“Artisticarers”: The Visible, the Invisible, and the In-Betweenness

By Lisha Rooney

The philosophy of utilising hardship as an addition — rather than simply enduring it — is rooted in the belief that adversity is not a barrier to progress, but the very mechanism of personal evolution. It is accepting that pressure is preparation, that failure is necessary, and that impediments to action advance action. Turning obstacles into fuel and transforming struggle into strength have the capacity to change the brain and the persona, providing an accumulated resilience, mental fortitude, and sharpened perspective. One could argue that this is more evident with artists than with other professions. And one could argue that this is *even more evident* with women artists and artist-mothers/carers, and perhaps *most* evident with artist-mothers/carers who care for disabled and/or neurodivergent children and/or children with mental health disorders.

Alongside hardship altering the brain, in 2026, capitalism shakes the pockets. Capitalism promotes being productive with the hands and the brain, but it overlooks the heart, the compassion, the intent. It overlooks care — to care is to observe, to acknowledge vulnerability, to respond to biological and emotional needs, to think of connections[1] — and the maternal narrative in economics, focusing not on the quality or sustainability, but the monetisation. Care does not seem to consciously or unconsciously have value assigned to it, and with capitalism and politics deeply intertwined, it stands to reason that the politics of care, given their association to the maternal, are easily dismissed from society.

The Artnet Price Database lists the 10 most expensive women artists at auction[2], and of them, only half are/were mothers. Making a deliberate decision to not become a mother, Agnes Martin said, “Never have children...Never do anything that will take away from your work,” the insinuation being that mothering/caring is not work. Georgia O’Keefe, also on this list, believed that having children would have hindered her artistic production. Both they and Dame Tracey Emin may have had insights not only into the production and economic component, but also patriarchal finger-pointing. In a 2015 interview[3], Emin said, “I don’t think I’d be making work (if I were a mother). I would have been either 100% mother or 100% artist...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.” Emin, whose current retrospective ‘A Second Life’ is on at Tate Modern, exhibits a film in which she talks about the misery surrounding an abortion she had in the early 1990s, calling it her “emotional suicide”. Whilst some artist-mothers/carers may have or continue to contemplate an ego death or perhaps at some point considered not having children, it seems that those who do and make one misstep or dare to portray an imbalance in caring and creating risk castigation.

Throughout history, mothers have been disproportionately — and irresponsibly, often by male researchers, physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists, economists, and

1 Elena Pulcini, “Tra cura e giustizia: Le passioni come risorsa sociale” (“Between Care and Justice: Passions as a Social Resource”), Bollati Boringhieri, 2020.
2 Vittoria Benzine, “Who Are the 10 Most Expensive Women Artists at Auction?”, artnet, 2 December 2025, https://news.artnet.com/market/10-most-expensive-women-artists-2722693.
3 Viv Groskop, “Tracey Emin: ‘I’m not flaky and I don’t compromise’,” Red Magazine, 15 October 2015.

sociologists — been blamed for their children's physical, emotional, and behavioural issues. In the mid-20th century, psychoanalysts blamed "cold" or "refrigerator" mothers for causing autism in their children. Comparably, schizophrenia was incorrectly attributed to "schizophrenogenic" mothers. Mothers were blamed for being "too protective" or "too distant", causing weakness and dysfunction, respectively. They have been scapegoated for failing to meet evolving, often contradictory parenting standards, and have even been blamed for societal decline. Headlines and political figures today accuse mothers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) of poor parenting, over-diagnosis, and "abusing the system". This systemic blame, which perpetuates a blame culture, has often functioned as a way to mask ignorance and for "experts" to rationalise complex child outcomes without considering comprehensive factors.

Mothers — who are more likely to be the 'default parent' — experience higher levels of stress, fatigue, and psychological distress, handling about 71% of household mental load tasks. They are more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression, and societal pressure for 'intensive motherhood' can lead to severe emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion. When you add a disabled and/or neurodivergent child/ren, and/or mentally unstable child/ren into the equation, paired with the cognitive and emotional labour, the tangible domestic planning, and the 'worry work' required to care for the child/ren, the scales tip. According to Seltzer et al. (2010)[4], some mothers of autistic children can present with clinically significant trauma-related symptoms associated with their child's behaviours, experiencing similar physiological stress profiles as combat soldiers, Holocaust survivors, and individuals diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

For these mothers, creating art is the fight and the flight. It is the amygdala whispering to the frontal cortex and asking it to engage in cognitive reframing: to consider constraint, compression, capriciousness as mediums, to incorporate fear and anxiety, prolonged stress, frustration and anger into *pièces de résistance*, both literally and figuratively.

