

Myrel Chernick

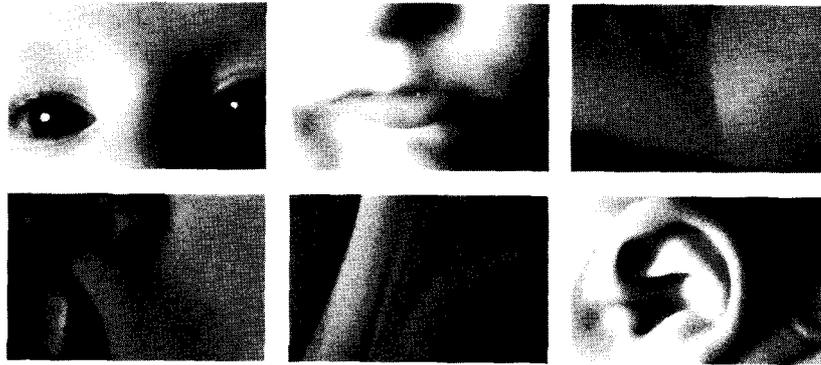
Maternal Metaphors

Artists/Mothers/Artwork

The exhibition *Maternal Metaphors* approaches the mother/child relationship from multiple viewpoints, in work that ranges from drawing, painting and photography to video, sculpture and installation. Medium, however, is less the focus than motherhood, for when an artist chooses to become a mother, she makes a difficult decision that further complicates her already complicated existence. “Busy” becomes “frantic,” passions are divided, financial and time constraints multiply.

Our culture publicly celebrates motherhood to such an extreme that any form of ambivalence—mother-toward-child especially—is difficult to express. Some artists, particularly women whose work already grapples with issues of identity, feel compelled to incorporate the concerns and conflicts, as well as the passions, of motherhood into their work. The conflicts of the mother-child relationship are compounded for the deeply committed artist. She finds herself in a continual struggle to meet the demands of her art and her family, as well as those of the dominant culture. The artwork included here reflects this struggle, seeks out and examines these conflicts, rather than celebrates the traditionally depicted image of the most perfect dyad.

The visual art world appears particularly ambivalent toward mothers, who have been known to conceal the existence of their children. This is a serious lack in a culture that reproduces itself on many levels through visual imagery, for both women and men need to see expression of these complex issues as well as read about them. The treatment of the subject matter in this exhibition as well as its presentation vary greatly, from the theoretical to the social, examining daily routine as well as unconscious choices, and is not afraid to address aberrant behavior that is rarely discussed until it flares up in the form of infanticide or child abuse, resulting in sensational headlines and brief public outcry.



