

Documentation of the research project

“ Spider “

by Litsa Kioussi (2022)

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SPIDER

a research project by Litsa Kiousi



image by Mayra Wallraff

Theme

„Spider“ is an interdisciplinary research project by artist Litsa Kiousi. Departing from the existing inequalities between women and men in almost all areas of life, both in Europe and beyond, Kiousi endeavor to explore the pandemic´s massive disruption on the independence and careers of female artists in parenthood. Many statistics make the impact of motherhood on a female artists´ career apparent, yet we seldom discuss the impact motherhood has on the artist, her ability to make, show and sell work.

Pre-pandemic, women in the arts industry faced huge challenges dealing with lack of interest, lack of understanding, systemic issues and structural limitations. Many feel they need to keep the two sides of their identity separate, as though they are somehow operating beneath the radar: secret mothers, infiltrating the house of art.

The sudden shift created by Covid-19 has both magnified and aggravated these pressures. For so many artist mothers (including Kiousi, herself a female artist and a mother of two), going through this pandemic has been a huge challenge when

every source of income and prospective has been put on hold overnight while unpaid care became a self-evident and undiscussed fact. With less time to focus on their art practice, space limitations and financial pressure the work often becomes - through necessity and not always by choice - smaller which can more often than not be perceived as less important by the art world. Such a shift though is very possible to have a damaging impact on the artistic career of a mother: the longer the artist remains less able to work, and less visible to the market, the less likely it seems that her art might generate attention.

“ There are good artists who have children, of course there are. They are called men. It's hard for women.” (Tracey Emin)

A paradigm shift is necessary precisely because motherhood is not a catastrophe, motherhood and art career aren't incompatible. That is exactly the problematic Kiousi is seeking to explore and address with her interdisciplinary project „Spider“. With focus on local scenes she aims to create spaces charged with questions, disturbances, confrontations on equality, systemic problems and inclusion in the art world and beyond.

Development

This page provides a form of documentation of the exchange between Kiousi and all the artists involved. Information on all stages of development of the research can be found here.

First stage: Interviews

Focusing on the versatile and vibrant Berlin arts community, the artist interviews artist is conducting insightful interviews with a diverse spectrum of mother artists, hailing from various regions and socio-economic backgrounds, and navigating different stages of motherhood. Each participant is presented with a standardised questionnaire, offering a comprehensive exploration of their experiences. Emphasising autonomy, respondents have the freedom to choose the extent to which they engage with the questions, ensuring a nuanced and respectful portrayal of their unique approaches, experiences, stories.

NOTE: Several artists expressed a preference for privacy, choosing not to showcase their responses on this platform. Despite their decision to maintain confidentiality, it is important to underscore the profound significance of their contributions to this research project. Their insights, though not publicly displayed, have played an invaluable role in enriching the depth of this process, contributing a wealth of knowledge that enhances the overall understanding of the intersectionality between motherhood and artistic pursuits.

Questionnaire

Being a mother has been cast as career suicide by Tracey Emin and Marina Abramovic.

“There are good artists who have children, of course there are. They are called men. It’s hard for women.” (Tracey Emin)

Two years later, Marina Abramović told the German newspaper Der Tagesspiegel that she had three abortions, “because I was certain it would be a disaster for my work [to have children]. One only has limited energy in the body, and I would have had to divide it.” She added that it is “the reason why women aren’t as successful as men in the art world”.

- What are your views on such statements?
- How soon did you start noticing/thinking about the impact that motherhood might have in your art? What were your thoughts / questions / worries / doubts?
- What are the structural limitations you are facing (if any) as a mother artist?
- - Let's talk money! Being an artist means not only many hours of work and insecurity of what could come next but also unstable and mostly pretty low income. Being a mother on top of that puts even more pressure. How do you handle that?
- Could you describe an average day-to-day life as an artist and mother?
- What is the impact of motherhood on your artistic process, way of working and selling your work?
- Have you experienced any rejections, cancellations, uncomfortable negotiations etc. due to the fact you are a mother in the art scene?
- Mother artists vs father artists : What are your thoughts?
- Do you integrate your child/children in different occasions regarding your work (premieres, openings, rehearsals etc.)? If yes, what is your experience with that?
- How do you feel about the problematic of mothers being taken serious as artists?
- The pandemic magnified and aggravated these pressures on women in the arts industry who were already juggling their careers and independence with childcare. How did you experience it?
- During the past two years of the pandemic fear, insecurity and mental load dominated everyone's life. How all these are re-shaping your artistic practices?
- What did we learn from that?