Artist-mothers/carers with sustained caregiving responsibilities within families of disabled and/or neurodivergent children, and/or children with mental health disorders are *rarae aves*, some with metaphorically clipped wings or confined to the cage that is home, others forced to follow unpredictable flight patterns or live with nocturnal nestlings. These "artisticarer" breeds necessarily alter their practices, taking necessary pauses, discovering alternative methods, incorporating their child/ren, and expanding visual vocabularies with which to respond, to share, to engage.

Caring and co-regulation — a "dance of attachment" which brings the child back to a ventral vagal state and forms the basis for self-regulation — becomes co-creation, and one wonders if care and artistry may ultimately have the capability to effect collective resilience, regeneration, and social and economic benefits. Artist-mothers/carers often necessarily integrate their children into their practice, and the breath and sometimes the hand of the disabled and/or neurodivergent child, and/or child with a mental health disorder — with such conditions as anxiety, depression, social anxiety disorder, borderline personality disorder (BPD), bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity

4 Seltzer, M. M., Greenberg, J. S., Hong, J., Smith, L. E., Almeida, D. M., Coe, C., & Stawski, R. S. (2010). Maternal cortisol levels and behavior problems in adolescents and adults with ASD. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 40, 457–469. doi:10.1007/s10803-009-0887-0

Disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, hyperlexia, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA), Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD), and Tourette syndrome — is present in the sculpture, painting, installation, and moving image.

While the nine artists in this exhibition do not subscribe to the woe-is-me narrative — colour, form, and texture supersede self-pity; line, pattern, and shape eclipse victimhood — it would be remiss for anyone viewing these works to overlook the context of their respective practices. Mediums, scale, and subject matters shift; ratios of mental preparatory work and making are modified; and two of the most powerful warriors - patience and time - are at risk of losing battles.

Co-curators Alexis Soul-Gray and Kelly Jessiman both have an autistic daughter with PDA, and Jessiman also has an autistic son with PDA. And both have also been confronted with trauma-inducing events: Jessiman's father who was schizophrenic took his own life, and after Soul-Gray's mother was diagnosed with cancer, she died by assisted suicide. Life and death and art have resulted in cultivation curation: nurturing, refining, developing, and improving what art can mean, what it can do, who can be seen. Not pseudo-seen. Really seen.

After the loss of her mother, Soul-Gray used her practice to explore anguish and question the notions of motherhood and home. She became a master-in-training of reclamation: recouping control through her art, using memory and longing, intuition and free association, nostalgia and ephemera. Roland Barthes wrote in 'Mourning Diary', his notes on his grief following his mother's death: "...I'm alone. And I realise that I'll have to get used to existing quite naturally within this solitude, functioning there, working there, accompanied by, fastened to the 'presence of absence'." It is this presence of absence which Soul-Gray depicts so brilliantly. She invites us to sit, stand, balance, float in a world of familiar-yet-hazy characters who seem to be simultaneously remembering and forgetting. It's a safe world — "The Horse Woman" beckons, with a recognisable figure and horse head — but a world that may require confrontation, not unlike the space surrounding Madame Benvenisti's gift to Freud. In "The Falling Girl", there is an attempt to use balance in the frame to restrict havoc inside with Soul-Gray's signature slices of forestry; three upside-down synchronised figures; immobilised toy soldiers with downturned mouths; below them, young girls who have lost their colour looking down to their respective corners; and one wise-looking being among limbs and visages. There is a sense of being in a purgatory of pensiveness only as long as necessary.

When Soul-Gray's autistic daughter was struggling and unable to attend school, the artist brought her into the studio so she could continue to work. On one occasion, her daughter covered one of Soul-Gray's paintings with red paint, an act the artist interpreted as self-erasure. Instead of discarding the work or starting over, the artist used turpentine and household chemicals to rub away at the surface, revealing remnants of a portrait beneath. The painting became a meditation on holding one's child's suffering whilst simultaneously carrying one's own and could be read as an unearthing of the wounded self. During this same period, Soul-Gray attempted to paint her daughter's masks. Instead, the canvas summoned the subconscious, and the artist painted a woman with a singing bird, a symbol for tranquillity despite external chaos. Hope is indeed the thing with feathers. It can also be the thing with a paintbrush, oil, and linen.

