BECOMING
Transformations Within the Maternal Exchange

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BECOMING
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Entering into a parenting role awakens unexpected concerns, fears, joys, and anticipations. Instincts go into overdrive as life’s main purpose shifts from self-preservation to protection and nurturing our child or children. The life once mapped out, or even the life in mid pursuit of, becomes magnified and heavily interrogated within this shift. My installation joins different environments, objects and works to explore the roles taken on during the tender and transformative incubation period of infancy and toddler stages. The role of protection is the focus of this body of work, using symbolic representations that contain processes within the natural world.

Becoming a mother not only altered my way of thinking, but also shifted how and when life outside of parenting happened. For some, this could be minimally impactful, depending on a number of variables. For me it was monumental. As with many artists, this made me question my art making altogether.

An unavoidable sacrifice happened for me, regarding my art practice, when I became a parent. No one could have prepared me for this. Participation in shows, grants and other dreams were sacrificed. Even the idea of continuing to be an artist came into question. I was at my wit’s end and nearing submission, when I stumbled upon the idea of trying to salvage myself as an artist while continuing to be the best mother I could be. Eloquently put by Janaina Tschape in the book, How do we do both: Art and Motherhood, “art making has this magical way of adapting and molding your life according to what is happening around it and within it” (Jigarijian 44). Being both mother and artist, bonded together, shifted my
art making drastically, but it did not happen instantly. It took time and introspection to explore how important art making truly was for me, which in many ways, meant abandoning old ideas in order to adapt to life as a mother. Adaptation came for me when my art shifted towards the discussion of being a parent. Considering different roles of parenting and various means of representation provoked my transformation into "mother artist". Along with that, new modes of exploration came about, including strategies of how to involve elements of my son in my artwork. Process dominated my art making in the past, and concept was secondary. With my son, my art making transformed to embrace process intertwined with concept, which yielded more substance and purpose.

In the text, *The Reenchantment of Art*, Suzi Gablik, a world-renowned artist, art critic, and art historian, she discusses how, "... all things are linked together in a cyclical process of nature..."(Gablik 91). Nature, being a driving force, specifically attributes of emergent ecological processes, guide and influence my works through metaphors that connect to motherhood. In turn, when each piece is joined together into an installation, both vivid and transparent symbiotic relationships become the dialog. With this, my works entwine and celebrate processes of the world we live in conjoined with the innate instincts within us.

Being our home and our sanctuary, the natural environment provides for us, just as we, as mothers, provide for our children. Often not ideal, but always as a measure of what is necessary, there is as an element of the spiritual that arises within this exchange. For me, spirituality and mothering consists of celebration of both the awe and the flaws. Within our world and within the maternal relationship dynamic, there is an experience that ignites a heightened emotional and physical landscape of connection. Essentially, it is an invincible, visceral, yet sacred atmosphere.
As parents we ask ourselves some crucial questions about upbringing, educating, providing, entertaining and protection. In this body of work, I contrast elements of strength and delicacy, inspired by organic formations, to represent protective spaces. The time consuming process of joining very thin and fragile papers together with extreme care, the tedious demand and patience it takes to consider and to place the formations while working on them in order to keep them intact, relates to the ambivalent experience of parenting which involves nurturing, joy and fear. How much is too much protection, and how much is too little? How long is protection necessary, and how much space should be between those who protect and others? Also, how close is the protector to the protected? And quite possibly the biggest mystery and concern: is the wholeness of this offering enough for the journey of metamorphosis to occur for both myself as mother, and my son as he transitions from infant through childhood into adulthood?

The boundless love that comes from parenting transcends any frustrations of the role. Sacrificing and freeing, time consuming and frustration, these important emotions we encounter as mothers are the driving force for my artistic process as it has given it deeper meaning both in process and concept. Artist such as Courtney Kessel, Janine Antoni and Mary Kelly all found there own unique way to discuss this in their artwork. Both their work and ideas have encouraged me to find my own voice in the conversation of nurturing into my artwork. Kessel’s work integrates shapes and sizes of herself and her child, while Antoni’s discusses the balance and sacrifice in maintaining our children’s happiness and comfort. Mary Kelly was the first artist who, in her work about her child’s growth, and development, triggered my own evolution in my current work regarding parenting. In her works, she studied the shift from infant to child, in terms of language acquisition and how a
child understands the complexities of the world. Other artists such as Louise Bourgeois, a large-scale sculpture and installation artist, and Eva Hesse, a material based sculpture and installation artist, have greatly influenced my material choices and sculptural practice. An embodiment that was visceral and absurd, in that emotion dominated over logic, encompassed the resolution of both of their very different types of art. They both used life size, or larger than life sized, sculptural elements in their work to convey a connection to the human experience, which has greatly shaped my choices in the making of my installation as a whole.