- Where do we go from here?
- What policies can be proposed that can support women's roles in arts as financial providers and parents?

STELLA ZANNOU

Introduction: I'm Stella Zannou, a 47 year old dancer, choreographer and dance teacher. I m married and I have a child 8 years old. I live in Berlin but I originally come from Greece.

- **What are your views on such statements?**

I feel such statements belong to another era or to another culture that doesn't connect with me. Having children is a unique thing and somehow it stimulates all the senses of a person – sensitivity, awareness, softness, maturity, but also critical and creative thinking. I believe motherhood helps artists become more creative. But statements like the above make me think that artists with too big egos, maybe is better indeed not to raise children.

- **How soon did you start noticing/thinking about the impact that motherhood might have in your art? What were your thoughts / questions / worries / doubts?**

As a dancer, of course I was concerned with the thought of motherhood. I thought that motherhood and dancing cannot go together. This is a totally false thought, though, that unfortunately, was rooted in my head since I was very young. It seems that in my training I never had an example, close to me, that would show me that motherhood and dancing could work very nicely together and could be very inspiring. I think this has changed in the last years, as you can see more often artists bringing their children in classes or in rehearsals.

The fears had to do with how I would be able to raise my child while eg I'm having rehearsals or while I'm teaching, since our timetables are so unstable.

Most places I was involved with, where very open to welcome my son in my classes or rehearsals. And on top I could clearly „read“ the thoughts of my dancers...that motherhood and being a dance artist is not only possible but also beautiful and unique.

Big concern also was whether my body would be totally unfit and ugly after giving

birth.

Maturity makes you understand that this only matters when your art itself is not that strong...

- **What are the structural limitations you are facing (if any) as a mother artist?**

I live in Berlin and somehow I feel there is a structure that supports me. Of course things could be easier, or less bureaucratic in order to save time – which is valuable when you have a child but still, the system works. I know dancers in other countries, don't have the same possibilities for Kita/ Hort, or have to pay a lot of money to have this choice. This for sure makes the life of an artist very hard.

- **Let's talk money! Being an artist means not only many hours of work and insecurity of what could come next but also unstable and mostly pretty low income. Being a mother on top of that puts even more pressure. How do you handle that?**

It's something that never came as a surprise. We kind of always had the facts from the beginning. And it feels „pressure“ is very common in our field. Again it helps when things are scheduled from before and you can kind of plan ahead. Again it depends where you live.. and also it helps when you know your limits and you can also say no to projects.

- **Could you describe an average day-to-day life as an artist and mother?**

There are periods that can be very heavy.

An average day would look like this:

I'd wake up at 05.45, eat breakfast and organise my thoughts and bags and then I'd wake my son 6.15.

Take him with the car to the school, half an hour distance.

Run to the supermarket opposite the school, to do some very basic shopping and then head on for rehearsal.

I'd rehearse until 18.00. So 19.00 I'd be back home and I'd have to cook. While cooking I'd have to check if he needs to do homework. And then I'd have to spend time with him. Playing or talking or just giving him my full attention. Then I'd need to shower fast and take him to bed, cause I know how important it is for him to feel this calmness and safety while lying with me in bed.

Most often my day ends there as I'm also falling asleep but sometimes I need to do computer work so I have to keep on going.

But there are also periods that I don't work that much and I can spend much more time with him.

- **What is the impact of motherhood on your artistic process, way of working and selling your work?**

I think selling my work was always difficult for me but with motherhood it got worse and maybe I didn't bother that much. My way of working is much more concentrated. I can be more productive. I can recognise problems and solve them pretty fast. I also have realised even more, from teaching and choreographing online and from raising my son, how important it is to be direct and precise and clear. My artistic process I find is much „crazier“ than before. As if it is easier to break my habits, not to be scared to be funny, ugly, stupid.

- **Have you experienced any rejections, cancellations, uncomfortable negotiations etc. due to the fact you are a mother in the art scene?**

Just a few times that I wasn't allowed to have my child with me, being invited as a guest teacher. But actually, that was only from one place.