Amidst stoneware and a kiln, Jessiman considers her sculpture practice a sanctuary from the pandemonium. Tactile testimonies of tenacity, the artist's

hand-constructed diary-vessels mimic her days, in embracing the imperfect. If one combined Grayson Perry's conventional vessels with unconventional adornments, Matisse's simple, fluid lines, Rose Wylie's childlike sense, and Jessiman's own and borrowed explicit, often directive texts, one would happen upon her mud-to-masterpieces. The artist does not shy away from sharing her experiences as the mother of neurodivergent children, including the dysregulation, occupational therapy, interactions with social services, and sleep deprivation. Parents of autistic children face high rates of sleep deprivation, with studies indicating that 70%–90% are considered "poor sleepers". Their sleep is greatly impacted by the prevalence of sleep problems in autistic children (affecting up to 80% of those children), resulting in frequent night wakings, shortened sleep duration, and heightened fatigue.[5]

Dyslexic herself, Jessiman is most proficient in the linguistics of creativity. She has dabbled in sewing, visual merchandising, and interior design, and although she made items of clay for her art GCSE, she did not touch it again until she was pregnant with her first child. It was not until lockdown when she became properly reacquainted, needing something just for herself. Her bones and muscles perhaps retained the restorative benefits. Physical contact is the first form of communication we learn as infants, and creating with clay can be a physical-mental-sensual way of transforming frustration, grief, memories, and conscious and unconscious beliefs and desires. It is also her way of harmonising motherhood and making with semi-fettered agency.

Research suggests that men — which may include fathers — are frequently more adept at such harmonisation, separating thoughts, emotions, and life areas into distinct "boxes," while women are more likely to *connect* experiences, emotions, and information. Although general trends rather than universal rules, men tend to have different cognitive and emotional approaches to processing information, often described as compartmentalisation. Women, conversely, engage in integration and interconnection, with thoughts and feelings from one area of life spilling into another. Men can more easily access a "nothing box," a state of resting in a single compartment, allowing them to temporarily detach from stress.[6]

Detachment is rarely, if ever, an option for artist-mothers/carers. "Little hidden ingenuities and constant resourcefulness is needed for nurturing human vulnerability long-term. These herculean energies often remain invisible to those not caring for people who society typically shoves by the wayside," says Anj Smith, artist and mother of three, one of whom is autistic. In her work, Smith often presents precarious psychological states and inhospitable environments, intertwining and disrupting conventions of motherhood. She has noted that it is impossible to depict the complexity of motherhood and encapsulate in a single image all of the conflicting experiences. Instead, she highlights the incredibly fragile, fragmented, and fluctuating sense of self, often as a consequence of exclusionary systems, but not as succumbing to these systems. "If you're not part of the mainstream...if you feel as though you experience reality and society in a way that makes it very clear at times that things have not been organised for your convenience...if you experience life like that, any kind of marginalisation will bring that home to you on a daily basis with a thousand different micro aggressions."

5 Lisa J. Meltzer, Brief Report: Sleep in Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, Journal of Pediatric Psychology, Volume 33, Issue 4, May 2008, Pages 380–386, https://doi.org/10.1093/jpepsy/jsn005

6 Michael Gurian, *"What Could He Be Thinking?: How a Man's Mind Really Works"*, St. Martin's Griffin, 26 September 2004

Through lived experience, artists such as Smith highlight the human potential and galvanise the omitted, ignored, and rejected by offering people who don't feel seen, in whatever capacity that might be, a moment of recognition, a moment of solace.

Her painting "Anting" depicts how the concealed colossal strength of an army of ants enables birds to once again take to the skies. When injured or in need of plumage repair, having discovered the healing properties of these insects' multiple bites and saliva, some bird species actively seek out mounds full of them to flatten themselves against. With plumage fully restored, the birds can now fly. More than metaphor, it interrogates the intricacies of selflessness and identity in motherhood.

Nicola Hicks MBE, who is dyslexic, emphasises the role of arts for those who feel displaced or alienated. "The arts have always been the home for people who don't quite fit. There is a beautiful correlation between the energy expended 'trying' to fit and the blossoming of an artistic purpose when that energy is diverted into creativity." She credits her focus to being neurodivergent, cutting out the things she couldn't do and engaging with what she could do: so long literature and maths, hello drawing and sculpture.

