lockdown of COVID-19 pandemic from mid-March 2020 I was not able to interview them face-to-face. The experience of physically and virtually interviewing reinforced my preference for physical interviewing. The dynamics between physical and virtual contact is different as I miss some of the non-verbal communication. I use my senses when talking to a person, viewing visual art, smelling a studio/working-space and touching cultural artifacts, like I did with the British interviews. So this makes me prefer the physical experience with a person and with art.

Arts-based autoethnography

During the interview I applied small-scaled arts-based autoethnographic assignments, in which the narrative of the autoethnographer (mother-artist) is being reflected upon, analyzed and interpreted within their broader social cultural context. Heewon Chang' publication *Autoethnography as Method* (2008) was my core methodological literature source. During my internship in Spring 2019, I conducted my own arts-based autoethnography on the basis of her book. Her book guides you as a researcher with hands-on steps in conducting and producing autoethnographic data through a variety of techniques. It is important that the personal data is brought together with cultural

context, external data and an analysis, so the validity of the personal data does not have to be questioned.

During the interviews I collected art-based data through past and present memories of the mother-artists by social and cultural memories as in cultural artifacts, role models and places of significance and by discussing their artistic process of artworks I selected in consultation with the mother-artist. I collected the social and cultural memories by talking, with imagery, by drawing or taking photographs. I send the mother-artists five assignments in advance so they had enough time to think, reflect, daydream and to collect certain objects. The mother-artists discussed cultural artifacts; objects produced by themselves and/or members of their community/society/culture that explicitly or implicitly manifest societal norms and values. An artifact is incorporated in their life, so it can be present in their daily life e.g. a religious book, a digital device or equipment, poetry or soccer ball. They spoke to me about role models that inspire them in their artistry and in their mothering. If necessary I researched information on specific role models. And we talked about places of significance, one related to mothering and the other to creating. These places are associated with a single memorable event, ritual or routine, which can conjure up a happy or a painful memory.

I had prepared assignments on a lifeline and personal values, which turned out to be unnecessary. During the interviews, most of the mother-artists spontaneously and unconsciously answered these assignments.

Analysis

After collecting the data from the participants through categories and classification, I analysed and interpreted all the data into (inter)connections such as recurring topics, (cross-) cultural themes, connection between the present with the past, relationship between self and others and framed by theories and concepts. I processed *quotes of the mother-artists* within the analysis (see appendix #1).

In the three chapters of my analysis, I mention the mother-artists Eliz, Amy, Csilla and Eva by their first name as I had personal contact with them. The authors of the used sources are mentioned by their surnames.

Important note with this digital document for my readers! The four artist biographies are in section 3 of this pdf-file, after the bibliography and section 2 with 'Imagery'.

Balancing your Mothering

In this first chapter of my analysis I discuss the motherly ambivalence the mother-artists spoke about during our interviews. The mother-artists discussed the double feelings they experienced as a (new) mother in relation to societal norms about the place of a mother within society as well as the commitment to their mothering and their artistry.

Love & hate

In the last 45 years several feminist researchers define the maternal ambivalence mothers experience. Adrienne Rich discuss this exquisite suffering of ambivalence in her *Of Woman Born* (1976) as 'the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves and blissful gratification.' (1976, p.21) She distinguishes motherhood as an empowering experience and as an oppressive institution as in

two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential –and all women– shall remain under male control. (1976, p.13)

Her book became the starting point for referring the concept of motherhood to the oppressive patriarchal institution of motherhood, which is defined and controlled by men. Therefore she wants to attack and –in her own words– *destroy* the oppressive institution of motherhood that is created and imposed on women by patriarchy. Rich finds it harmful that patriarchal motherhood assumes that mothering is natural to a woman and it is the sole responsibility of the biological mother, and that mothers do not have the power to determine the conditions of their responsibility in childrearing.

According to Myrel Chernick, ambivalence is 'the emotion that characterizes the process of separation from the mother and need for independence for the child that begins at birth, that colors all further relationships, and is well documented by psychoanalysts, psychologists, and cultural scholars. I found this same deep ambivalence in my

interactions with my children, as well as the constant negotiation of shared space and boundaries.’ (2012, p.256) I interpret Chernick’s statement as the contradictory entanglement of your own emotion of inevitable separation from your child from the day you give birth and the childrearing within interaction, space and boundaries to raise your child into an independent human being. This separation and togetherness between two people clashes within the role of mothering a child.

Andrea Liss argues that feminist motherhood ‘confuses the normalized order of gender and power. [It] deranges the supposed natural and historical progression of culture.’ (2009, p.xvi) By saying this, Liss states that feminist motherhood *attacks* the institution of motherhood as Rich anticipated.

Amy felt the pain that motherhood can be as society is not talking about the reality and real feelings of being a mother:

There are so many assumptions like you have to be happy being a mother, that motherhood is an incredible journey with no obstacles, everybody is just smiling all the time, children are running over beautiful green fields. But I didn’t feel this at all.

This pain became her/their starting–point in search for the double way of feeling as a mother. *Torn in Two: the Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (1995) by British psychotherapist, art historian and writer Rozsika Parker (figure 4), became a sort of bible for answers to many of Amy’s questions. Amy told that:

Parker explains why the terms love and hate are problematic in relation to motherhood/maternal. She captures the power of love and of hate. Love is a more acknowledged affection than hate. It is taken for granted within the experience of mothering. In reality love and hate coexist and they can’t exist without the other. Accepting hate as a part of our lives, it becomes lighter and easier. Parker made me feel normal and human.

As I interpret this, Amy illustrated a strong self–awareness of the two affections within her/their mothering and childrearing that causes her/them to experience feelings of pain. She/they transformed her/their

own love–hate ambivalence into the photographic serie ‘Monster Mom’ (2014) (figure 5).

The children’s book ‘When Mum Turned Into A Monster’ (figure 6) by Joanna Harrison was the visual inspiration for this serie. Amy told that she/they often felt herself/themselves becoming that monster when all three kids were 5 years and younger. She/they was on her/their own, without any family. This ‘turning into a monster’ was triggered by the way she/they felt. On calm days sometimes just a green ear popped out and on other lower days she/they could turn into the complete monster in a snap: *‘The monster was always there as well as myself, like a double everyday reality.’* Amy explained that

Mothers are judged in public when you become (partly) the Monster Mom when your child is having a tantrum. People shake their head and give judgemental looks like ‘She can’t control her child’. With my one-eyed Monster Mom I need to look out to the viewer for understanding, showing I am human and looking for understanding, for empathy, for sympathy. Instead of shaking a head, give a nod of ‘I get it’. I always go to a mother to reassure or encourage her.

So Amy’s one-eyed Monster Mom is an artistic statement against judging a mother by her/their actions and a wake–up call for transforming the “mythical mother” into a human being with ambivalent feelings and certain needs. Chernick argues that

if the denial of maternal ambivalence were not so deeply rooted in this society, we would not so constantly feel the need to tell women how to be good mothers and to condemn them when they fail to meet the ideal. (2012, p.264)

The denial Chernick mentions seems to expose a powerstructure within society, which is about controlling childrearing within the “good mother”–ideal. Amy experiences this powerstructure within her/their mothering in public spaces. People feel the need to condemn a mother when she does not meet up to the ideal mothering by controlling her child so it does not

get a tantrum. As I see it, people are condemning both the mother in her childrearing as well as the emotions of an upset child.

Feminist–mother dichotomy

The patriarchal institution of motherhood, as stated by Rich, positioned women/mothers below men/fathers through binary oppositions as active–passive, strong–weak, rational–irrational and other false dichotomies. Liss discusses the feminist movement in that time–era created ‘an either/or dichotomy between feminist and mother.’ (2009, p.xvi) I have the impression that Eva was struggling with this dichotomy of feminist–mother. She made engaged and feminist work before her son was born. After becoming a mother in 2016, she did not want these subjects in her art anymore without giving up feminism as a way of being. Becoming (partly) financially dependent on her husband also, she felt that this shift

has taken my fighting spirit away; I want this too. I always thought you have to be able to do both. I felt it as a gift to take care of my son for the first four years, instead of being burdened with it as a woman.

As I read it, feeling childrearing as a gift and being a feminist for Eva could be clashing the dichotomy of feminist–mother. According to this dichotomy, as a woman you will be burdened with the care of a child as well as being (partly) financially dependent on your husband. With the thought of being able to do both, it looks like Eva is starting to reject the burden of not being able to be a mother and a feminist at the same time. Contemporary scholars as Andrea O’Reilly and Andrea Liss define feminist mothering as being both a mother and a feminist. Liss states that feminist motherhood rejects and challenges the patriarchal institution of motherhood. She explains that the distinction between the feminist mother and the patriarchal model of the mother is that

the feminist mother struggles to break the yoke of centuries of expectation. She cannot carry the myth of the all–loving, all–forgiving, and all–sacrificing mother. She still loves, forgives, and

sacrifices for her child(ren), but not at the expense of losing herself. (2009, p.xvii)

By stating this, Liss alters love, forgiveness and sacrificing within the oppressive myth into an equitable and equal way of taking care of both your child(ren) as yourself as a human being. Feminist mothering can thus dismiss the dichotomy of the feminist–mother.

Balancing act

Csilla felt overwhelmed with early motherhood in 2016 with everything that comes with it like feeding, putting to bed, and *'your brain becomes kind of like a mush.'* Without an own studio and limited time she found her daily structure in the global and online Artist Residency in Motherhood (ARiM). This residency, founded by Lenka Clayton in 2013, is 'a self-directed, open-source artist residency to empower and inspire artists who are also mothers. You don't have to apply. It doesn't cost anything, it's fully customisable, and you can be in residence for as long as you choose. You don't even have to travel, the residency takes place entirely inside your own home and everyday life. An Artist Residency in Motherhood is the reframing of parenthood as a valuable site for creative practice, rather than an obstruction to be overcome.' (consulted March 2020) By participating within the context of this residency, Csilla found structure to create her photographic sculpture serie 'Pillars of Home'. (figure 7)

'Pillars of Home' are 98 balancing sculptures, made during her son' nap. Mainly the living room of her home became a studio for thirty minutes at a time. Csilla explained that Pillars is a reaction on the whole situation, so to *'close out everything around you and becomes meditative in some way so you have that (half a) hour to yourself.'* She states that her pillars answer the dilemma of how a mother finds balance between all her priorities, a never-ending juggling act. Chernick frames this act for a mother–artist as 'a continual struggle to meet the demands of her art and her family, as well as those of the dominant culture.' (2003, p.24) She appoints the complex position of a mother–artist within the arts and the society she is part of. As I see it, this ongoing balancing act symbolises the commitment of a mother–artist to her artistry and to her mothering.

Eliz experiences this daily balancing act within dividing her time between her family and making art:

So many times you have to choose. I just don't want to choose, I want to do both. I have to choose many times like how much time I spent doing art and how much time I spend with my daughter and my family. Here in England there is the notion of time. But I can easily lose the notion of time. When I go home on the evening and until the next day I don't think about my art. I just enjoy the time with my family so much. The same happens when I make art [on the University]: the whole day I'm not thinking about my family. I really live in that moment and be focused on what I'm doing. I feel really bad between these two things.

Liss links this ambivalent conflict Eliz is experiencing to the highly coded cultural dilemma created for countless feminist mother-artists. This dilemma is based on societal norms about the place of a mother and the conflicted maternal identities mother-artists experience as a result of it. Liss argues that

to work in any artistic activity, to be in that space of creativity and deep inner focus, to be away from your child(ren) physically and emotionally and to know you feel whole and good about it... most of the time, some of the time, until you miss being with him or her or them, until you think you should be there... until your creative work time is up. (2009, p.60)

The several identities within mother-artists, as seen in Eliz' time-struggle, clashes with their intersubjectivities – the relations between the artist and the mother. And this clash does not only has to do with the aspect of taking or choosing time but also with being emotional and physical absent when making your art or mothering your child(ren). Your own body is innerconnected to this identity-dilemma of being with one and not the other.