- **Mother artists vs father artists : What are your thoughts?**

I have the feeling that for father artists the fact that they might be away for many hours or days is not such a big issue as it is for women. I don't know if this is practical or connected to sociological reasons. I haven't also experienced myself father artists taking their kids in the studio.

- **Do you integrate your child/children in different occasions regarding your work (premieres, openings, rehearsals etc.)? If yes, what is your experience with that?**

Yes, I've been doing this since my child was a only a few months old. It's a great experience. And I think these kids are so lucky to have a contact with art from such a young age. For me it's always exiting to be taking him with me but of course also challenging and sometimes puts a lot of stress on me.

- **How do you feel about the problematic of mothers being taken serious as artists?**

I find it so old fashion I don't really take it seriously. Actually, I find people who say so, very naive and immature as persons, therefore, it tells me something about their art.

- **The pandemic magnified and aggravated these pressures on women in the arts industry who were already juggling their careers and independence with childcare. How did you experience it?**

There where some very hard moments having to choreograph or teach, for example, online and my son had to be home and do also online schooling. It was a very hard period. In general I find that there was understanding from everyone,

though. But still the pressure was extreme. It was a period where the limits of everyone was getting tested.

- **During the past two years of the pandemic fear, insecurity and mental load dominated everyone's life. How all these are re-shaping your artistic practices?**

I feel that artists in Berlin had opportunities to be supported from the state. Again in other countries situation was much harder. Money was given, without very complicated applications or analytical budgets or not connected necessarily to productions. Artists could also focus on organising their material, work on their websites, spend time researching. People who before would get all the time negative replies from applications, now they were supported. I think this gave a breath to many artists. The same to me.

- **What did we learn from that?**

All problems can create possibilities.

- **Where do we go from here?**

I don't know when the money given for arts because of corona becomes much less, what's going to happen.

If audience will come back in the theatres.

If artists will have the urge and thirst to create without money, again.

If middle aged mothers will find the strength to keep on going? It seems that so many children got psychological problems from the measures that society took, that mothers will need to devote more hours to their children. Would mother artists find this strength and time? I don't know.

It seems after the pandemic the needs are a bit different. For children and families.

- **What policies can be proposed that can support women's roles in arts as financial providers and parents?**

I don't really know...Maybe timetables that are compatible with the school hours?

Or maybe when both parents are artists a kind of support, when one parent has to work very intensively for a show that the other one could be financially supported, in order to stay home and take care of the child? A bit like Elterngeld.

TATIANA HEIDE

Introduction: Hello, My name is Tatiana Heide. I am a Brazilian, cis woman, 36 years old and I have lived in Berlin for the last 7 years in which I have moved back to Brazil since December 2021.

I am married and I have 2 kids, one is 8 years old and a 3 year old toddler.

I am a writer and an actress. But since a couple of years, text, words and writing have been my main artistic work. I'm writing my first short story book and I have been self publishing since 2018.

– What are your views on such statements?

I agree with Marina Abramovich's statements considering that she speaks and makes art within the patriarchal logic of artistic production. That is the only logic we know. Marina speaks from this place, from the woman who wants to be in symmetry with men within a system created by them.

If we could dare to think within other sign systems, it is more radical to think about "the energy of the body that contains and creates another one" . What is its capacity?

– How soon did you start noticing/thinking about the impact that motherhood might have in your art? What were your thoughts / questions / worries / doubts?

Since the moment I've looked into the two red lines in the pregnancy test I think about how motherhood would impact my artistic life. My first worry was about that. That somehow from now on, the idea of a career would always be subject to my motherhood and the demands of a child.

First I've put the responsibility and the success of this management on myself. As if I could only attest to my artistic quality if I managed not to sink my fledgling career. And for years I beat myself up thinking that "my artistic failures were only my responsibility.

Time management, priorities. Finding a creative space without the interference of childhood and above all valuing within myself the issues that before motherhood seemed supreme and gained other dimensions after having children.

Since I approach motherhood in a historical marxist way I understand that artistic quality and career are a sarcastic game ruled by different directors.

- **What are the structural limitations you are facing (if any) as a mother artist?**

The difficulties as an artist mother vary a lot in Germany and in Latin America. In Latin America, our issues are still very structural such as day care and free full time schooling and mobility issues.

In Germany it is more about support networks, about community, about ways that go beyond the logic of the nuclear family and include childhood more organically in the professional practice.