A mother of two – both of whom she gave birth to in her studio – Hicks acknowledges that having children enhanced her practice. She talks about the hurt surrounding *that* either/or conversation: the woman artist who chooses not to have children will be taken seriously, and the woman artist who does can wave goodbye to career prospects. Hicks says that this rhetoric makes so many assumptions about motherhood and being both an artist and a mother, and that the reality is realising what the echelon of love, care, and obstinate energy does to your heart and hands is liberating. It is not retooling; it is tooling 2.0.

Chosen by her daughter – Edie Flowers, also featured in the show – Hicks' piece "Maquette for Dump Circus" depicts a furious cat from an imaginary circus, portraying human havoc on Earth pitted against the stamina of the natural world. The cat holds a cup, on a scale with itself, and it appears empty. As in Smith's work, ecofeminism and the degradation of environment is present. And perhaps a subversion to conformity: I can't and don't want to, but do I have to, to survive? Does adhering to gender roles and consenting to neurotypical modes equate to positive outcomes for all? Not for Hicks, who says the world is splendid but it's nasty and painful, and she confronts it by sculpting.

Like her mother, Flowers – who notes "there are swathes of neurodivergence in my family which seem at times to separate us from the rest of the world" – has an affinity for sculpture, particularly plaster. To plaster, she frequently adds clay, chicken wire, dust sheets, and found materials, often working with whatever is least reactive for her hand eczema. Her writing and charcoal-on-paper drawings both inform and compliment her 3D practice, which investigates the relationship between psychological turbulence – cyclical patterns of fear, disorientation and emotional stasis – and its physical embodiment. Fellow artist Paul Klee held that the purpose of art is to show what isn't always immediately obvious, including internal states, universal principles, or spiritual realms, and Flowers engages in this process of transforming the intangible into the tangible by creating, destructing, and then reconstructing.

Flowers' work "A Private Conversation" features distorted, misshapen torsos becoming one, as if conjoined twins. This self-portrait statuette is a dual representation of the scornful and the shame-ridden. It examines indecision and

inner conflict, in the body, in the studio, at home, in existence. It is medium as emblem. Plaster tolerates experimentation before commitment and is easy to repair. Flowers shares a Germaine Richier – French sculptress who accentuated bodily deformations to convey anguish and who, rather than having children, treated her sculptures as her offspring – quote from a *Paris Post-War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55* exhibition catalogue: "A form lives to the extent to which it does not withdraw from expression. And we decidedly cannot conceal human expression in the drama of our time."

Hicks and Flowers. Mother and child. A ubiquitous image in the art canon, in portraits primarily by men. What is more scarce is the mother herself stirred by and depicting her own relationship to her child/ren as an expression that is beyond care and love, but ideation courtesy of the maternal hours and years: feeding, sleeping, developing, playing, learning, schooling, relationshipping, all of it. One thinks immediately of Mary Kelly's 'Post-Partum Document', in which the artist-mother took her son's used nappy liners, printed them with the details of his diet, and displayed them. And artist-mother Marlene Dumas, who "collaborated" with her daughter Helena in her piece 'Underground', a 28-panel work where Helena decorated, worked on, and painted over Dumas' black and white drawings of her. And of course Caroline Walker – painter of parenting and progeny – who, rather than romanticises motherhood, reveals the behind-the-scenes monotony and messiness.

The bond between mother and disabled, neurodivergent child/ren and/or child/ren with a mental disorder may be being depicted in art today, without viewers even knowing. How do artists illustrate invisible disabilities? And is there prioritisation: it is the artist-mother's life so she should be allowed free expression? Does she need to seek disclosure permission from her child/ren? Is collaboration the only viable option?

Artist Kate Montgomery, who has three daughters, one of whom is a student, and two who are NHS mental health clinicians, explores interior spaces associated with women's responsibility, creativity and desire and fairy tale-inspired themes set in timeless, place-elusive patternscapes. Amongst her juxtapositions of colourful, elaborate, hypnotic rhythms, there is a melancholy, a longing and a stillness in the women and girls who stand in nature, contemplate, wander. In between the rearing and the tenderness, there is distance. Are they miles between the here and now and an erstwhile freedom? The expanse between caring and creating? The vastness of empathy?

Moved by her youngest daughter, Montgomery's two paintings "Seedlings and Daffodils" and "Star Maps" recall times when the two of them gardened, cooked, and painted together, or as the artist observed her daughter through a nurturing, optimistic lens. Symbolism is aplenty – horses and their freedom, daffodils and their new beginnings, tables and their connection, stars and their guidance. And throughout history – in art, religion, mythology, and metaphor – apples whole and halved, bitten, and floating have symbolised symmetry, balance, and duality; temptation, forbiddance, and life choices; and in some ancient cultures, a feminine symbol.