The motherly ambivalence experienced by the mother-artists seems to be connected to the intersubjectivity of the mother and the artist. This intersubjectivity appears to relate with the “good mother”-ideal within society, the feminist-mother dichotomy and the embodied presence while mothering and/or creating art. Patricia Hill Collins connects these three aspects to the interpersonal domain of power within her theory of the ‘Matrix of Domination’. This domain focuses on the ‘routinized, day-to-day practices of how people treat one another.’ (Collins, 2009, p.306) With small yet significant actions social justice can be accomplished. Amy does this by supporting a mother with an upset child when others judge them in public. Eva changed the feeling of the burden of motherhood into acknowledging and being allowed to feel that caring for your child is a gift.

The identities of mother and artist seem to be intertwined and (re)shaping each other as seen with the embodied artworks by Amy and Csilla. Therefore I elaborate on the artistry of the mother-artists in the next chapter.

The Maternal in Art

In this second chapter of my analysis I discuss artistic powerstructures the participating mother-artists experience while creating art. As being a mother and an artist seems to intertwine and (re)shape each other, it is important to acknowledge the narrow and essentialist representation of motherhood in art, especially the Madonna-motif. The mother-artists within my research connect their lived experiences with their maternal gaze to create a new intersectional representation of motherhood.

Mother Mary

The patriarchal institution of motherhood is historical mainly depicted by male artists within the 'Madonna'-motif. The Madonna represents the holy mother and Virgin Mary of the Bible. She is often portrayed together with her Child, the infant Christ. The worship of the Virgin by European Christian male artists resulted in depicting her in countless fresco-paintings and other forms of artistic representation. This imagery promoted the fulfilling of her two main roles as a woman: marital fertility with infant Christ as its artistic symbol (figure 8) and offering consolation as in witnessing the Crucifixion of Christ or as in sheltering the needy and vulnerable. (figure 9)

Rachel Epp Buller states in her *Reconciling Art and Motherhood* (2012) that 'this narrow and essentialist construction of motherhood, historical visual representations of mothers have contributed to hegemonic constructions of maternity, allowing until recently little room for artists to picture the diversity of maternal experiences.' (2012, p.1) Susan Bright argues that canonical representations and the male gaze within this art history dominated the representation of the mother figure within photography until the second-wave feminism. According to Bright, contemporary photographic artists often appropriate, update and subvert this Madonna-motif. By doing so, mother-artists explore the 'complex and demanding experience of motherhood and the transitions that occur to a woman's identity when she is becoming or being an mother.' (Bright, 2013, p.18)

In Eva's own kindergarten class, next to her female teacher, hang a painting of mother Mary with her infant Christ. (figure 10) For Eva, Mary

symbolizes patience and good motherhood. She never felt that way *'because I am the most impatient mother ever.'* Eva discussed that

for many Western people Mary symbolizes motherhood and how we think we will be. It also imposes on us something of the perfect mother we all look up to. Nowadays it has almost become a kind of a contest with the blogs and Instagram accounts in which mothers promote everything they do with their children, as well as all the books you can read on mothering. There is so much you should do that sometimes I don't know where to start.

By saying this, I see a connection Eva (unconsciously?) makes between the past imagery of mother Mary and the demanding fulfilments and the contemporary imagery of motherhood. It would seem that past-Mary reinterprets within imagery of present-motherhood online by mothers and in books on mothering. This perfect mother Mary we look up to therefore still reinforces the patriarchal motherhood on mothers.

Eliz sensed ambivalence within the art of the lactating mother Mary and contemporary imagery of breastfeeding. She became interested in these works while breastfeeding her own daughter. She mentioned an incident in 2017 where a mother in the London' Victoria and Albert Museum had to cover herself during breastfeeding her son while there was a sculpture of a lactating woman exhibited next to her. The contemporary censoring of imagery around this aspect of motherhood shocks Eliz. I think this censoring is connected to the dominant gaze within imagery of motherhood and a mother' sexuality. With the imagery of Mary and her child, the Catholic Church used the virgin birth to support a deep denial of sexuality. By doing so, the church seems to implicate that a woman is an a-sexual or non-sexual active human. This discourse reflected on the traditional imagery of Mary as the embodiment of the ideal chastity.

Maternal gaze and ethics

Since its invention and development in the 19th century, photography has been surrounded by the myth of objectivity and unbiased truth. As Sturken and Cartwright in their *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (2009) state that 'the creation of an image through a

camera lens always involves some degree of subjective choice through selection, framing and personalization.’ (2009, p.16) So therefore, it is the photographer who chooses who, what, why and how to create the image and not the camera. The photographer (un)consciously attaches a cultural, social and/or historical meaning and gaze to a photograph. Thus a photograph can never be neutral or objective, the gaze of the person who creates the image has to be taken into account.

Some female artists who are mothers choose their motherhood as (main) subject of their art. These mother-artists express this maternal gaze by creating art about their own lived experiences as mothers such as pregnancy, childbirth, the motherbody, sexuality, breastfeeding, mother-child relation, childrearing, maternal mental health, loss/death/miscarriage, poverty, black motherhood, the domestic/family, etc. As Chernick illustrates that

for some creative mothers who are inevitably and irrevocably implicated in their artistic lives as well as domestic lives, the need, conscious and unconscious, to bring aspects of these lives together becomes indispensable. (2012, p.263)

By saying so, I interpret Chernick’ argument as the thin line between the artistic and domestic life which for some mother-artists means that these lives can become entangled, regardless of whether they want to or not. A possible outcome therefore is that they choose to depict their domestic life as (main) subject in their artistic life. So the maternal gaze of a mother-artist on her lived experiences from both lives creates a way to artistically express the complexities of this maternal subjectivity.

Eliz choose her child and family as the main subject of her art. She wants her maternal subjects to be alive and not objects such as a napkin or toys. She came to this decision because

portraits and self-portraits of the mother and/or child are more about yourself. Photographs of everyday objects are about explaining and describe motherhood, but the mother and/or child are absent. The objects become some sort of a fetish.

I would relate Eliz' preferred choice for (self)portraits to, what art historian Frances Borzello explains in her *Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self-Portraits* (2016), the need for self-representation as a way to present an autobiographic story through pose, gesture, facial expression and accessories.

Eliz experiences the downside of portraying her own maternal subjectivity through (self)portraits. The specific photograph of her daughter in the bathtub (figure 11) made Eliz question how much you share of your motherhood:

I have become aware of the boundaries in the privacy of daughter, more mindful how much and what I show of my daughter in an image for an artwork. People can be bad or mentally sick with photographs of children.

She experiences 'an awkward private-wall' in the United Kingdom in comparison to her home country Romania, where this image of her daughter in the bathtub is no problem. Even with no visible private body parts, '*in the UK it is too explicit,*' she states.

Eliz received disliking and critical feedback from peers and her tutor of her MA Printmaking on the explicitly of this photograph. In her voice I heard frustration and subtle anger about this injustice:

Honesty is hard to be digested by people. A naked child in an ad for a skin product is okay, so I was ashamed and crossed. Why am I not allowed to do that? To be honest feels as an oppression.

She is being judged by showing her daughter bathing, a common daily activity for Eliz and her family. I think this crossing by her peers and tutor has to do with the implication of her daughter's naked body. Borzello argues in her *The Naked Nude* (2012) 'where does beauty and sexuality resides: in the child or in the eye of the beholder?' (2012, p.66) The connotation of the innocence of a child creates fear for sexual abuse and violence. This affect results in anger of the beholder to the photographer of the image in which (s)he disrupts this concept of innocence.

Photographer Sally Mann, according to Time magazine in 2001 'America's Best Photographer', was accused of paedophilia and child

abuse due to her *Immediate Family* photographic serie (figure 12). Mann photographed what was closest to her and greatest events of her life. Mann received criticism for portraying her children naked and in vulnerable situations from victims of incest and sexual violence and from mothers who condemned her for being a bad mother in using her children within her art in that way. This seems to me that Mann and Eliz are both being judged upon their mothering, which is related to the “good mother”-ideal within society that Amy encounters.

The oppression experienced by Eliz is also illustrated in the theory of the ‘playing mother–artist’ as Chernick explains. Playing is an activity that originates in childhood, encouraged and facilitated by the mother. Playing is also connected to the creative play of artists in making their art. Chernick therefore raises the question why a playing mother–artist is so threatening, as

What is happening when the mother plays? Is she playing as the child in that creative space? With her own mother’s body (or is that for male artists only)? Can a mother artist expressing her maternal ambivalence by playing with her children’s bodies be accepted in this culture of denial of that same ambivalence? Is a mother who plays with her child abusing him? (2012, p.262)

By stating this, Chernick confronts both the arts as well as society on the ambivalence of being a mother and an artist. A mother is allowed to play inside the realm of childrearing, between the walls of her house, private and personal. As an artist she is allowed to play so to create art, but she is not allowed to play with her children and the identity of a mother as subjects in her artwork. So there is a double ambivalence for a woman who plays with her own and her children’s bodies within her art practise and with raising a family as a mother. Eliz experiences this ambivalence within the artistic institution she studies as she creates maternal art with her daughter as a subject.

For the moment, Eliz is consciously building two parallel artistic narratives in her artistry. One narrative of photographic imagery is for the university, her peers and tutor and for the visitors for her final exhibition of the MA that beholds –as Eliz calls– mindful and subtle photographs of her motherhood. The other narrative is the photographic imagery, in

which she visualizes her honest motherhood. So Eliz wants to create a revolution with this parallel narrative and artworks after finishing her MA.

Amy always worked on identity, longing and memories within her/their artistry. She/they started questioning *'how to hold on to your memories'* due to the death of her/their father as a young girl. This expanded when she/they became a mother. Just as Eliz, she/they questions herself/ themselves how much does she/they share about her/their motherhood. She/they discussed if it is ethical to show your children in your artwork without their permission, because can a young child really and truly understand what it means to give permission to be photographed for a work of art? Now that her/their children are growing older, she/they asks their consent and often gets a 'No'. Amy asks herself /themselves

What happens with my art practice when my work is still related to my children and motherhood but due to ethics I don't portray them in my work?

By saying this, Amy connects her/their maternal subjectivity inseparable with the depicting of her/their children and her/their motherhood within her/their art. Yet she/they is faced with the challenge of consent of the ones she/they portrays. This resonates to me as an artistic clash of ethics of the subjects in your art on the one hand and the need to portray your lived experiences as a mother on the other hand. Amy's ethical questioning resulted in talking with her/their teenage daughter about depicting her puberty without revealing her identity. By doing this I think Amy is looking for a solution to get ahead of this ethics-clash so she/they can make her/their art on lived experiences within the ethical frameworks she/they wants for herself/themselves and her/their children.

Objects as maternal narratives

As some mother-artists choose their children and family as main subject within their art, other mother-artists indirectly visualize motherhood in their art.

Eva experienced turning into another person after becoming a mother, seeing the world differently and this influenced her artistry. She

does not intended to depict her mothering directly into her work. Taking many walks with her son gave her hope and a distraction from the fear of death she felt when she became a mother. She states on her website that 'being alive was never so important. In these turbulent times I needed something to believe in. My quest for that something became like a pilgrimage, in which I found fragments of hope. Physically I did not travel far but my mind went everywhere.' (consulted May 2020) She took a small camera with her to take photographs of everything that intrigued her. On their walks on trash-day she collected all kind of items as a sort of a treasure hunt where her treasures, kind of souvenirs, became sort of holy items. Once time she found a book with a cover of a woman walking in a labyrinth (figure 13). She then realized:

I am actually undertaking a kind of pilgrimage. Even though I am just walking, it still feels like a pilgrimage when also a little lost.

Her photographs of what she saw and found became the serie 'Fragmented Traveling' (figure 14). She often photographed a stone in Park Frankendael (Amsterdam, NL) when walking with her son or being in the play garden near by. After coming upon a photograph of a stone with spirals in a book of Ireland, she drew spirals of crayon on the stone in the park herself (see first photograph, left top, figure 14).