All of these factors are explored in my works through use of impressionable and fragile materials supported by strength and structure. Four life-sized sentinel boxes, which are thirty-three inches wide by seventy-two inches tall, have an openings specific to my height and width, twenty-seven inches by sixty-six inches. Theses sentinels stand firmly on the ground bearing both sculptural formations as well as digital compositions.
Entitled *Becoming*, I built these structures provide a shared space for the formations and the imagery. A transformative outlet is evoked in the arrangement, as the delicate materials and vulnerable formations are at ease within the strong framework of protection and containment. Conceptually, this explicitly conveys a message about both coexisting and accepting protection within vulnerability.

The inevitable and naturally occurring pulls and rips that happen with such delicate materials, used for the formations, resonates with the early stages of growth and development that is raw and true, full of imperfection and transparency.

*A beauty arises with this exploration, as multiple layers, including the digital imagery, is revealed. Using life size imagery, protection, refuge, physical presence, and the*
role of bodies enter the conversation. Obstacles in life are mapped out to depict a complex and challenging terrain within the digital imagery. The two elements, digital compositions and three-dimensional compositions, join up and support one another. A protective framing creates a specific space for emergence and evolvement into becoming to take place. Both the digital and the three-dimensional components are life-sized. The formations are created with the size of my son up until now in mind, and the imagery represents my height and width. They are protected by the larger image, while simultaneously being sheltered by the framework. A symbiotic relationship is echoed in this arrangement emphasizing the protector also being protected. In, *The Experience of Landscape*, Jay Appleton, a Human Geographer, professor and writer, conveys the strong correlation landscape has to symbolism, which is a component of the exploration in my installation. These spaces are reminiscent to the entrance of a cave, in that the “fabric of the earth” (Appleton 103) is being abstractly mapped out and represented in a protective and sanctuary fashion. Emerging white forms and complex colorful imagery are arranged in this way to support depend on one another.
The digital imagery used in *Becoming* is comprised of photos of nature, specifically, a photo I took of the rings of a freshly cut down tree, joined with a painting/drawing created by my three year old son. 

![Untitled, marker, colored pencil and acrylic paint, by Jaxon Gray, 2016](image-url)

Inviting my son to participate in my artistic process has resolved many concerns and issues that arose for me in being both artist and mother. Before this discovery, when I would take time to create art, he would become very emotional and the look in his tear filled eyes would haunt me. I thought for a few weeks about putting my art making on the back burner until he was ready for me to get back into it. After some thought, I asked him if he would like to join me in my art making. I found myself challenged and excited about this new idea of collaboration and authorship. Rethinking what this meant for me as an artist become a window into a vast and ever evolving terrain. Initially, it began with him and I drawing together to create pieces, which was a good start, but the idea did not feel fully developed. Next, I scanned his artwork into Photoshop and layered it with mine, and this idea felt like the beginning of something exciting. I layered his paintings with my photos,
but unlike the previous state, I worked on them with him right next to me, holding my hand, in fact.

He wanted to spend time with me, so I pulled out his play dough, sat him in a chair next to me and started to join together our imagery. Insisting on holding my hand while I was doing so, I thought this was not going to work out. Although it seemed unrealistic, I decided to try it out. So making art with one hand it had to be. Strangely, the connection did something for the creative process. He was happy, and held my hand the whole time, and the works just flowed innately. The process ultimately became the driving force of these works. A challenging terrain, as mapped out in the imagery, became conquered by will and compromise. As Zoe Buckman, a mother and artist phrased it; it was a “... lesson in acceptance and gratitude... how the very process that freed me was the same one that often chains me” (Jigarijian 22).
In honor of this process and these prints, I chose to print intimate and illuminated small versions. Entitled *Evolution / Becoming*, all four images are set within illuminated shadow boxes on each end of the installation to encourage the viewer to take a closer look