Montgomery has always painted, often in seized moments between teaching and caring for her daughters. They needed her time, and of course they needed money, and the artist says there was never enough of either. Montgomery had to paint at night while they slept, and in order to paint in any corner of the house, she began

creating easily transportable, smaller-scale works. “Being an artist mother has made me tenacious and protective of even a 20-minute opportunity to do something of mine away from teaching and parenting...If I’m not doing [my work], I’m in mourning for myself.”

Like Montgomery, artist-mother Mindy Lee modified her practice following motherhood. “ADHD shifts how my son’s body senses and moves, as well as thinks. Navigating his Hereditary Multiple Osteochondroma (HMO) with specialists focuses on fragments of the body in relation to their impact on the physical whole. I piece and layer information together to holistically care for his flexibility and growth, physically and mentally. This strongly influences how I approach painting.” Lee’s emotional and physical family interactions inspire her to create works that are unresolved and arresting. Facial features, limbs, and fingers are detected, and upon first glance the medium could be mistaken for dried blood. Certain shades of red rarely permit us to turn away. The acrylic and pigment on silk organza within embroidery hoop pieces depict a reduced palette and truncated forms. “I paint quickly, finding images whilst the paint dries. Paint transforms the image, as it shifts and settles, slipping in and out of focus, punctuated with colour to pinpoint attention. Paintings grow, creating seemingly hybrid images, and I allow time for images to reveal slowly, partially and unevenly.” She adds, “They are not finalised, but emerging and dissipating, fragments of moments. It’s the same with my life. I don’t feel a hard edge between different roles in life — artist, mother, curator, etcetera. They bleed into each other and jostle around.”

While Lee employs embroidery hoops to focus attention at the centre of the paintings, enabling the silk to sit outside of the border and hint at a larger picture, embroidery hoops have historically been used only to hold fabric during stitching, after which the embroidery was removed and framed or used to decorate linens, clothing, and aprons. The artist has bridged the traditional and functional, transforming an object associated with domestic docility into a contemporary tool for personal — and social, within a larger context — artistic expression. She has done similar with clothing she wore while pregnant, bedsheets, and blankets, especially during the period following her son’s birth, when her studio moved to her home.

Mother-artists/carers are structurally pushed toward home-based or child-proximate studios, due to lack of childcare and the incompatibility of creating within rigid childcare systems. The domestic space becomes a working space, out of necessity. Remembers artist Lezley Saar of her mother Betye Saar, “She was always drawing on little bits of papers, and notebooks, and sketchbooks, and stuff...on the north side of the studio [inside the house where we grew up] was her printing press. We played in there — we used to pretend it was a ship wheel, like a clipper ship kind of thing, this thing that she could crank to roll the huge weight over the plates when she was making her work.” Artist-mother Ruth Asawa looped her wire structures on the kitchen table surrounded by her six children. Supporting and photographing her was fellow artist Imogen Cunningham, mother to three sons. The two women shared a bond over the belief that artists should not have to choose between their family and their practice.

Although utilised for practical reasons, it is poignant to imagine the kitchen table which is often the heart of the home, a site of nourishment, connection, storytelling, and ritual transformed into a space where masterpieces are created and — by modelling, the greatest teacher — values are transmitted.

Asawa, Cunningham, and Saar showed their children that they and their creativity mattered, an act which is often more difficult to demonstrate and convey to a disabled and/or neurodivergent child or child with a mental disorder. One prevalent theory for conceptualising the cognitive basis underlying social communication and interaction differences between neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals is Theory of Mind (ToM), broadly defined as a "body of conceptual knowledge that underlies access to both one's own and others' mental states."[7] Alongside this concept is the "double empathy problem", wherein there is an acknowledgment of the complexity of understanding in social interactions, and that both neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals might encounter difficulties. However, what might be less difficult to convey is the art itself, a sensory, more tangible, visual way to process and communicate when social interactions are too overwhelming.