During Eva's research on pilgrimages, she came across an archive photograph of a man on a pilgrimage holding a coin. It inspired her to imitate this photograph with a cap of a fruitsnack of her son. (figure 15)

Just as Eva, Csilla used objects to tell her narrative of motherhood within her 'Pillars of Home'. These domestic objects became abstract sculptures she created within her own home. Csilla did not know if she wanted to do anything with motherhood in her artistry. At that time, she experienced

a lot of ambivalent feelings with it like how much do I want to include motherhood in my work. I feared that by bringing this in, the aesthetics of the image would be less. For me at that moment, it was important that my sculptures were not about my son.

It appears to me that Csilla chose to not visually express her motherhood within her art at the beginning of early motherhood. She related her fear of a less valued image to the aesthetics of art, the so-called definition, recognition and appreciation or criticism of a work of art. She wanted to create abstract art with a background story that can be about motherhood, which she explained as

you have reasoning why things are happening, but you should also be able to enjoy it without knowing the background or the story.

I interpret her words as that your work can be about your lived experiences as a mother without you literally portraying your mothering. As a viewer of her Pillars, you will not immediately see Csilla's motherhood within this work.

After separating early motherhood from her art, Csilla got more involved with the topic of being an artist and a mother. She explained that

the last couple of years have changed me so much. Sometimes you have to think what would have happened if I didn't have a child. My art practice became –kind of stupid to say– deeper by it, because I became much more involved with something than before. So for me it rose a lot of extra things to my practice what I don't know if I had without becoming a mother.

As I read this, Csilla's art practice deepened after the first years of mothering her baby which led to her choosing to not separate her motherhood and artistry anymore but let them interact with each other in an artistic way she wanted to. Liss illustrates this process as an ongoing labor in which mother-artists create 'the complex and wondrous representations of the maternal self.' (2009, p.152)

Awareness of intersectionality

In the 1970s the American Feminist Art Movement wanted to, according to Buller, throw off 'the burden of motherhood, dismissing the experience of motherhood as a basis of serious art making.' (2012, p.2) The Women's Building in Los Angeles (USA) housed the Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW) from 1973 until 1981, the first program exclusively to

the education of female artists. Though women's bodies were sacred –and so was childbirth– within the philosophy of the Building, child rearing was not part of this celebration of the female body. Several participating female artists –who were also mothers– founded Mother Art in 1974. They wanted to demonstrate the other young and childless female artists within FSW that motherhood was a legitimate subject within feminist art. One of their conceptual works is 'Laundry Works' (figure 16) in which they gave mini-performances in several Laundromats within Los Angeles (USA) by hanging their art and poetry on clotheslines. The artists held conversations with the women who were doing their laundry in the Laundromat during one wash-and-dry cycle.

With their art, they depicted the intense time and labor mothers dealt with. As Liss states that the collective 'initiated a break in the silence so long imposed on the maternal as a subject for art within the art world and within artist-mothers' life experiences.' (2009, p.5) This breaking of the silence was a first step in acknowledging the lived experiences of female artist who are mothers, both in the art world as in society. However, according to Chernick and Klein not that much has changed since then. They argue that

although feminism has made radical incursions into the male-dominated art world during the past thirty years, mothers and the representation of motherhood remains on the margins of art practice. (2011, p.2)

So the influence of feminism from the 1970s and onwards has not yet resulted in the equal inclusion of mother-artists and the representation of motherhood as a subject within the arts. Amy confirms this 'remaining in the margins' when she/they became a mother in 2008. She/they felt that

the art world was kind of a hostile place. That place where it did not consider my reality: being a mother, not having money, don't owning a studio, etc.

This hostile feeling Amy experienced seems to be related to the absence of sufficient awareness of intersectionality within the arts. I interpret her reality as an artist that not only her gender causes inequality and injustice, but also the fact that she/they has caring responsibilities as a parent and no money at that moment so therefore she/they does not own artistic property.

Csilla experiences this absence of awareness of intersectionality within participating an art-residency. Out of the wish to participate within her own reality as a young mother and an artist, she set up a project for the art-residency Mothers in Arts in 2016–2017. Mothers in Arts was an artstudio combined with a communal day-care in Amsterdam (NL), with the exhibition 'ReProduction' as endresult (figure 17).

The residency was specialized in supporting emerging female artists, who are also mothers. She received many positive reactions to her initiative, though she remembers a male British artist asking why it was only for mothers since it excludes fathers. She explained to him that the residency

came from a personal experience as a reaction to my own situation as well as for other artists who are mothers. It does not effect most male artists, because most primary caregivers are still mothers.

I would say that Csilla points out the detrimental effect on female artists when becoming a mother and being the primary caregiver. It seems that the effects Csilla refers to are at the intersection between who society considers caregivers within a family and the arts who fails to sufficiently recognize the new identity of caregiver for an artist. During a lecture about the residency in 2019, Csilla received feedback from the participants about intersecting more axes to 'Mothers in Arts' such as gender (fathers), race (black mothers/parents), sexual orientation (LGBTQ+–parents) and family composition such a single parents '*who need this even more*', Csilla stated.

Eva discussed that she thinks that '*you are actually expected to do the same as when you are not a mother, I found that especially difficult the first few years.*' She indicates she is not being able to work with her

child around and short residencies do not work for her because of the way she works on her art.

Next to participating a residency, being a mother and an artist also raises other practical challenges such as attending exhibition openings. Csilla mentions that openings are commonly during the evening hours, *'you can't go and engage with others, because you have to stay at home.'*

Csilla also mentions wages and time as a challenge for an artist and a caregiver. As an artist you are (mostly) underpaid and living on a minimum wage, so

I understand why an artist decide to not have children, because you're sacrificing your time while your future is really unstable with no pension, living in social housing or 'anti-kraak', etc. So most artists combine their art practice with a part-time job. It is just not easy to combine your artistic practice with parenthood.

These thoughts of Csilla brings the performances of 'Laundry works' by the Mother Art Collective to mind as in the artists integrate the domestic life of a mother with the art as the working-class. Liss describes 'Laundry works' as emphasizing 'the harried lives of mothers, especially poor mothers, as well as the lack of cultural space accorded to mother-workers and mothers working as artists.' (2009, p.2) I would say that both Liss and Csilla intersect class with being a mother and an artist, therefore critique the cultural and social space in which working mothers within the arts have to struggle to survive.

Sentimental (re)framing

Liss argues that in the 1980s it was

absolutely necessary for feminist artists to avoid any imagery that would code their art, especially work that dealt with anything female—motherhood being the most debased— as "sentimental". (2009, p.13)

As I spoke with Amy, it seems that this avoiding is still echoing within the arts. In 2018 Amy held workshops with her/their Desperate Artwives project on 'Reframing the Sentimental in the Art of the Maternal' (figure

18). The workshops beheld themes of conceiving, birthing and the identity after you birth. According to Amy, this sentimental is the way society sees motherhood, maternal art and us calling ourselves mother-artists. She/they recounts –in a bit of a sarcastic tone– that the art world does not want sentimental: *'Oh, another picture of a child, how boring!'* Art still has to be something very different than the sentimental in order to be recognized and sold. Historically, male-artists who portrayed the Madonna and breastfeeding the child were not labelled sentimental. Amy connects this non-labelling to the common male gaze on motherhood, the painting skills of the artist and the much symbolism within a painting to represent religion, wealth, status, etc. Yet, *'it was not the reality. There were no artists at that time that really painted what the reality [of motherhood] was'*, Amy argues. Liss links this sentiment to artworks of pregnancy by mother-artists and the way patriarchy codes these works as sentimental to accomplish what

should not and could not be seen; its obscenity would risk revealing the sexuality and passion that created the child. So the perennial insult of sentimentality masked true sentiment and deep feeling, which in contemporary terms deflects, insults, and embarrasses the passion that is erotic sentiment. (2019, p.13)

So as I interpret these words of Liss, it seems that patriarchy within the arts uses false sentiment to hide the sexuality of a (pregnant) woman. I would say that it refuses to acknowledge a mother's sexuality as well as the way a child is conceived. By framing art of a pregnant body by mother-artists as "sentimental", both the mother's body and the representation of this motif by mother-artists appears to be dismissed from society as well as the art world. As I see it, Madonna and Child-art by male artists confirmed the patriarchal institution of motherhood, as maternal art from the lived experiences of mother-artists were labelled sentimental to de-value them and therefore maintain the depiction of the institution. With the workshops at Desperate Artwives, Amy started reframing this oppressive sentimental perspective by –as I would call it– transgressive imagery thus to expose what conventionally is hidden.

Csilla confirms the change of this false sentiment: *'I think that the image of the mother and her child does not have to be that idealistic now'*, she said. These changes are related to the expectations of a society of a mother as being there only for your child and the loss of sexuality. Also changes are happening within the gender of parents like transgender mothers. Csilla stated that *'motherhood as a topic becomes wider but mainstream is still conservative'*. Amy discussed that

Now women artists who are mothers are more exposing themselves. There is still a lot of work to be done, but it is definitely happening more than when I started. There are lots of us showing the massive and positive effects on the household and children in being an artist and being a mother. But society seems to not be ready yet for these progressive thoughts.

Liss restates this change by saying that 'when the figure of the mother is no longer regulated, singularized, generalized, and fetishized, representations of true maternal experience come into being.' (2009, p.152)

Taboo or niche

In early 1990, Chernick had a rude awakening as she was curating an exhibition with artworks on maternal subjectivity. After submitting her proposal, she received a letter from the director of this association

explaining that although she felt the work was interesting, it was not particularly "timely", and would not fit in with their agenda. Not timely, I mused. Have women stopped having children? When is motherhood timely? (2012, p.261)

This "timely" makes me think of the concept of a taboo that Liss explains as strategically negotiating 'between engrained codes of maternity and embrace the complexities of lived motherhood.' (2009, p.xviii) These engraved codes seem to be related to the director's "timely"-statement that Chernick criticises. I agree with Chernick' critical musing on motherhood being timely. For many centuries now, women gave birth and became mothers. I am guessing that "timely" has to do with the

engrained codes of cultural and societal expectations of motherhood of the private sphere. Liss relates this to feminist motherhood and its strategies within visual culture and life to

embarrass traditional maternal qualities such as caring, empathy, and sacrifice, to displace them so that they are no longer kept solely in the private realm, assigned to their “proper place”. (2009, p.xvii)

By saying this, it seems that Liss is breaking the “proper place” by stating that mothering does not be kept in the private sphere but therefore in the public sphere. I believe that maternal art by mother-artists can be one of these strategies, although this is a risky thing to do as Csilla explained. As she was presenting her Pillars of Home to a male curator at a portfolio-moment he asked why she talks about the back-story of her serie. ‘I’m not interested in that. I just want to see the pictures. It doesn’t give anything extra to it’, he told her. At a later moment she talked with a female curator –also a mother– who told her that most of the art of female artists who are mothers becomes MAMMA-art which is seen as less worthy. Csilla redefines a possible taboo to a stigma on the artist as artist-MAMA, so it appears that it is still a risky thing to include your motherhood in your artistry.

Both Csilla and Amy stated that maternal work is more a niche, where to a certain extent Amy still considers it as a taboo. Eva raises the point that *‘it is not that long ago that Marina Abramović said she only got this far [in her artistry], because she didn't become a mother. So I think the taboo is still there.’*

All four mother-artists feel that motherhood within contemporary art is getting more attention and that change is happening. Csilla and Eva referred to Carmen Winant’ *My Birth* publication and exhibition in the American Museum of Modern Art in 2018. (figure 19) I think that the maternal artwork of Carmen Winant contributes to the removal of the stigma of an artist-MAMA. It can create a shift from the daily life of motherhood that is not allowed outside its “proper place” into the representation of the lives experiences of mothering within society and the arts.

