

MOMMA

Artists who are mothers see the world in a distinct and complex way. “Mommy eyes” see close and far, beauty and danger, past and future. Mothers are attuned to the possibilities of known and unknown, joy experienced and lost, a future both exciting and frightening. The view of the mother-artist is a valuable perspective on the world that is often dismissed as mothers in our society are sentimentalized but not truly respected.

Motherhood is a profoundly feminist subject. It is because of the physical nature of preparing for, carrying, bearing, and raising children that women are, even today, frequently excluded from many types of roles (excluded by both men and other women). Women in both the business and art worlds are often told to downplay their role as mothers, so that those in power won’t have that excuse to doubt not only their abilities and intelligence, but their commitment and dedication. Since the beginning of the women’s movement, women who intended to be both artists and mothers were marginalized within the movement, finding the need to be feminists within feminism. Thirty years later, mother-artists are still facing this prejudice, especially within the art world itself. This is the background against which I began thinking of this exhibition.

MOMMA presents the work of four artist-mothers, each of whom addresses aspects of motherhood in her work. **Laura Morrison**’s sculptural yarn work responds to the generative properties of nature, while her delicate assemblages are ruminations about family and connections between people. In **Patricia Schappler**’s drawings and paintings, she creates closely observed life-size and more-than-life-size portraits of her children over time, individually and as a family. In her paintings, prints, and quilts, **Annette Mitchell** looks at motherhood from inside and outside, as a mother and grandmother, but also as a daughter. I (**Marcia Santore**) began this exhibition with paintings about the swirling, chaotic, and animal nature of motherhood, but that MOMMA sparked an entirely new group of work, The Minivan Series.

MOMMA is not a motherhood manifesto. It is not about advocating motherhood for all women or defining women as mothers first and anything else second. It is not about the “right” way to mother. And it is most definitely not intended to diminish women who don’t have children, whether by choice or not. It’s about showing something important about a group of people who make art based on the conditions of their lives—how being mothers affects the work we do as artists. We are who we are and where we are in large part because of our roles as mothers. How we see the world, what we notice, what we make art about, is strongly affected by our roles as mothers and provides a point of view that is often overlooked.

This year, the Women’s Caucus for Art national conference included a panel discussion on artists and motherhood. In conjunction with the MOMMA exhibition, the Silver Center for the Arts will screen *Who Does She Think She Is?*, a documentary about artist-mothers. It’s exciting to me to realize that these ideas about motherhood, making art, and marginalization that I’ve been considering for years are being thought about and talked about nationally at the same time that MOMMA is coming together.

—Marcia Santore