Maliheh Zafarnezhad explores in her practice the intricate experience of being both artist and mother to a nonverbal autistic son. Through materials and process, she addresses time and the repetitive rhythms of caregiving, noting, "Simple moments like playing with my son can become cycles of patience, care, and emotional intensity. Small gestures and moments carry deeper meaning. I try to communicate this lived experience through materials, family photographs and layered processes rather than direct explanation, as a quiet but direct language." Her pieces "Infinite Rehearsal" and "A Day Out", three-dimensional mixed-media structures made with acrylic, image transfer, wood and glass, allude to finding splendour in a rigid adherence to routines or specific ways of doing things, finding gratitude in the unpredictable. Biophilia is present in medium and images, with nature appearing throughout Zafarnezhad's work. For her, they symbolise resilience and hope. The use of wood and the recurring image of swans represents endurance, while human figures placed within natural spaces suggest the relationship between mother, child and environment. The layers reflect the psychological landscape of motherhood, challenging idealised expectations of the "perfect mother" and revealing a more intimate, complex reality.

There is a thread of relationships, identity, and memory in all of the artist's work. Born and raised in Iran, Zafarnezhad was forced to navigate a labyrinth of oppressive gender constraints and after moving to Ireland, assimilation into an entirely new culture. Exploring a sense of loss, displacement, and urgency surrounding identity and belonging has parallels with her current motherhood role. Parents of neurodivergent children often experience profound grief linked to initial diagnoses, constant caregiving demands, and the loss of any anticipated life path. It is a mourning often referred to as "cyclical grief". Zafarnezhad — who engages with neurodivergence as a mother at home and as a full-time qualified teacher teaching GCSE Art to neurodivergent pupils, including those with mental health challenges — does not, however, dwell in this sorrow-filled space, instead decontextualising a diagnosis and recontextualising it within her own creative framework.

Recontextualising and reimagining allow for challenging dominant narratives and creating new forms of storytelling and sharing. Artist-mothers reimagining roles, moments and rituals with disabled and/or neurodivergent children and/or children with mental disorders can serve as a regenerative artistic force where projects can educate, mend, and improve quality of life, and — on a macro scale — society as a whole. As mother to an autistic daughter, artist Lezley Saar's practice incorporates themes of autism and neurodiversity, moving beyond the mainstream focus on

7 Sodian, B., Hülsken, C., & Thoermer, C. "The self and action in theory of mind research", Consciousness and Cognition, 12(4), 777–782. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1053-8100(03)00082-5, 2003

the “tragedy” or “cure” of autism. Her series “Autist’s Fables” explores the interior worlds of autistic individuals, offering their perspectives.

Artist Natasha MacVoy intertwines the reality of life as the mother of identical twin neurodivergent teenagers with her practice to explore unconditional love, connection, invisible labour, identity, process, repetition, and language. Like a lot of mothers in her shoes, during and following the assessment and diagnosis process, they realise the similarities in their child/ren’s dispositions, sensitivities, and behaviours and question whether they are also neurodivergent. MacVoy learnt that she was autistic. Listening to her, there is a delicacy, a generosity, and an empathetic tone, which also comes through in her work.

Mothers of neurodivergent children often share how isolated they feel while caregiving, and MacVoy combats this feeling by turning it into opportunity. When her children were unable to continue going to school, attempting to prevent the loss of her practice which had already been in hibernation for several years following their birth, she made the short film “Mum! Mum!” Addressing doubling, masking, and rehearsing through the language and technique used by wigmakers, the film is part of MacVoy’s ongoing project, “The Mother as Stunt Performer”. The project is an expansive body of work exploring adaptive care and education in a broken system, with mother as human safety net and beacon of hope, all through connection with others experiencing similar scenarios.

In “Mum! Mum!”, adopting this identity, MacVoy invites fellow local mother and wigmaker Louise Davies to make an impression of her head using cling film, cellotape, eyebrow pencil, and marker pen in order to shape a lace cap replica from which a wig can be made. Davies is shown knotting hair into the cap, through elaborate, repetitive movements. MacVoy invited local musician, singer, and fellow mother Sophie Newman — who recorded herself whilst her youngest child was watching television — to provide the soundtrack, which beautifully captures the tentative exercise of finding one’s voice and rhythm again after a prolonged period.

One’s voice, one’s sense of self, one’s place in the world can easily feel reduced, moderated, even eradicated, and this is likely more true for artist-mothers who have disabled and/or neurodivergent children, and/or children with mental disorders. There is an extraordinary loneliness, unrealistic expectations, and fragile narratives that are easier for the rest of the world to ignore. The mother-artists in this show have been shaped by sustained caregiving, painted into corners, and possibly snapped by others, and they use it all not only as a catalyst for artistic transformation but to highlight the human condition in a way only art can. They redefine value, positioning care, presence, and perseverance not as absences of productivity but as radical forms of it.

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