I am a female/mother/artist

Amy applied the term mother–artist within her/their art practice while starting to create maternal art, so that it would become accepted and normal. She/they mentioned it ‘politically important that we used it’ to gain this result. Nevertheless the term ‘mother–artist’ changed for her/their within the following years. Amy pointed out that it bothered her/them that male artists did not need to be labelled as MALE artists or FATHER–artists in for example a pamphlet for an exhibition. She/they questioned why she/they has to be labelled female artist or mother–artist. *Why can’t I just be an artist?*, she/they asked. She/they stated that female and mother–artists need to fight to be seen and recognised. Philosopher and feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti describes the origin of this difference in sexuality to ‘the dissymmetrical powerrelations that underlie the construction of woman as the Other of the dominant view of subjectivity’. (1998, p.299) This dominant subjectivity is based on masculinity as the rational and universal agency, which leads to the belief that the woman is inferior. This appears to be happening within the labelling of artists, where a female artist has to be labelled with her gender and/or role as a mother and a male artist does not. His gender appears to be the dominant view of who an artist is, so there is no need to mention it. When otherwise, then there is the need to mention someone’s gender. Amy finds the term mother–artist important, yet

I also want to rebel against it. What different does it make if I am a mother? You don’t need to know what my sexuality is, if I am white or black. You look at my concept, you look at what I do.

Amy’s statement involves a significant ambivalence in the importance of and in the rebelling against the label mother–artist. Amy wants her/their own reality to be acknowledged within the arts and she/they also wants to be seen as ‘an artist’. It seems like the ambivalence Amy experiences are related to the dominant muscular subjectivity as well as the lack of awareness of an intersectional perspective within the arts. With her/their statement she/they broadens the point of labelling an artist with axes of its identity when this artist goes beyond the framework of the dominant subjectivity as white, male, childless, etc.

For Eliz it seems more clearly, as she identifies herself as a mother–artist because *‘my present work is about all kind of aspects of motherhood.’* Eva is not sure if she sees herself as a mother–artist, because she stated that her identities as female–mother–artist–teacher do not necessary have to be interconnected. She is not sure if she even wants this, because

my artistry is partly an escape from motherhood. Being an artist gives me some space to myself, I don't want to blemish this with me being a mother. Motherhood is also different for everyone, so what this entails for you and what you do with it in your work is different.

It seems to me that Eva agrees with Amy on certain aspects of whether or not intersecting and/or labelling your (creative) identity. Their principles are different and equally valuable; Amy wants her/their motherhood and artistry to intersect but does not want to be labelled as such to prevent possible oppressive powerstructures within the arts, Eva chooses not to intersect her motherhood and artistry in order to preserve her artistic space away from mothering.

So the dilemma is whether the label ‘mother–artist’ benefits exposing the oppressive structures within the arts, or whether the label actually reinforces and continues the unequal position of a woman and mother who wants to be acknowledged as an artist. I particularly wonder whether the importance and the rebellion can coexist and work simultaneously to accomplish breaking out of the margins within the arts.

Maternal artist (m/f/x)

In line with whether or not intersecting and/or labelling axes of your identity, does an artist need certain axes within its identity in order to represent motherhood? In other words: does this mean that mother–artists are the only artists who can portray motherhood? Eliz argued that maternal art could be made by any artist regardless gender. Important to her are different perspectives on the subjectivity. On that point, Csilla stated that

motherhood can be a lot of things like transgender parents, fathers, people that are mothering and not necessary children. So you do not have to be a mother or a parent to create art on motherhood.

By saying this, both artists seem to refer to an intersectional approach of the subjectivity beyond the dominant view on motherhood. Eva said that when she ever would make art about motherhood, her superhero-mother (figure 20) would be different now that she is a mother compared to when she would have made it when she was not yet a mother. Also, she would make this work of art different from the work of an artist who is/will not be a mother as well as from the work of another mother-artist because you are not identical mothers.

Amy said that it is important the voices of female artists are being heard. Male artists can portray motherhood from their own perspective, so not the perspective of the actual mother as knowing e.g. how to give birth. She/they does not want male artists *'taken out of the conversation, because both men and women are victim of the patriarchal system.'* I am guessing that a part of the male artists who are fathers experience the same struggle as female artists who are mothers, when they have a large(r) contribution in childrearing.

Community

All four mother-artists indicated the importance of being part of a community, either related to their motherhood and/or their artistry.

Amy looked for and found support within her/their personal struggles of being a young mother. For her/them it was an important issue how a mother (does not) manages the ambivalence of love and hate within their mothering. By reading about this ambivalence and then the process of accepting this coexistence, it got better for her/them:

Knowledge is power, especially when you think you are the only person who is feeling that way. So a community is a great asset to manage the ambivalence. By sharing, reading, talking, acknowledging it. By finding and creating a safe space and being with like-minded people, so you can be understood and don't feel afraid to tell. Your feelings are been validated.

In 2011 she/they founded the Desperate Artwives project as an international space for activism and motherhood for artists who are mothers and/or have other caring responsibilities.

Eliz participated in a group of female artists –some of them also mothers– as an artistic support system for over 14 months when her daughter was one year. This group created art together, gave feedback and encouraged each other, showed work. For Eliz the feedback and encouragement she received and the space for thoughts and feelings as fear was the most important. She told that being part of this group made her felt that she was not alone and *'this group kept me moving in creating my art.'*

Eva finds it a pity that there is little community in the Netherlands for female artists who are mothers, compared to the United Kingdom. Although she is not a community person, *'I do seek recognition in my artistic struggles. Not in my motherhood, I have another community for that.'*

Csilla founded her Mothers in Arts Residency as a space for support for mother–artists with their children. This residency of three months combined an artstudio and provided day–care for the children. She did not take into account that the young children (all under 2 years) had to adjust being taking care by someone else for the first time. Csilla stated that this adjustment is much as important in the process of your mothering as well as creating work and an exhibition within your artistry.

It occurred to me that in the literature I read for this study there is little or no mention of the contemporary formation and importance of a community. The American Feminist Art Movement and Mother Art Collective are referred to in several of these publications. I discovered that the most recent book I used for this research was published in 2012, while the participating mother–artists in my research were looking for collaboration and support after 2011. Amy started her Desperate Artwives project in 2011. Eliz, Csilla and Eva mentioned the online Artist Residency in Motherhood (founded in 2012) as their starting point of the search for support, collaboration, balance and structure when they first became mothers. When Amy became a mother in 2008, this online collective was not founded yet. It appears that being part of a community is important (again) for Csilla, Amy, Eva and Eliz. So why do these scholars not write about community in their publications, were there no more communities

after the Feminist Art Movement in the 1970s and 1980s until the 2010s? There may well have been communities, but not as visible and outspoken as the Mother Art Collective in the 1970s? I am guessing that the revival of visible and outspoken communities since the 2010s may be caused by the appearance of a global fourth-wave feminist (art) movement, in which mother-artists and their need for support search and find both local as international (online) communities thanks to the Internet.

It appears that the purpose of the powerstructures within the Western arts is to maintain the dominant gaze and the artistic depiction of the patriarchal institution of motherhood. This oppressive discourse in representation is related to the disciplinary domain of power within Collins' 'Matrix of Domination' in which an institution 'remains dedicated to disciplining and controlling their workforces and clientele.' (Collins, 2009, p.299) Although women are accepted to art and education institutions and choose artistry as a profession, the arts seems to continue excluding and denying mother-artists and artists with other axes of identity such as gender, sexual orientation, BIPOC, etc. than the dominant identity. I would say that this domain of power causes the non-recognition of these artists as well as the maternal subjectivity.

Contemporary mother-artists are fighting for change in the representation of motherhood with their artworks on their maternal subjectivity. Rosemary Betterton argues that current theorization in the politics of representation is shifting from how we make and read images into *how* meanings are made and *for* whom. The participating mother-artists in my research are taking part of this shift by depicting their own lived experiences in their works by embodying their feelings as anger, fear, love and hate. By doing so, they create a new representation which can be for other persons who are mothers/caregivers to identify with.

The Creation of Art

In the last chapter of my analysis I elaborate on the creative process within the artistry of the participating mother-artists. Within this process a mother-artist (un)consciously makes choices why and how she/they create art, get inspired by lived experiences and role models, gives meaning and value to the (maternal) art she/they create as well as the (unexpected) artistic collaboration between a mother-artists and her/their child(ren).

Heart of the artistic works

The core of an artistic work (the 'heart') lays in the choices of the artist in material, techniques, subject, etc. Eliz, Csilla, Amy and Eva spoke about and showed their artistic hearts during the interviews.

Moving and stillness

Eliz takes photographs not as a moment but as a movement, the photograph is a 'moving image'. She takes not one photograph at one specific moment but a beaks lump of time such as three photographs on one day.

Her serie 'October' (2019) (figure 21) we spoke about is made by the available eight Polaroid-slides within a package. She took the photographs in her own home (#1 and #8) and during the trip to and stay at her grandparents' house in Romania (#2 to #7). The home of her grandparents is a significant place for Eliz, especially the kitchen reminds Eliz of loving memories. All the eating, napping, playing and bathing took place in this room. Grandfather' chair and the big table with a sofa were important, like napping together with the cats and dogs. She loves the sun and its light in this house, which she cannot see, feel and find in London. Her present house in London does not feel home-yness, so after her graduation she wants to create a home somewhere else, preferably in Romania.

She rearranged the eight Polaroids to create the feeling and the capturing of a moment and movement. The essence of this serie is presence and absence. The first and last photographs are a glance out through a window of her house, when her daughter was at school. The six

photographs in between focuses on the movement in different forms as the moving train (#2), her grandfather stroking the face of her grandmother (#3) and her daughter who fall in the pillows (#4) as well as being moved by emotions (#5), by a story (#6) and the sunlight touching her hair (#7). For Eliz everything is the same when her daughter is there (present) and when she is away (absent).

Eliz describes creating a serie as *'repeating the image like a poem with a word that is repeated each time in a slightly different way.'* While listening back and processing my interview with her, I suddenly discovered a connection I had not yet made during the interview between this poetic perspective of a serie she mentions and her favourite children's book *Altató* by József Attila (figure 22) she talked about later on in our interview. *Altató* is a famous lullaby-book from Hungary/Romania about a boy who does not want to go to sleep. The lullaby, written as a poem, is about dreaming you can become anything you want. For the author dreaming about becoming a soldier, fire-fighter or sheppard is a big thing coming from poverty himself. Eliz' mother read the lullaby to her, her grandmother read it to her mother and Eliz read *Altató* to her daughter when she was little. This poetic lullaby became an intergenerational storybook within Hungarian and Romanian families and therefore became a cultural artifact.

Eliz herself related Attila' poem to her playing with distance as the writer goes from far away/outside as the cars on the street to being closer/inside as the promise of becoming a soldier in the boy's dreams. I make an additional connection next to her outside/inside-perspective as in the power of repetition and language, especially due to the fact she also underlined her proud of the Hungarian language for its pronounce, playfulness, different meaning for words and humour.

Colorful objects

Before becoming a mother, time and balance were already important in Csilla' art. She combines these elements with her interest in objects and still-life photography as well as composition and colour composition.

She used random domestic objects to create her Pillars, objects that were already in her house. Most of the times she grabbed these objects from the moment her son was asleep, sometimes she planned ahead with a image in mind. Her home is the main place of significance

for her artistry; mainly her emptied living room was important in realising this serie.

She tried not to use the same object within multiple sculptures, however after the first 15 photographs this became a challenge. She had to *'shake it up somehow'*, so during the process of this serie she started to place herself into the sculptures and shifted from only sculpturing from floor to ceiling to also using a table or the staircase. She intended to create 100 photographs with only objects, after 98 she felt it was enough. In 2019 she published her book 'Pillars of Home' with all 98 photographs of her sculptures.

Her Pillars–sculptures include symbolic elements that have to do with playfulness and humour like characters popping up and a trap when opening a door something falls down. (figure 23)

Csilla works in series because of the repetition, just as Eliz does. A single image does not do that much for her. She likes *'working on something for a longer period, researching it, producing versions of one thing.'* She has this in common with Amy.