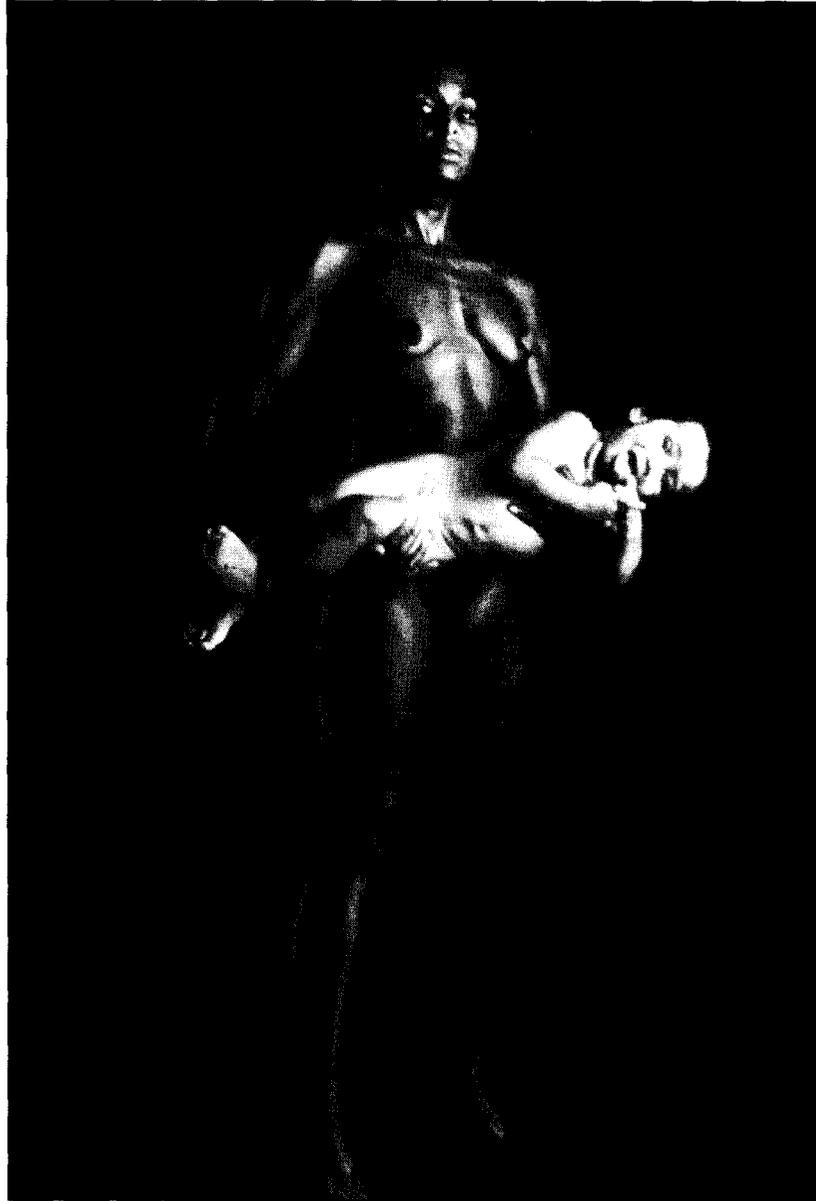
*Mary Kelly, "Primapara, Bathing Series."
12 black and white photographs, 7.5 X 11 cm each*

Mary Kelly's seminal work, "Post-Partum Document," brought many issues of motherhood into public debate. Here we see her series of photographs "Primapara," intimate records of the rituals of the infant's life, which address the representation of the mother's desire.



*Aura Rosenberg,
"Laurie Simmons/Lena,
1998." C-print, 16" x
14" and 40" x 30"*

Aura Rosenberg paints children's faces and costumes their bodies so that her striking and startling photographs raise issues not of horrific babies but of manipulative parenting.



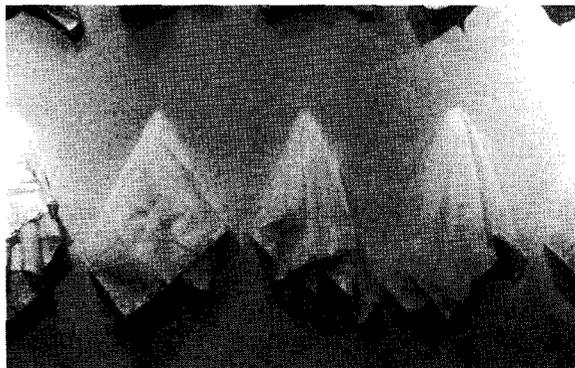
Renee Cox, "Yo Mama, 1993." Silver gelatin print.

Renee Cox's dramatic and unconventional projections of herself as mother (both pregnant and postpartum) from her "Yo Mama" series challenge the depictions of mother and child that range from medieval Madonnas to Mary Cassatt.



*Marion Wilson, "Playing War," two room installation at
Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, 1999*

Marion Wilson's "Playing War" incorporates sculptures of armored babies, antique guns and abstracted photographic images of children's faces to contrast brutal reality with glorified motherhood. Simultaneously alarming and beautiful, the work confronts both the fear and acceptance of violence in contemporary culture.