- **Let's talk money! Being an artist means not only many hours of work and insecurity of what could come next but also unstable and mostly pretty low income. Being a mother on top of that puts even more pressure. How do you handle that?**

For years I did not deal. I succumbed to a system of economic dependence on my partner coupled with poor mental health. I put motherhood as a priority, and I believe that I was able to enjoy being a mother who was present and involved in my daughter's life. In the second motherhood, existing professionally was the only way to have the minimum mental health to be a mother.

Financially I could only get a little more security by working with women who were not mothers.

- **Could you describe an average day-to-day life as an artist and mother?**

Waking up and serving breakfast to hungry little ones. Dealing with the thousands of logistical and material issues like clothing, snacks, and materialities of childhood. Leaving in the educational institutions and then concentrating on my artwork by making mental negotiations with other practical life information that has nothing to do with creation.

After work I leave the space of artistic practice full of inspiration to be thrown back to hungry, exhausted, and however sweet they are, full of demands that I, as a robot, have to follow until they fall asleep exhausted in bed. If I can be reliably inspired and light-hearted I can include creativity in dealing with them, but not always.

- **What is the impact of motherhood on your artistic process, way of working and selling your work?**

I think there is a work on sensitivity that is the basis of my work. A sensibility of listening and looking, but still a sensibility of who is at the margin of the system like many other bodies that do not follow the white male European logic.

This sensibility guides any practice. Even if it is not the obvious theme in my artistic

productions, it is the only territory I can and am interested in producing. I embrace this as strength and not as weakness. I try to talk with those who understand the discourse of those on the margins of the art market.

- **Have you experienced any rejections, cancellations, uncomfortable negotiations etc. due to the fact you are a mother in the art scene?**

I perceive an air of disinterest from some who get sick of the idea of having to deal with topics that seem extremely uninteresting to them, such as motherhood. But not a more explicit rejection.

Before I couldn't even insert myself in an artistic production market because I was completely lost within the functions of motherhood and without financial autonomy

- **Mother artists vs father artists : What are your thoughts?**

Most parents never feel separated from the system and insert their artistic practice, even if frustrated, within the logic of providers. I believe that fathers are less affected by issues of low self-esteem and tend to compromise less with the material issues required by parenthood. They tend to have more lightness to deal with the demands and are less demanding about food and general issues of their children.

- **Do you integrate your child/children in different occasions regarding your work (premieres, openings, rehearsals etc.)? If yes, what is your experience with that?**

I integrate as I have support and mental health. I have three books written for children and bring a lot of the creative play of the rehearsal room indoors. I still expose them little to the premieres and rehearsal rooms. Especially the youngest who still have their own demands that are difficult to reconcile with adult spaces with protocols. The eight-year-old accompanies me whenever possible.

- **How do you feel about the problematic of mothers being taken serious as artists?**

I think it is a structural system problem. Perhaps it is necessary that mothers are seen as a creative category, not a minor one, but one that is capable of producing within more specific contexts and that spends half of its creative force making room to create with the remaining half.

It is a social paradigm shift as well. But I don't want it to sound like utopia. I believe that in small practices we can instigate significant reflections and changes.

- **The pandemic magnified and aggravated these pressures on women in the arts industry who were already juggling their careers and independence with**

childcare. How did you experience it?

Let's be very honest here: I went crazy. I sought psychiatric help outside of Germany because I couldn't get any support. I crossed the swamp with the help of medication. Being thrown into childcare exclusively was all I didn't want and was forced to do. It was a difficult time that I would not have gone through alone without leaving traumatic marks on myself and the children.

- **During the past two years of the pandemic fear, insecurity and mental load dominated everyone's life. How all these are re-shaping your artistic practices?**

I can't say for sure yet, but my new book is about characters who are all in an underground dimension of life. Having to deal with aspects that were once sublimated through a compulsive professional and social life. Aspects of biological amplitude such as maternity, paternity, and difference between generations are brought into play.

- **What did we learn from that?**

I have learned to embrace fragility and a state of insecurity as a ground that keeps me present, critical, and active. A state of combat. I have learned to delve into the issues of artistic production by consuming and valuing artists who take into consideration non-ideal means of production and are inclusive in their discourses.