Distance to reflect

Amy takes photographs, puts them on her/their computer and then it can take up a long period of time before she/they goes back to them to see the work she/they created. She/they needs time to understand things as a slow thinker as she/they describes as

when in the moment I'm too much involved in what happens, by looking back I understand it more. Reflect – let it grow – move on from that situation – detach yourself; I think I need that distance. Most of my work is conceived within a reflection that you understand it more.

This appears to be the same intrinsic working process Csilla mentioned. They also share a preference for working in series. Amy told that she/they is not that kind of bold person; a single artwork has to stand out and could exist as one. Otherwise she/they creates loads of series. Her/their Monster Mom came to due to what the kids were doing at that particular moment of taking the photograph as in different scenes, environments, times and days.

In the time Amy was working on Monster Mom she/they did not had all the resources as money, space and time for her/their artistry. So she/they used the camera on her/their mobile phone and a digital coloring app to create her/their monstermoms, in which the kitchen became her/their studio. Amy also produced work “on the go” where she/they recorded her/their thoughts during the walk from her/their house to the school of her/their children. She/they adapted to different places of significance to create her/their art. She/they became – as she/they called it herself/themselves – a walk-lover. Eva created her first serie also by walking.

Turn the ordinary

Everywhere she walks, Eva can find inspiration. She said that:

You yourself are the most important part wherever you are. This is also a kind of place of significance you take with you everywhere. Inspiration is within me so it does not matter where I am, I can find inspiration everywhere.

She also finds inspiration for her research on cyber pilgrimages on the computer and internet, so this became the cyber space of significance for her.

From something very ordinary or ugly, Eva makes something sacred. There is little challenge for her to have something very beautiful, because *'then I don't feel the transformation that is in that thing.'* An essential part of the process is that she extracts this thing from its surroundings or combines it with other things, so that she turns it into something else: *'The ordinary stands for life that is also very ordinary to me and that you make the positive out of it.'* She mentioned that if the fruit cap of her son had been an actual relic like the relic on the archive photograph, it would have been of no interest to her anymore.

Eva works intensively with notebooks to paste printed screenshots from the internet, drawings, images in books and other visual material that intrigues, inspires and interests her. (figure 24) She always has a lot of ideas that she cannot make all at once, so this way she cannot forget them.

Photography has recently become more of a tool for her. What she does with a photograph she often finds more interesting than taking the photograph itself. The beauty for her now lies in how she processes the footage. Eva can continuously experiment within this process, also re-uses and re-examines footage so sometimes footage appears in multiple series. She argues that something is never really finished:

I can go on with things until it becomes a mush. Sometimes I have to force myself to stop, a deadline for an exhibition, for example, is what I need.

Eva loves conceptual work that she does not understand. She wants to know more about it and often she does not, so you can let your own imagination run wild. She said that her own work

demands a lot from you as a viewer. It's not the most fun and easy thing to look at. It requires something to believe in my work, because what do I explain and what not?

The main similarity between the creative processes of the mother-artists is they all work within series. I guess this is no coincidence as I also work within series. You unconsciously make a selection in the work that touches or intrigues you.

Csilla and Eliz work with the element of time, as Amy and Eva can create ideas and art 'on the go'. None of them use a studio space to create work. Their actual lives are the surroundings in which they create art like the living room or the route between home and school.

Most of them research, reflect and experiment during the creation of an artwork, with digital and paper notebooks as ways to collect this process.

Amy and Eliz portray themselves and/or their families with a digital and/or analogue camera. Csilla and Eva depict objects and symbols, so the photocamera becomes a tool to depict their concepts.

Role models

I like to discuss the phenomenon of role models because two important issues came to my attention during the interviews and while analyzing my collected data. Within this research I consider a role model as a person, a spirit, an artist, an animal, an art movement, etc. who is an example for you in your motherhood and/or artistry and can be a source of inspiration on different levels. From this perspective I asked the mother-artists about role models in their motherhood and artistry.

Two mother-artists discussed about role models within their mothering. Eliz spoke about the important role her kind and nurturing mother and both her grandmothers play in her mothering. With great affection she described her grandmothers as hard-working resilient women who created something out of nothing, especially after many family members had been taken away from them during war. Csilla is amazed by how single parents take care of their children on their own, *‘especially artist who are pulling it off.’* I would say that both Eliz and Csilla find a sort of support and the inspiration from the way these people care and mother their families.

I do not know the underlying reason(s) why only these two mother-artists named role models in their motherhood. For this, I need more knowledge about (feminist) motherhood to be able to answer this question.

Two mother-artists specifically named famous/well-known historical female artists as role models: Mary Kelly, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Frida Kahlo. Kelly (mentioned by Eliz) and Laderman Ukeles (mentioned by Csilla), both from the 1970s, were named due to their important contribution on shifting the maternal subjectivity within arts and in their own artistry. Eliz also mentioned Kahlo as a role model for her strong personality by creating art while dealing with her sickness and pain. (figure 25) However, almost all mother-artists seemed to prefer to speak more elaborately about contemporary (mother-)artists as their role models rather than on historical (female/mother-) artists. Amy rather perceives the mother-artists with whom she/they works within the Desperate Artwives project as role models as well as Laura Godfrey-Isaacs as collaborative partner in artistry and midwifery for the past two years. Csilla named Lenka Clayton, the founder of the Artist Residency in

Motherhood, as a role model for her and many others through connecting so many artists who are mothers on one platform. Eva mentioned conceptual works from contemporary artists such as Penelope Umbrico and Walid Raad, so as a genre within the arts. Eliz spoke about the American photographer Leigh Ledare and his explicit, uncensored, real and honest photographs of his mother.

Eva also spoke about role models from outside the arts. She mentioned the concept of the pilgrim as her main role model as well as scientists who research the same topics within pilgrimage such as Peter Jan Margry at the Meertens Institution. She is fascinated by how a scientist researches and how she can apply this in her work. So it appears that Eva integrates scientific research methods and outcomes within her artistry.

Finally, none of the mother-artists mentioned a historically or contemporary art movement as a role model.

What stands out to me in the role models of the four mother-artists within their artistry is their stronger preference to contemporary (female/mother-) artists compared to historical artists. In some way this reminds me of the American Feminist Art Movement' goal to establish a matrilineage of female artists within art history as an alternative to the canon of male artists. With this matrilineage the movement wanted their artistic foremothers been represented within art history. Buller states that this matrilineage seems less important for contemporary artists, so it seems to the mother-artists within my research as well. She discusses a framework by art historian Carol Armstrong, who compared two photographs from different generations, in which Armstrong states that

what I am interested in here are echoes not sources, a haunting not a line of descent, eccentric coincidences not direct influences, a space of dim recollection and regression, not one of canonical progression. (citation by Buller, 2012, p.137)

It seems that Armstrong experiences (more) artistic freedom with echoes, hauntings, coincidences and recollection than with establishing representation of artistic foremothers within art history by sources, line of descent, influences and the canon. It also appears that she sets binaries within this framework e.g. echoes/sources, haunting/descent,

etc. By doing so, these dichotomies can possibly reinforce certain in/exclusion of artistic foremothers within art history. What I am missing in her statement, is what it means to you as an artist and as a mother to stand on the shoulders of foremothers, what you do with it in your daily life and how these echoes and hauntings influences the present narrative.

Artistic mothering

As the last paragraph of this chapter and as a final part of my analysis, I focus on the role of art within the families of three mother-artists. Particularly evident is the artistic collaboration that – sometimes unexpectedly – arises between these mother-artists and their child(ren).

Amy's oldest daughter made replica drawings out of imagery from her/their own visual journals Amy collected and brought from Italy – where she/they grew up– to London. For Amy, these replica drawings represent *'how a child looks up to a parent, what we as parents are passing on, what they take in of us as parents/mothers.'*

Csilla and her son started creating stopmotion-videos together during the COVID-19-lockdown last spring. She also worked with him –still in the directing stage– on imagery for a publication where she created imaginary friends for him. Together with her Colombian partner and father of her son, they let him *'experience as much stuff as possible, e.g. by going museums and visiting other countries, because we bring so much mixed culture in the house'*. He owns a small camera and loves to take photographs of the environment and especially collected and on-top-of-each other objects. I would say he creates his own Pillars of Home.

Eliz and her daughter and husband are all photographing their daily life and routines. There are a lot of photographs on the wall of their house and in family albums. Eliz explains that through *'the distance with our family roots, photos are important. We look after a photograph, they are precious to touch.'* It would seem that this documentary approach of Eliz' family creates an intergenerational meaning of photography of affects such as joy, love, sadness, shame, anxiety, mourning, beauty and magic.

Liss argues that creating 'complex and wondrous representation of the maternal self [...] leads to flowering of mutual respect, love, and intersubjectivity between a mother and a child.' (2009, p.152) By saying this, it would seem that more representation of the maternal self and artistic collaboration between mother-artists and their child(ren) like these three mother-artists can result in more diverse representation of mothering.

Conclusion

By conducting this research I wanted to know how British and Dutch mother-artists empower their mothering and artistry with their photographic maternal art, so they can fight for change in the oppressive powerstructures they (may) experience. Based on my research various interconnected layers of ambivalence became visible out of the lived experiences of the participating mother-artists within society and the arts.

The mother-artists discussed the double feelings they experienced as a (new) mother in relation to societal norms about the place of a mother within society as well as the commitment to their mothering and their artistry. The motherly ambivalence experienced by the mother-artists seems to be connected to the intersubjectivity of the mother and the artist. This intersubjectivity appears to relate to the “good mother”-ideal within society, the feminist-mother dichotomy and the embodied and committed presence while mothering and/or creating art.

The “good mother”-ideal seems to be related to Rich’ discourse on the institution of motherhood that is created and imposed on women by patriarchy that beholds the engrained codes of cultural and societal expectations of motherhood. People feel the need to condemn a mother when she does not meet up to the ideal mothering by judging a mother by her actions. Depicting this ideal within art can create a wake-up call for transforming this “good mother” into a human being with ambivalent feelings and certain needs.

Contemporary scholars define feminist mothering as being both a mother and a feminist and therefore this ‘confuses the normalized order of gender and power.’ (Liss, 2009, p.xvi) Feminist mothering can dismiss the dichotomy of the feminist-mother, where a woman will be burdened with the care of a child as well as being (partly) financially dependent on her husband.

The interviews also revealed that all mother-artists struggle with finding balance between all their priorities, ‘a never-ending juggling act’. As I see it, this ongoing balancing act symbolises the commitment of a feminist mother-artist to her artistry and to her mothering.

As being a mother and an artist seem to intertwine and (re)shape each other, it is important to acknowledge the narrow and essentialist representation of motherhood in art. The influence of the second-wave feminist art movement has not yet resulted in the equal inclusion of mother-artists and the representation of motherhood as a subject within the arts nowadays.

It seems that there are four powerstructures maintaining this dominant representation. First of all, historically white Western male artists produced imagery of mother Mary who embodied 'the all-loving, all-forgiving and all-sacrificing mother.' (Buller, 2012, p.1) This male gaze in the artistic depiction of the institution of motherhood leads to the denying of the maternal subjectivity by mother-artists and artists with other axes of identity such as LGBTQA+, BIPOC, disability, etc. The participating mother-artists stated that any artist could create maternal art, whereby an intersectional approach of the maternal subjectivity beyond the dominant view is crucial. Yet, the former representations of Mother Mary still influence the (online) imagery of today' motherhood. This perfect mother Mary we look up therefore reinforces the oppressive patriarchal motherhood on mothers.

Second, the arts seems to impose a false sentiment on maternal art created by mother-artists. By framing art of e.g. a pregnant body created by mother-artists as "sentimental", both the mother' body within society and the representation of this motif by mother-artists in the arts appears to be dismissed. As a result, a mother-artist can be stigmatised as artist-MAMA. As I see it, maternal art from the lived experiences of mother-artists are labelled sentimental and artist-MAMA to de-value them to maintain the depiction of the patriarchal institution of motherhood.