*Evolution / Becoming, 2016, (side view)*

With a similar idea in mind, a shadow box entitled *Son*, sits in the middle of the four sentinels on a pedestal. Within it, a silkscreen dipped in clear encaustic is illuminated. A photo of my son during the making of his actual drawing was used, as well as a scan of the actual drawing next to it. Both silkscreened by me, the color choice relates to that of the cocoon formations, within the sentinels, to give the viewer a hint of the development of the imagery and my sons hand in it.
Since my works are a discourse about adjusting and accommodating to the needs of my son, I specifically use thin and natural papers as a way to configure shapes and spaces. Sometimes, the paper becomes so delicate that it tears, and it’s in these moments of frustration something reveals itself in the pieces. These fragile areas created from this initial defeat evoke the realness of the creation. Imperfection is unavoidable, therefore it is important to accept and work with it instead of against it.

The hanging shapes created with thin natural papers, entitled Shed / Grow, join together elements of vulnerability, strength, incubation, metamorphosis and the unknown.
Symbolism relating to cocoons, including processes that relate to them, such as shedding, heavily influenced the making of these sculpture pieces to “...heighten the interpretation of a creature’s behavior within the environment.” (Appleton 81).

Natural processes play an important role in creating the visual and tangible elements of the works. Shapes that heavily suggest cocoon formations bring into consideration a process of change and transformation, driven by patience and time.
This is important to my work as it resides deep within the emotional and physical nature of parenting. Areas of exposed imperfection echo the raw truth of imperfection and openness. Vulnerability and confrontations are inevitable in parenting and in order to communicate to not only our children, but also our families or involved parties, including our care providers for our children, these become necessary. In these moments the idea of “beingness is the key...” when we “sit and listen to learn...” we adapt and evolve how we respond to these circumstances, and how we physically transform to adapt to them (Gablik 122). Acceptance of less than ideal circumstances, or of the attributes that set limits of self as parent, is not easily done. Cocoon formations work in conjunction with this dialog, as they symbolize both an incubation period and protective spaces. A breaking down and a building up coexists within the intimate spaces of cocoons, providing room for the beautiful, the ugly, the raw and the necessary processes to occur. Growth and truth unfolds itself within the depths of each sacred cavity.

*Shed / Grow*, Ink Jet digital prints on Tengucho paper, various natural fiber and Japanese papers, wire, 2016
In the two etching prints on each end of the installation, entitled *Origin of Wholeness*, a feminine quality emerges.

![Image of etching prints](origin_of_wholeness.jpg)

*Origin of Wholeness*, etching on Kozo paper, 2016

The role of nurturance has historically proven to be complex and problematic, in terms of defining the qualifiers attached. Questions on maternity and what comes along with it, as a role, has been constantly debated throughout art beginning most explicitly during the feminist movement in the 1960’s. Although the ideas of how to manage and divide up this role are ever changing, and can prove to be problematic to balance in everyday life; the beautiful and delicate gift of creating and bringing up a child outweighs it all.
Strength lies within fertility, as endurance of pain is just as crucial as the elements of tenderness and patience during stages of incubating and laboring. These early processes prepare mothers for the evolving challenges and adaptions necessary throughout the upbringing of a child. An evolution of love and sacrifice, “…the mind and body of the mother are constantly in labor” -Andrea Liss (Chernick 34). The early fertilization stages and child bearing are just the beginning of the laboring. Etching, as a technique and process, suites this concept, in that its mysterious and invasive qualities relate to the journey of nurturing and sharing life with a child. First, a ground, is placed on a metal plate in order to protect the plate, however, it can easily be removed with a pointed tool. Once areas are removed, the plate is placed in acid. The longer it is left in acid the more it erodes. I prefer longer periods of time as this permits the material to breakdown in more expressive and mysterious ways by allowing more than the initial mark making to be
expressed. Essentially, these exposed areas erode and decay. Ironically, this elimination creates the imagery that is then inked and printed through the printing press. The degradation has potential to yield exciting and beautiful results. In terms of printing the plate, I chose natural toned inks and Kozo, a thin Japanese and natural paper, to print on in order to maintain the focus on the organic truth of this subject. Also, this choice is reflected in the range of browns and natural gold hues throughout the hanging structures. In conjunction to one another, feminine and maternal elements that exist in parenting humans, and all creatures alike, resonates.
This body of work joins together an embodiment of both an artistic and a maternal drive. Reflection on the relationship I share with my son, and marrying it to the art world, awakened a lively and dynamic collaboration (Gablik 106). The emotional journey and phases along the way are communicated in my work through the profound relationship mothering and upbringing has to that of organic processes. Through material and conceptual exploration, a contrast of strength and tenderness, contemplation and risk taking, and the continuous evolution of a maternal exchange is both questioned and celebrated.
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