- **Where do we go from here?**

I don't know. I discover and rediscover and invent everyday. But a return to decolonial ways of producing and thinking shift the protagonists to include groups that are usually outside the logic of the market by the change of focus, approach, and ways of conceiving and valuing the world. I believe that institutions could include educators with training to deal with, guide and entertain children in artistic environments so that their parents, artists or not, do not need to be excluded from art spaces on account of having children.

- **What policies can be proposed that can support women's roles in arts as financial providers and parents?**

I believe that motherhood puts women in a place of limbo that many need support from the state to reinsert professionally. Often this work is mostly a psychological rescue. A broadening of horizons. I believe that public policies that look at artistic women without demanding resumes that are like men without children or like Marina Abramovich's are fundamental for women mothers to create a way of working that escapes the imposed logic.

ELKE R.

Introduction: Elke R, 53, divorced (solo parenting experience as well as shared custody experience), dance/performance

I am not currently a full-time (or even part-time) artist. After the birth of my son 11 years ago, I continued to pursue my own creative work for another 5 years (HP Sept 2016) then again Carrie Oct 2018

– **What are your views on such statements?**

I agree, it seems easier and more “allowed” per societal norm for men to continue their life as is with the addition of having a child. For women it seems to be that having a child is not an extension of her, but she needs to sacrifice her own existence. And while I do not generally abide by the “norms” I feel like I need to fight them all the time, even if only on a subtle level.

Looking after your child is physically and emotionally exhausting (sleep deprivation, stress, organization, etc.). You will never again have a single focus ability. And “carving” out an hour every day to devote to your art if limited. For a couple years, my son would spend his summers with dad, so I had me time. It always took me at least a week or two to return to anything remotely akin to my brainpower.

– **How soon did you start noticing/thinking about the impact that motherhood might have in your art? What were your thoughts / questions / worries / doubts?**

Pretty much as soon as I found out I was pregnant. Along with others, I had the thought: “my life is over.” Because going forward I and my pursuits, other than anything contributing to the well-being of the child, are not going to be prioritized anymore.

– **What are the structural limitations you are facing (if any) as a mother artist?**

Childcare comes to mind first. (Note: I am referring to my time as a solo parent in the US for this statement)

Early age childcare centers were often set up to be from 9-12 or another relatively short time frame. Considering drop off and pick up it would maybe give me an hour and a half of free time. I eventually found something with longer hours but then struggled with guilt leaving my child in external care for so long. ...doomed if you do doomed if you don't...

– **Let's talk money! Being an artist means not only many hours of work and insecurity of what could come next but also unstable and mostly pretty low income. Being a mother on top of that puts even more pressure. How do you handle that?**

In the end, I didn't. I got an office job, first part time then full time to support me

and my son. I am scheduling any art projects (home-based on a small scale) and performance projects (mostly the ones organized by others and I participate) around it. Haven't done a self-directed project in the last 5 years.

- **Could you describe an average day-to-day life as an artist and mother?**
Mostly in the last 5 years it has been non-artistic, but pragmatic and logistical with a big move from NYC to Berlin, paid off debt, maintained job, settled in. The one project I did was with an artist in NYC and that included rehearsals/performances when I was there, and my son was full time with his dad in Berlin. (I could talk about pre-Berlin times when I was still trying to do things in NYC while a solo parent, but honestly it stresses me out just thinking about that.)

- **What is the impact of motherhood on your artistic process, way of working and selling your work?**
While doing less artistically due to the 5 pragmatic years (described above), I made sure to still have at least one creative/inspiring dialogue with a friend or colleague to nurture basic artistic needs, kept up small scale drawing project, looked at writing from a different (more focused) angle to self-express, took online classes in other topics that interested me (negotiation, gender studies, neurodiversity). Not a five course meal but I try to get as many colors/food groups from the plate each day ;)

- **Have you experienced any rejections, cancellations, uncomfortable negotiations etc. due to the fact you are a mother in the art scene?**
I was granted an Artist residency before I was even pregnant. I had to do some negotiating to bring my then six months old into the two-week residency. I was able to do the residency, but of course my participation and socialization with the other artists was limited, less relaxed. (I also had literally just separated from my kids' dad so things were complicated).

- **Mother artists vs father artists: What are your thoughts?**
One personal example: My son's dad build a career as a musician after our separation while I went into full time office work. I keep saying that this is because he now has two women in his life (new partner and ex-wife) who take care of him and his kids. I think there is definitely something to this, although there are other factors. He stayed in Berlin (cheaper than NYC), he has a partner, music (entertainment) can earn more than dance/performance art (although I dabbled into stripping/erotic dance briefly which offer more income but another set of hard to navigate logistics).