Third, a female artist has to be labelled with axes of her identity and a male artist does not. His gender appears to be the dominant view of who an artist is, so there is no need to mention it. So the ambivalent dilemma is whether the label 'mother-artist' benefits exposing the oppressive structures within the arts, or whether the label actually reinforces and continues the unequal position of a woman and mother who wants to be acknowledged as an artist. I particularly wonder whether it can coexist and work simultaneously to accomplish breaking out of the margins within the arts.

Last, being a mother and an artist also raises practical challenges such as participating an artist residency, attending exhibition openings and living under minimum wages. Almost all participating mother–artists mentioned the difficult economic position of themselves or (mother–) artists in general. Intersecting with class critiques the cultural and social space in which working mothers within the arts have to struggle to survive.

The mother–artists within my research connect their lived experiences with their maternal gaze to create a new intersectional representation of motherhood. A thin line between the artistic and domestic life means for some mother–artists that these lives can become entangled, regardless of whether they want to or not. The outcome is that they choose to depict their domestic life as (main) subject in their artistic life. So the maternal gaze of a mother–artist on her/their lived experiences from both lives creates a way to artistically express the complexities of this maternal subjectivity, whether it is with objects and conceptual or with self–portraits and portraying your child(ren).

All four mother–artists feel that motherhood within contemporary art is getting more attention and that change is happening. I think that the maternal artwork of high–profile artists as Carmen Winant, Elinor Carucci, Sally Man and others contributes to the removal of the stigma of an artist–MAMA. I would say that intersectional exhibitions, publications and other forms of (artistic) visibility of artists who are caregivers are essential for the recognition and acknowledgement of maternal art that is created by mother–artists. It can create a shift from the daily life of motherhood that is not allowed outside its “proper place” into the representation of the lived experiences of mothering within society and the arts.

What stood out for me in the artistic role models of all mother–artists is their stronger preference to contemporary (female/mother–) artists compared to historical artists. Also, none of the mother–artists mentioned a historically or contemporary art movement as a role model.

The main similarities between the creative processes of the four mother–artists is working within series, their actual life is the surrounding in which they create art and the process of researching, reflecting and

experimenting during creating. The major difference between the mother-artists is in the chosen maternal subjects and its expression of these subjects in their maternal art as (self-)portraying the family and depicting (domestic) objects and symbols.

Three mother-artists (unexpectedly) started an collaboration with their child(ren). This artistic collaboration can result in a more diverse representation of the maternal self and mothering when their work would be published and/or exhibited.

The interviews revealed the importance of being part of a community, either related to motherhood and/or artistry. The revival of communities since the 2010s may be caused by the appearance of a global fourth-wave feminist (art) movement, in which mother-artists and their need for support search and find both local as international (online) communities thanks to the internet.

These communities are part of a broader institutionalization of initiatives for, with and by mother-artists. Three mother-artists mentioned the online Artist Residency in Motherhood as their starting-point, one British and one Dutch mother-artist started their own artistic and activist projects to empower mother-artists and/or maternal art.

The participating British and Dutch mother-artists in my research depict the ambivalence of being a mother and an artist through their own lived experiences of powerstructures within society and the arts. They also see and take chances to research, question and deconstruct these oppressive discourses with their photographical maternal art. By doing so, they do not only depict feminist mothering in their maternal art but also mother the Western arts into becoming more inclusive, just and intersectional.

Recommendation

By creating photographic maternal art of lived experiences, mother-artists depict motherhood from their intersectional perspective. This maternal art can potentially empower feminist mothering within society. Powerstructures within the arts seem to restrain the process of change within depicting motherhood beyond the dominant gaze. Thus it is crucial to support this process to reach equal inclusion of mother-artists, the representation of motherhood as a subject within the arts and strengthen feminist mothering. As I see it, this process connects activism and art into the appropriate term 'artivism', coined by the funding organization MamaCash in 2017.

Therefore, I suggest the following four recommendations for contemporary and future organisations, initiatives and collectives in science and art that support this process of maternal artivism by mother-artists.

Mother-artists in photographic maternal arts

Within art and/or feminist research practise, mother-artists in the photographic maternal arts have been less of a subject in contrary to (feminist) research on other artistic medium and photographic narratives through family photo albums.

My research was focused on the narratives of British and Dutch mother-artists in the photographic maternal arts. British mother-artists are minimally represented in the literature I applied for this research, while Dutch mother-artists are not represented yet. Existing research has often been written from an American, European and/or Western perspective. In any research, an intersectional approach is of great importance to give these narratives a place outside the dominant narrative, such as gender (fathers), race (black mothers/parents), location (Eastern/Southern/local), sexual orientation (LGBTQ+-parents) and family composition such a single parents.

Thus I recommend more feminist research on mother-artists in the photographic maternal arts from an intersectional perspective.

Being part of artistic community

To grow, collaborate and find inspiration within your artistry you may want to be part of an artistic community. Three aspects of this community were mentioned within my research: artist residencies, exhibition openings and community in the Netherlands.

Too many of the artist residencies worldwide are aimed at artists who do not have a family of their own, have no caring responsibilities and/or earn sufficient/good wages. There should be opportunities for all artists to take part in a residency, without any axes of someone's identity being an obstacle. This recommends an intersectional approach, other forms of funding, adjustments within a space for accessibility and knowing what these artists really need to progress.

Attending exhibition openings can be challenging as they mainly take place during the evenings. I recommend museums, galleries and other exhibition-spaces to consider whom they represent and acknowledge the diversity within this group. For example, an exhibition in New Mexico State University started the opening of the exhibition 'Labor: Motherhood and Art in 2020' shortly after dinner, so that artists and children could join in. I recommend that openings with exhibitions on subjects other than maternal art may also be programmed at times which do not exclude these artists.

There is little community in the Netherlands for female artists who are mothers, compared to the United Kingdom. M/Other Voices is a Dutch platform that initiates, supports, does, promotes, raises awareness and gives visibility to maternal thinking, -theory and -research within the arts, culture, philosophy and the society at large, as well as to increase the participation of mothers in the production of art, culture and theory. My collaboration with this platform started this last Spring and together with the director I am developing various plans, such as building a Dutch community of maternal artists.

Making transgressive maternal imagery visible

As I stated within my conclusion, intersectional exhibitions, publications and other forms of (artistic) visibility of mother-artists are essential for the recognition and acknowledgement of their maternal art and to gain new perceptions of motherhood in general.

The first step is to gain insight into the existing publications of mother-artists worldwide and to gather them into a literature list. This list needs to be published online as well printed and distributed to bookstores, libraries, art and education institutions, etc.

The second step is to publish more work of mother-artists and artists who are caregivers. Not every artist has the (financial) opportunity to publish a book through an official publisher. Some mother-artists choose to self-publish their own work, as one of the participating mother-artists in my research did. I recommend existing publishers to expand their targetgroup and funding. Another option is to set up an independent (inter)national publisher for these transgressive art books, such as independent feminist press Demeter Press from Canada who publish peer-reviewed scholarly work, fiction, poetry, and creative non-fiction on mothering, reproduction, sexuality and family.

By publishing these transgressive imagery the label of sentimental on maternal art and therefore the dominant gaze of the institution of motherhood can shift to the meaning and context of maternal art from lived experiences.

Historiographic matrilineage of maternal art

Where there always/never mother-artists in the arts? What does it mean to stand on the shoulders of artistic foremothers? How do these echoes and hauntings influence the present narrative within the arts?

I consider haunting as a form of excluding a voice within a narrative, while that voice is still there in the present time. This voice is (unconsciously) being past on to new generations. So how can this voice be heard and come to rightful place within the narrative, which in this case are the excluded voices of artistic foremothers within art history? I believe that these excluded voices from the dominant canon of art history are causing the mother-artists within my research to mention a few historical (female/mother-) artists.

I also suspect that the dominant canon of art history influences the feelings of ambivalence within mothering and artistry the mother-artists in my research discussed about. I would say that the lack of intersectional approach of representing motherhood within art history still reinforces the patriarchal institution of motherhood in present time.

Therefore I recommend developing and publishing a transgressive and historiographic matrilineage of artistic foremothers/caregivers who created maternal art from lived experiences. From primary school till university, there is too often a singular perception of both the so-called great artists such as Picasso, Rembrandt, Michelangelo and Van Gogh and of subjects as architecture, glorious victories, naked women and nature. With this matrilineage unheard narratives and unseen artworks take up their rightful and equal space within art history.

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Appendices

Appendix #1 – Quotation

Within my analysis I applied quotation from the interviews with the participating mother-artists. This appendix is a summary of the quotes from the three chapters of my analysis, divided in each participant. I recorded the interviews with a dictaphone. The mentioned time behind each quote is the actual moment in the interview that they made this statement.

Eliz (recordings part 1, 2 & 3)

Interviewdate: Wednesday February 26, 2020; in her shared studio at the Camberwell College of Arts in London (UK)

So many times you have to choose. I just don't want to choose, I want to do both. I have to choose many times like how much time I spent doing art and how much time I spend with my daughter and my family. Here in England there is the notion of time. But I can easily loose the notion of time. When I go home on the evening and until the next day I don't think about my art. I just enjoy the time with my family so much. The same happens when I make art [on the University]: the whole day I'm not thinking about my family. I really live in that moment and be focused on what I'm doing. I feel really bad between these two things.

(part 1/1:06:15)

... portraits and self-portraits of the mother and/or child are more about yourself. Photographs of everyday objects are about explaining and describe motherhood, but the mother and/or child are absent. The objects become some sort of a fetish. (part 2/21:00)

I have become aware of the boundaries in the privacy of daughter, more mindful how much and what I show of my daughter in an image for an artwork. People can be bad or mentally sick with photographs of children.

(part 1/23:30)

...in the UK it is too explicit. (part 1/39:45)

Honesty is hard to be digested by people. A naked child in an ad for a skin product is okay, so I was ashamed and crossed. Why am I not allowed to do that? To be honest feels as an oppression. (part 1/48:50)

... my present work is about all kind of aspects of motherhood.
(part 2/26:20)

... this group kept me moving in creating my art. (part 1/1:22:10)

... repeating the image like a poem with a word that is repeated each time in a slightly different way. (part 3/13:15)

...the distance with our family roots, photos are important. We look after a photograph, they are precious to touch. (part 1/17:10)

Amy (one recording)

Interviewdate: February 27, 2020; in the livingroom of her own house in London (UK)

There are so many assumptions like you have to be happy being a mother, that motherhood is a incredible journey with no obstacles, everybody is just smiling all the time, children are running over beautiful green fields. But I didn't feel this at all.
(6:00)

Parker explains why the terms love and hate are problematic in relation to motherhood/maternal. She captures the power of love and of hate. Love is a more acknowledged affection than hate. It is taken for granted within the experience of mothering. In reality love and hate coexist and they can't exist without the other. Accepting hate as a part of our lives, it become lighter and easier. Parker made me feel normal and human.
(7:10)

The monster was always there as well as myself, like a double everyday reality. (10:15)

Mothers are judged in public when you become (partly) the Monster Mom when your child is having a tantrum. People shake their head and give judgemental looks like 'She can't control her child'. With my one-eyed Monster Mom I need to look out to the viewer for understanding, showing I am human and looking for understanding, for empathy, for sympathy. Instead of shaking a head, give a nod of 'I get it'. I always go to a mother to reassure or encourage her. (22:10)

...how to hold on to your memories. (15:20)

What happens with my art practice when my work is still related to my children and motherhood but due to ethics I don't portray them in my work? (31:50)

... the art world was kind of a hostile place. That place where it did not consider my reality: being a mother, not having money, don't owning a studio, etc. (36:20)

Oh, another picture of a child, how boring! (46:25)

...it was not the reality. There were no artists at that time that really painted what the reality [of motherhood] was. (51:25)

Now women artists who are mothers are more exposing themselves. There is still a lot of work to be done, but it is definitely happening more then when I started. There are lots of us showing the massive and positive effects on the household and children in being an artist and being a mother. But society seems to not be ready yet for these progressive thoughts. (36:50)

Why can't I just be an artist? (43:00)

I also want to rebel against it. What different does it make if I am a mother? You don't need to know what my sexuality is, if I am white or black. You look at my concept, you look at what I do. (44:00)