*Sarah Webb, "Milk and
Tears, 2000." Birdseye
weave cloth diapers,
embroidery.*

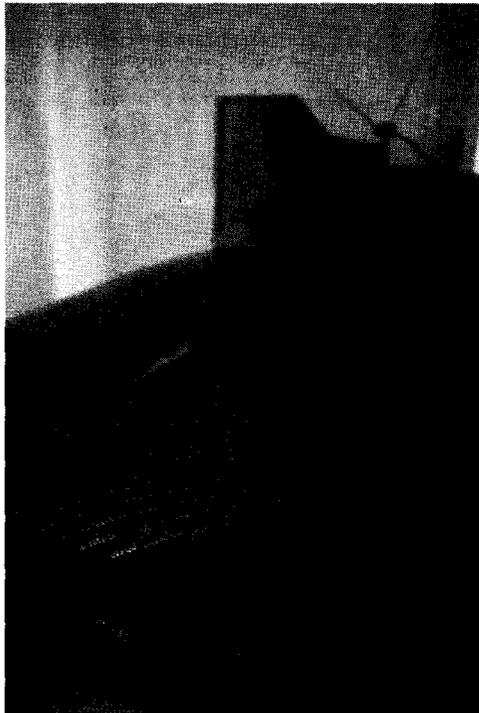
Sarah Webb's fragile installations (piles of eggshells, squares of silk, handsewn diapers) are produced with repetitive movements that mimic the mother's touch, nurturing as well as potentially destructive. Her recent installation of embroidered cloth diapers, "Milk and Tears," focuses on the non-sexualized (maternal or cancerous) female breast.

Myrel Chernick

*Monica Bock,
"Maternal
Exposure (don't
forget the lunches)
1999-2000,"
embossed and
folded sheet lead,
cast glycerin, each
bag 11" X 5" X 3"*



Monica Bock also works with repetition and vulnerable materials in her installation "Maternal Exposure (don't forget the lunches)" where 418 folded lead lunch bags and an equal number of bags of glycerin soap are spread out across the space. Inspired by the daily ritual of exposing a mother's nurturing skills to public scrutiny, the sheer magnitude of the task, seen as a collective unit, reveals the impossible effort to nurture and protect one's children.



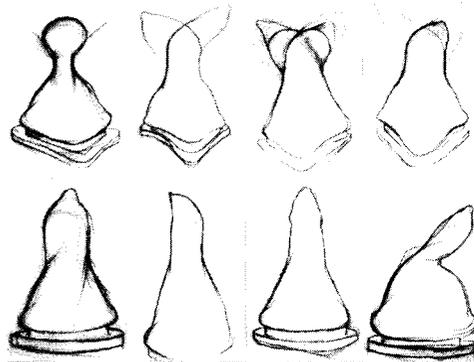
*Myrel Chernick,
"On the Couch, 1996"
Couch 72" X 40" X 30".
Installation with couch, monitor,
mirror, lamp, slide projection.*

Myrel Chernick's mothers are violent, controlling, passionate and self-sacrificing as well as nurturing. In her series of three video installations, "Domestic Interventions," which incorporate dilapidated furniture, videotapes and text, fragmented narratives of and by these "good" and "bad" mothers are provocatively interwoven against a backdrop of quotidian ritual.

*Judy Glantzman,
untitled, 1999,
oil on canvas, 90 x 80 "*



Judy Glantzman's paintings and drawings of layered and fragmented bodies (hers and her daughter's) convey a fluid and nearly erotic entanglement.



*Ellen McMahon, "Suckled Series
(group of 8)," charcoal on paper,
20" x 13" each, 1996*

Ellen McMahon's sensually executed charcoal drawings of mutated synthetic nipples and syringes are part of her "Maternal Alphabet," a pre-linguistic symbol system that addresses the mother's conflicted feelings of intimacy and longing, satisfaction and emptiness, humor and sadness in her relationship with her child and the outside world.

The artists in this exhibition "re-conceive" the idea of motherhood. Confrontational and analytic, personal and passionate, their at times beautiful, at times horrific, always provocative work evokes a full range of contemporary "maternal metaphors" by women who seek to give artistic expression to one of the most mythologized and misappropriated chapters in a woman's life.