ORIT NAHMIAS

Introduction: 45 years old, actress, writer, a mother of a 10 year-old boy. Originally from Israel and since 10 years based in Berlin.

- **What are your views on such statements?**

Exactly because of these kinds of perspectives i didn't want to have children for a long time, i was afraid it would harm my acting career, and after years thinking that i realize i don't even have a career... (its from my stand up show that i wrote after giving birth). and thats the amazing thing in my case, that my career really started shortly after i became a mother, and being a mother and having a child with all its challenges and fear and struggles are part of my artistic work, they feed each other. and for me my artwork is a healthy break from being a devoted mother and being a mother gives my art work a more balanced perspective, my artwork is very very important to me, but with all due respect my child means more and that helps me to be more relaxed and playful at work. and as for man being more successful i guess its connected to structural patterns as well, like man in power positions maybe appreciate more man work etc...

- **How soon did you start noticing/thinking about the impact that motherhood might have in your art? What were your thoughts / questions / worries / doubts?**

I remember a very long time ago a friend and a colleague told me that when ill have children i would have less need and passion for my art, and i remember it really disturb me to hear that and i remember saying that in this case i dont want to have children. i didnt think about the junggeling between work and kids, i was afraid of lusing the passion for my creative work. happy to say that in reality it didnt happen, i didnt lose the pasion not foe work and not for my kid and being a mother. i enjoy them all.

- **What are the structural limitations you are facing (if any) as a mother artist?**

I don't know if thats consider a structural limitation, but working as an actress in theater means working evenings, weekends and holidays, so it doesn't fit family life (having a domestic oriented partner is in my case is super necessary to be able to have this kind of work)

- **Let´s talk money! Being an artist means not only many hours of work and insecurity of what could come next but also unstable and mostly pretty low income. Being a mother on top of that puts even more pressure. How do you handle that?**

Luckily, i have for 8 years now an almost steady income and although i earn more than my partner, we always share the burden of life costs, even now as ex partners. So i would say, life sharing with someone can sometimes be a good way to handle the instability.

- **Could you describe an average day-to-day life as an artist and mother?**

In most stressful days like 2 weeks of Endprobe, i would wake up at 6 to learn text before my kid wakes up, and then take him to school, quickly go to morning probe 10-14 run back to pick him from school, play with him if im lucky or containing a midday meltdown if im not and at 5 i would run back again for night evening 18-22 (without a kid i could use the break to prepare and learn text, eat, have a break, doing errands..) but now my kid is 9 and he goes to a friend after school, and his father with his flexible job is also available so i don' t have to be so stressful. the main stress is my wish and need to be there for him.

- **What is the impact of motherhood on your artistic process, way of working and selling your work?**

The artistic process must be officiant, fast and with very little time achieve alot. time management, energy management, priorities management.

- **Have you experienced any rejections, cancellations, uncomfortable negotiations etc. due to the fact you are a mother in the art scene?**

I didn't experience that from outside but i definitely rejecting offers knowing it doesn't fit my family life, work that involve touring, weekend works, or work that doesn't pay well enough to sacrifice quality time with my kid.

- **Mother artists vs father artists : What are your thoughts?**

I think that since we are all social creators and we are taught and conditioned to be parents, mothers most times have more need to be more with there kids, if its because they feel it (like me) or because they feel the kids needs their present or because we are taught how should a mother be like, cause if she is too focusing on her then she is not seeing her child's needs but her own. Fathers have more room to decide how involved they want to be, i notice from those around me, that mothers would find babysitting solutions not so good compared to fathers for example.

- **Do you integrate your child/children in different occasions regarding your work (premieres, openings, rehearsals etc.)? If yes, what is your experience with that?**

I do very much, i bring my kid from young age to theater (when i couldn't find another solution) he watched run throughs, comes to the make up room, the sound system, he likes more the technical side of art than art... i find it very cool that my work can be interesting for my kid, that i can share my work life with him, if i would work in a layers office it might be less interesting for him to come to work.

- **How do you feel about the problematic of mothers being taken serious as artists?**
I haven't experienced that.