... taken out of the conversation, because both men and women are victim of the patriarchal system. (54:20)

Knowledge is power, especially when you think you are the only person who is feeling that way. So a community is a great asset to manage the ambivalence. By sharing, reading, talking, acknowledging it. By finding and creating a safe space and being with like-minded people, so you can be understood and don't feel afraid to tell. Your feelings are been validated. (17:20)

... when in the moment I'm too much involved in what happens, by looking back I understand it more. Reflect – let it grow – move on from that situation – detach yourself; I think I need that distance. Most of my work is conceived within a reflection that you understand it more. (14:45)

... how a child looks up to a parent, what we as parents are passing on, what they take in of us as parents/mothers. (33:55)

Csilla (one recording)

Interviewdate: Monday May 11, 2020 with online video platform Jitsi, Csilla was in her own home in Hoorn (NL) and I was in my attic studio in Utrecht (NL)

... your brain becomes kind of like a mush. (36:15)

... close out everything around you and becomes meditative in some way so you have that (half a) hour to yourself. (40:35)

... a lot of ambivalent feelings with it like how much do I want to include motherhood in my work. I feared that by bringing this in, the aesthetics of the image would be less. For me at that moment, it was important that my sculptures were not about my son. (46:25)

... you have reasoning why things are happening, but you should also be able to enjoy it without knowing the background or the story. (44:10)

The last couple of years have changed me so much. Sometimes you have to think what would have happened if I didn't have a child. My art practice became –kind of stupid to say– deeper by it, because I became much more involved with something than before. So for me it rose a lot of extra things to my practice that I don't know if I had without becoming a mother. (1:18:10)

... came from a personal experience as a reaction to my own situation as well as for other artists who are mothers. It does not affect most male artists, because most primary caregivers are still mothers. (1:24:05)

... who need this even more. (1:25:00)

You can't go and engage with others, because you have to stay at home. (1:26:20)

I understand why an artist decides to not have children, because you're sacrificing your time while your future is really unstable with no pension, living in social housing or 'anti-kraak', etc. So most artists combine their art practice with a part-time job. It is just not easy to combine your artistic practice with parenthood. (1:20:15)

I think that the image of the mother and her child does not have to be that idealistic now. (1:33:40)

Motherhood as a topic becomes wider but mainstream is still conservative. (1:37:25)

Motherhood can be a lot of things like transgender parents, fathers, people that are mothering and not necessarily children. So you do not have to be a mother or a parent to create art on motherhood. (1:57:10)

... shake it up somehow. (55:15)

... working on something for a longer period, researching it, producing versions of one thing. (1:04:30)

... especially artists who are pulling it off. (1:59:00)

...experience as much stuff as possible, e.g. by going museums and visiting other countries, because we bring so much mixed culture in the house. (1:29:45)

Eva (one recording)

Interviewdate: Saturday May 16, 2020 with online video platform Jitsi, Eva was in her studio in Diemen (NL) and I was in my attic studio in Utrecht (NL)

... has taken my fighting spirit away; I want this too. I always thought you have to be able to do both. I felt it as a gift to take care of my son for the first four years, instead of being burdened with it as a woman. (19:00)

... because I am the most impatient mother ever. (22:20)

For many Western people Mary symbolizes motherhood and how we think we will be. It also imposes on us something of the perfect mother we all look up to. Nowadays it has almost becomes a kind of a contest with the blogs and Instagram accounts in which mothers promote everything they do with their children, as well as all the books you can read on mothering. There is so much you should do that sometimes I don't know where to start. (23:00)

I am actually undertaking a kind of pilgrimage. Even though I am just walking, it still feels like a pilgrimage when also a little lost. (2:30)

You are actually expected to do the same as when you are not a mother, I found that especially difficult the first few years. (1:29:30)

... it is not that long ago that Marina Abramović said she only got this far [in her artistry], because she didn't become a mother. So I think the taboo is still there. (1:25:50)

... my artistry is partly an escape from motherhood. Being an artist gives me some space to myself, I don't want to blemish this with me being a

mother. Motherhood is also different for everyone, so what this entails for you and what you do with it in your work is different. (1:20:30)

I do seek recognition in my artistic struggles. Not in my motherhood, I have another community for that. (1:11:15)

You yourself are the most important part wherever you are. This is also a kind of place of significance you take with you everywhere. Inspiration is within me so it does not matter where I am, I can find inspiration everywhere. (1:19:05)

... then I don't feel the transformation that is in that thing. (33:50)

The ordinary stands for life that is also very ordinary to me and that you make the positive out of it. (34:55)

I can go on with things until it becomes a mush. Sometimes I have to force myself to stop, a deadline for an exhibition, for example, is what I need. (49:20)

... demands a lot from you as a viewer. It's not the most fun and easy thing to look at. It requires something to believe in my work, because what do I explain and what not? (1:00:15)

Imagery

Section 2



Figure 1

My Birth
Carmen Winant
2018



Figure 2

Mother
Elinor Carucci
2013

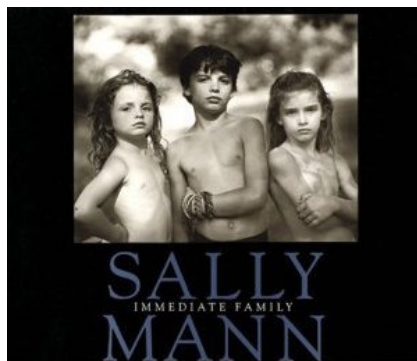


Figure 3

Immediate Family
Sally Mann
1992

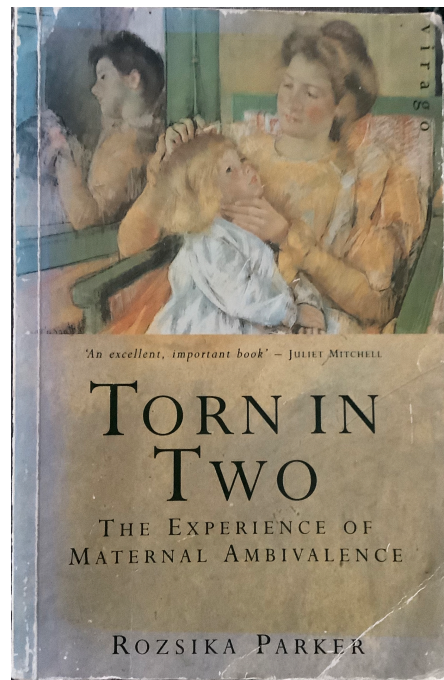


Figure 4

Amy' copy of Torn in Two by Rozsika Parker

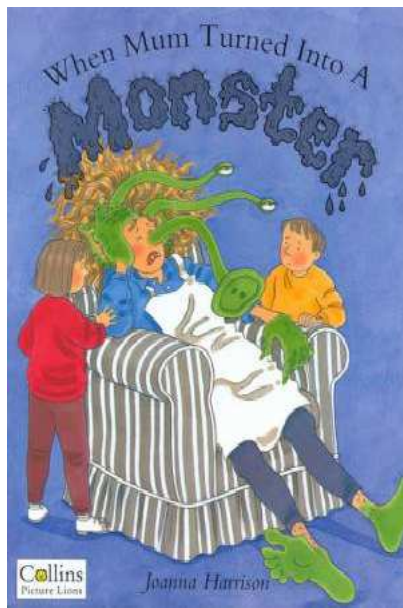
Photograph © Amy Dignam

2020



Figure 5

Monster Mom © Amy Dignam
2014



“The cousins are coming to tea and Mum is busy cleaning, shopping and cooking. Sam and his sister are no help at all; they just bicker and whinge and create even more mess. Meanwhile, something very strange is happening to Mum! Suddenly the door burst open. I had never seen Mum looking THIS cross before! She tried to shout, but all that came out was smoke and flames and a terrible roar. “Oh no, “ whispered Sam. “She’s gone completely BONKERS!”

Figure 6

When Mum Turned Into A Monster

Joanna Harrison

1996



Figure 7

Pillars of Home © Csilla Klenyánszki

2016-2017

Selection by Isabelle Zumbrink

2020



Figure 8
Madonna and Child
Duccio di Buoninsegna
Ca. 1300



Figure 9
Madonna della Misericordia
(*Virgin of Mercy*)
Piero della Francesca
Ca. 1460



Figure 10

Eva and her postcard of Mary (own collection)

Photo taken during online interview

May 16, 2020 © Isabelle Zumbrink



Figure 11

Photographs daughter in the bathtub © Eliz Varga Boglárka
2019–2020

Photographs taken during interview
February 26, 2020 © Isabelle Zumbrink

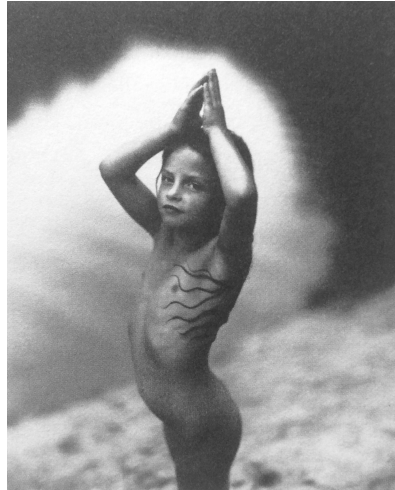


Figure 12

Photographs from Immediate Family © Sally Mann

1992

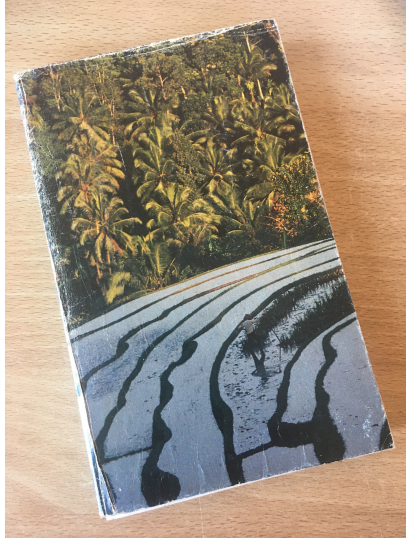


Figure 13

Found book during treasure hunt by Eva

Photograph © Eva van Ooijen

2020

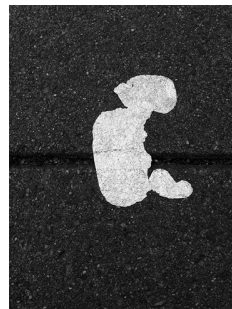
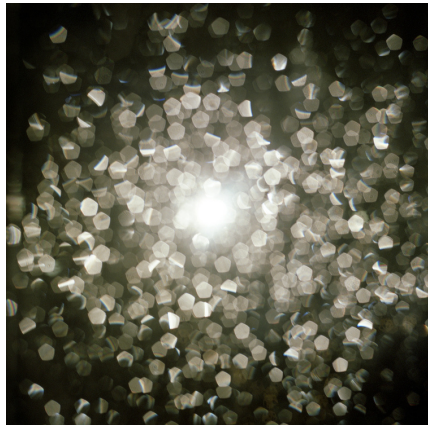
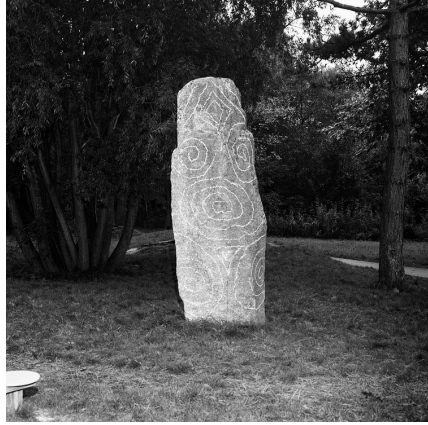
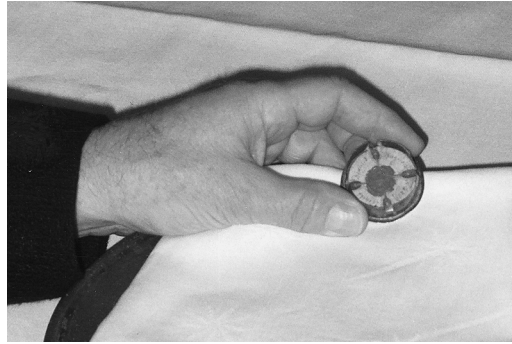