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SHOW CARD

MFA
THESIS EXHIBITION

Opening Reception
MAY 6 5-7PM

The Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art
1 Hawk Drive, New Paltz, NY 12561
Tina Marie Jaehnert  
Tmjax0205@gmail.com

Education
State University of New York at New Paltz  
Master of Fine Arts in Printmaking  
Masters Degree: May 2016  
GPA 3.84/4.0
Marist College  
Bachelor of Science in Studio Art  
Bachelors Degree: January 2014  
GPA 3.64/4.0

Sojourner Truth Fellowship Scholarship  
Alpha Sigma Lambda: Gamma Eta Chapter
2014-2016  
National Society of Leadership and Success

Experience

Instructor of Record

Introduction to Printmaking (Spring 2016), SUNY New Paltz

• Instructed a class of 18 students in a variety of printmaking approaches.
• Lead class discussions, lessons and demos.
• Created a variety of assignments with material specific requirements.
• Held students accountable to deadlines and course requirements.
• Maintained a productive and active class setting by walking around to students assisting them and answering questions.

Teaching Assistantships

Drawing I (Fall 2014) Graduate Teaching Assistant, SUNY New Paltz

• Assisted with demonstrations in drawing with graphite, charcoal, sumi ink and other mediums
• Assisted in demos in still life, figure and 1-2 point perspective drawing.
• Created an assignment in Self Portrait, which included a demo on drawing the proportions of a face.
• Actively participated in critiques, providing students feedback for in progress as well as completed projects.

Lithography (Fall 2015) Graduate Teaching Assistant, SUNY New Paltz

• Assisted in the process of Stone Lithography, Pronto Plate Lithography, Photo Plate lithography and Aluminum Plate Lithography.
• Assisted in lectures, critiques, and demos. Which included assisting students with the various approaches and techniques.
• Created and lead an assignment in Pronto Plate Lithography, which included a technique and printing demo.

Art Seminar (Spring 2016) Graduate Teaching Assistant, Suny New Paltz

• Assisted in overseeing 55 students in a lecture class setting.
• Collected and organized all assignments.
• Took attendance.
• Oversaw class participation.
• Lead a lecture and discussion, which included creating a relevant assignment for the class.

*Photo shoot Assistant*, July 28, 2013.
Main Photographer: Dan McCormack
• Assisted photographer in setup and breakdown of camera and supplies.
• Assisted models in arrangement.
• Assisted other photographers in preparation and arrangement.
• Assisted models with water.

**Exhibitions**
2015 *CAA 103rd Annual Conference Show*, Greenpoint Gallery, Brooklyn, New York
2014 *Collective Process*, SUNY New Paltz Print Club Art Show, Bacchus Restaurant in New Paltz, New York

**Juried Shows**
2013 *Skin*. Allen Birnbah Juror.

**Skills**

**Printmaking**
• Concentration in Monotype, Woodcut, Lithography and Etching.
• Strong Skills in Silkscreen, Linocut, dry point, aquatint, and collagraph.

**Painting and Drawing**
• Extensive skills in oil, acrylic, watercolor, charcoal, pastels and ink varieties.
• Extensive experience in digital painting, purell transfers, supersauce transfer and gelatin transfers.

**Photography**
• Extensive skills in manual photography, including the developing process, and printing.
• Extensive skill in digital photography, including digital SLR manual cameras.

**Sculpture**
• Experience with studio saws (hand saw, jig saw, band saw, circular saw, table saw, chain saw) Power drills, power tools and plaster casting.

**Computer Skills**
• Extensive knowledge in Adobe Creative Suite, including Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign.
• Extensive knowledge in digital fine art print production, including large scale printing on various types of papers and materials.