Figure 14

Fragmented Traveling © Eva van Ooijen

2016-2017



Relic of St. Nicolaas van Tolentijn,
St. Josephkerk, Nieuw-Namen (NL)

Photograph © Ottie Thiers

Year unknown



Eva and the cap of a fruit snack (own collection)

Photo taken during online interview

May 16, 2020 © Isabelle Zumbrink



Photograph from 'Fragmented Traveling' © Eva van Ooijen
2016-2017

Figure 15

Selected and collected by Isabelle Zumbrink

2020



Figure 16

Laundry Works © Mother Art Collective

1977



Figure 17

ReProduction / Mothers in Arts © Csilla Klenyánszki
2017

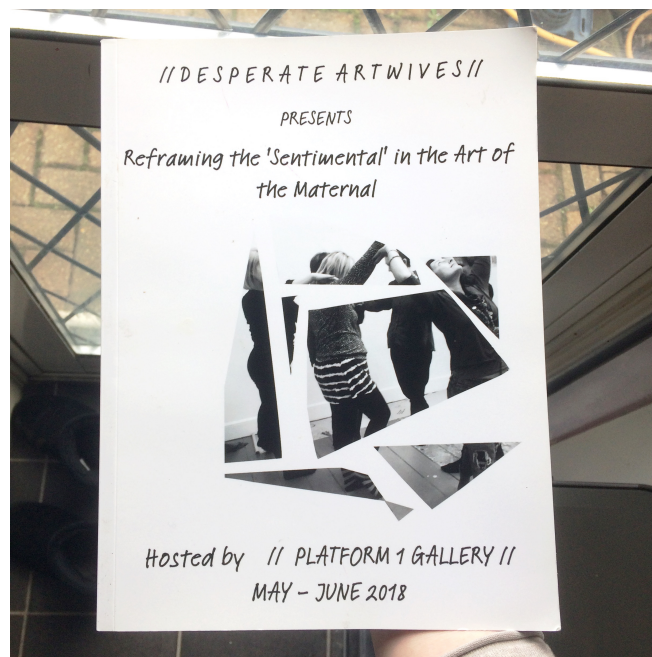


Figure 18

Workshop programme 2018 © Desperate Artwives
Photo taken during interview
February 27, 2020 © Isabelle Zumbrink



Figure 19

My Birth © Carmen Winant
2018



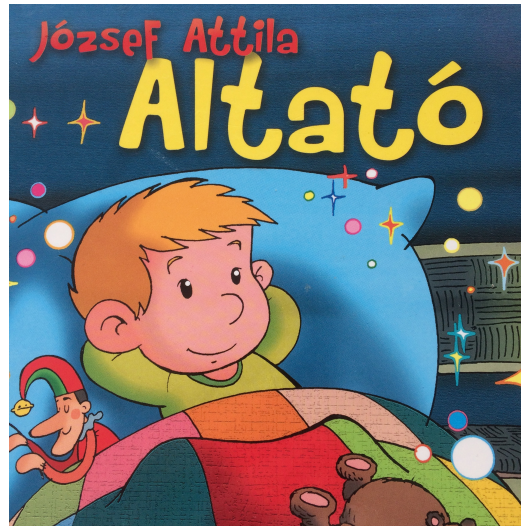
Figure 20

Eva and her found object of a mother carrying a child
Photo taken during online interview
May 16, 2020 © Isabelle Zumbrink



Figure 21

October © Eliz Varga Boglárka
2019



Altató (Hungarian)

Lehunytja kék szemét az ég,
lehunytja sok szemét a ház,
dunna alatt alszik a rét –
aludj el szépen, kis Balázs.

Lábára lehajtja fejét,
alszik a bogár, a darázs,
vele alszik a zümmögés –
aludj el szépen, kis Balázs.

A villamos is aluszik,
– s míg szendereg a robogás –
álmában csönget egy picit –
aludj el szépen, kis Balázs.

Alszik a széken a kabát,
szunyadozik a szakadás,
máma már nem hasad tovább –
aludj el szépen, kis Balázs.

Szundít a lapda, meg a sip,
az erdő, a kirándulás,
a jó cukor is aluszik –
aludj el szépen, kis Balázs.

A távolságot, mint üveg
golyót, megkapod, óriás
leszel, csak hunyd le kis szemed, –
aludj el szépen, kis Balázs.

Tüzoltó leszel s katona!
Vadakat terelő juhász!
Látod, elalszik anyuka. –
Aludj el szépen, kis Balázs.

Lullaby (English)

The sky's blue eyes are falling shut,
shut, too, the house's many eyes;
fields sleep beneath their coverlet –
so go to sleep now, little Blaise.

Ants rest their heads upon their knees,
the drowsy wasps are in a daze,
their business and buzzing cease –
so go to sleep now, little Blaise.

The streetcar snores, its rumbling
dozes, forgetful of the days,
but rings its dream-bell, ding-a-ling –
so go to sleep now, little Blaise.

Asleep the jacket on the chair,
its torn sleeve dozes where it lies,
this day no further will it tear –
so go to sleep now, little Blaise.

The whistle snoozes, and the ball,
the woods and picnic holidays,
the favourite choccie-bar, and all –
so go to sleep now, little Blaise.

Distance, glass marble of the skies,
you will achieve in all your ways,
you'll be a giant; close your eyes –
and go to sleep now, little Blaise.

A soldier, fireman, you will be!
Shepherd, you'll lead wild game to graze!
Mummy herself drifts off, just see –
so go to sleep now, little Blaise.

Figure 22

Altató

József Attila

First edition: 1935



Figure 23

Pillars of Home © Csilla Klenyánszki

2016–2017

Selection by Isabelle Zumbrink

2020



Figure 24

Eva with cards for inspiration
 Photo taken during online interview
 May 16, 2020 © Isabelle Zumbrink

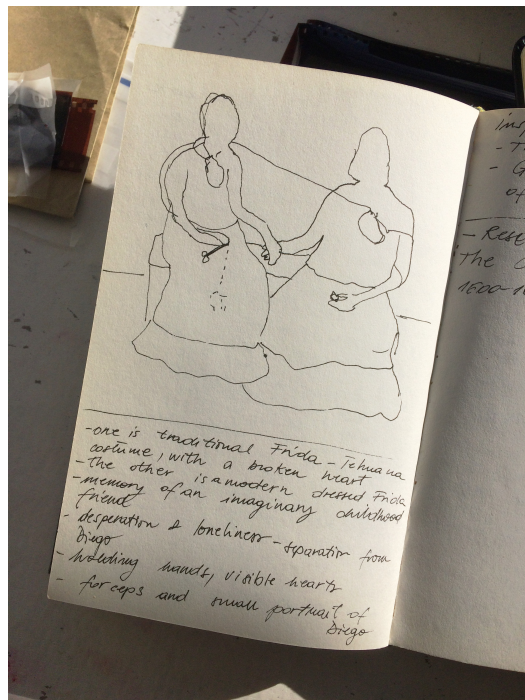


Figure 25

Eliz' sketch and thoughts on work of Frida Kahlo
 Photo taken during interview
 February 26, 2020 © Isabelle Zumbrink

Artist biographies

Section 3

Eliz Varga Boglárka

Age	32
Place of residency	London (UK)
Ethnicity, race and/or roots	White Hungarian
Gender & sexuality	Heterosexual cis-woman
Family	Married
Children	One (4 y.)
Creative identity	Photographer Visual artist Mother-artist
Highest degree of school	MA Visual Arts Printmaking
Medium	Photography
Artistic style	Analogue (film and print) and digital photography



Instagram: @elizboglarkavarga

MA Printmaking:

www.mavisualarts.com/boglarka-eliz-varga/

Flickr:

www.flickr.com/photos/elizboglarkavarga/

Blog: boglarkavarga.blogspot.com

Artist statement

‘My work for the past two years has been examining the relationship of the mother and daughter dyad as the child develops from birth to the first years of life. The duality and the sense of separation, transformation and loss are explored experimentally through image making.

While elaborating in the subject of motherhood and its complexity, mainly focusing on privacy, separation and belonging my primary artistic tool is the

camera. These vernacular photographs are the point of departure for my artworks in various printmaking techniques.’

East London Printmakers Graduate Marketing Award 2020

Mid-July 2020 Eliz won the East London Printmakers Graduate Marketing Award for her MA degree show from MA Visual Arts Printmaking at Camberwell College of Arts (London, UK).

Amy Dignam

Age	42
Place of residency	London (UK)
Ethnicity, race and/or roots	White Italian
Gender & sexuality	Prefer not to say
Family	Married
Children	Three (12-9-7 y.)
Creative identity	Visual artist Mother-artist Curator Coordinator of art projects/ organisation/ movement
Highest degree of school	BA
Medium	Photography, video, drawings, performance and installation
Artistic style	Digital, mixed media



www.amyfdignam.weebly.com

www.desperateartwives.co.uk

Instagram: @amyfdignam

Artist statement

Amy's work is about everyday life, identity, motherhood, childhood, longing. Amy's art practice explores the mundane and originates from the female body and its existence as a mother and artist.

Her work is mainly autobiographical – about the process of becoming identity-less and finding herself yet again in some strange foreign place – motherhood.

Statement Desperate Artwives project

Amy is the founder and curator of the Desperate Artwives project – a collective of women artists whose work is entirely created in-between domestic chores, paying the bills and family life.

She is Co-Founder of the Mother House Pilot in September 2016 and Art Curator Volunteer at FiLiA.

Csilla Klenyanszki

Age	34
Place of residency	Hoorn (NL)
Ethnicity, race and/or roots	White Hungarian
Gender & sexuality	Heterosexual cis-woman
Family	Relation/partner
Children	One (4 y.)
Creative identity	Photographer Visual artist Mother-artist Coordinator of art projects/ organisation/ movement
Highest degree of school	BA, currently enrolled MA Art Praxis at ArtEZ (NL)
Medium	Photography and installation
Artistic style	Still life, objects, abstract, composition and colour composition



www.klenyanszki.com

Instagram: @csillaklenyanszki

Pillars of Home
www.pillarsofhome.com

Mothers in Arts Residency
www.mothersinarts.com

Artist statement

‘A search for balance with a problemsolving attitude characterises my work. Within my current practice I carefully examine and deconstruct personal –but universally known– challenges such as parenthood, gender, and the malleability of self-identity through the passage of time.

Works, such as “Pillars of home”, “to make time”,

“House/hold” or the “Mothers in Arts Residency” aim to give solutions that range from the practical to the absurd.

Although my approach is analytic, the nature of the work is highly playful and experimental. To give a new perspective I often play with the borders of nonsense with a constant attraction to physical and mental tension.’

Eva van Ooijen

Age	34
Place of residency	Amsterdam (NL)
Ethnicity, race and/or roots	Caucasian
Gender & sexuality	Heterosexual cis-woman
Family	Relation/partner
Children	One (4 y.)
Creative identity	Visual artist
Highest degree of school	BA
Medium	Photography, moving images and installation
Artistic style	Conceptual



www.evavanooijen.nl
www.lourdesaandeamstel.net
Instagram: @eva_van_ooijen

Artist statement

Eva is a visual artist who grew up in Zutphen (NL), where she attended a Waldorf School. This is where the groundwork was laid for her aesthetic view on the world. In 2009 she got her photography degree from the Hogeschool voor de Kunsten in Utrecht (NL).

In her work she takes things historical, like a pilgrimage, as her starting point. Tales about

visions, healing and miracles that seem far-fetched, but spike her curiosity.

Investigating these tales by gathering evidence. Making them her own using analogy, metaphors and association. She looks at the modern world like an archaeologist from the future, examining reoccurring themes and trends. Not taking things as truth but creating one.