- **The pandemic magnified and aggravated these pressures on women in the arts industry who were already juggling their careers and independence with childcare. How did you experience it?**

Most of the pandemic time, theater was closed and i didn't work, luckily i still got paid, i don't know how would i have earned money otherwise in this time. i did use the time to write but i had to share the time with my ex partner since there was no school.

- **During the past two years of the pandemic fear, insecurity and mental load dominated everyone's life. How all these are re-shaping your artistic practices?**

It mostly (or maybe it was other things, im not sure) reduce my motivation.the break from work showed me in what kind of stress my life were, i didn't even notice it, i got used to it until it became natural.and then i was enjoying the not doing phase, coming back to work was suddenly soooo stressful, it was too much, since then i reduce my work to the minimum possible.

- **What did we learn from that?**

The above answer, answers that i think.

- **Where do we go from here?**

Less work!

- **What policies can be proposed that can support women's roles in arts as financial providers and parents?**

i don't know...

MERVE ÇANAKÇI

Introduction: Merve is a visual artist from Ordu, Turkey. She studied painting at the Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Istanbul. The extensive list of her international exhibitions include solo shows at Artsümer Gallery, Istanbul and group shows i.a. in Apartment Project, Ark Kültür, National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington DC, and 48 Stunden Neukölln. Nerve is 40 years old, a mother of one daughter and lives and works in Berlin.

– **What are your views on such statements?**

Unfortunate statements. While I have the utmost respect for women who choose not to be mothers, I don't think any woman should have to choose between her career and motherhood. I think the real problem is the failure of the art world to produce an inclusive dialogue on this issue. It is also extremely sexist. With such discourses, the male-dominated perspective is reinforced in the art world as in every sector...Mothering is a task that is often shared between parents today. Moreover, there are countless iconic „female“ artists who have children and achieved great success in their career. The real problem is that artists who were mothers and at the same time had a successful career have been ignored by art history for so many years.

– **How soon did you start noticing/thinking about the impact that motherhood might have in your art? What were your thoughts / questions / worries / doubts?**

When I wanted to become a mother and started to think about it, I realised that there are a lot of women who have had negative experiences in the art world. People can have preconceived notions about artists becoming mums. There are people who think that you won't continue your career anymore. Collectors lose interest in your career, they can immediately think that you will not continue because you have become a mother. There was a cruel exclusion and isolation in the stories I read at that time. One encounters more negative experiences than encouraging stories. I remember this made me angry, but I reminded myself of this fact: For me, art is a field that is intertwined with life and feeds on life itself and the experiences it offers. Every artist needs to stop and collect material from time to time in order not to repeat themselves. I was able to get rid of these concerns by not considering the experience of motherhood as a situation outside my practice and preferring to feed from it.

– **What are the structural limitations you are facing (if any) as a mother artist?**

There are structural limitations I am facing as an artist, but I don't think they are directly due to my motherhood.

- Let's talk money! Being an artist means not only many hours of work and insecurity of what could come next but also unstable and mostly pretty low income. Being a mother on top of that puts even more pressure. How do you handle that?

It's really hard...Since I cannot sustain my life only by selling my work, I have to do extra jobs . I think what is overlooked is the fact that many artists are actually unable to cover their basic needs by selling their art, which they spend a lot of effort, labour and time. In any case, there is a division, but it is extremely wrong to attribute this only to motherhood.

- Could you describe an average day-to-day life as an artist and mother?

My child goes to kindergarten around 8:30 in the morning, usually her father drops her off and I start working around 9-9:30 am. She returns from the kindergarten around 5 pm, depending on the situation, I or her father picks her up. Especially between 9am and 4pm, I devote as much time as I can to my production, this is the time when I can work most efficiently and with high concentration. But time to time, depending on the financial situation, I use this time period for another job in order to earn extra money. My daughter goes to bed around 7pm, but it can take up to 8:30 to sleep. From 5 to 7 pm I try to be with her and do things that she likes. After 7pm, I am busy reading and collecting materials for my work, I rest or go out depending on the impact of the day.

- What is the impact of motherhood on your artistic process, way of working and selling your work?

Children, especially small children get often sick. That pushes you to be ready to rearrange your work schedule. It is very challenging but you get use to it. Becoming a parent forced me to be more flexible at work.

- Have you experienced any rejections, cancellations, uncomfortable negotiations etc. due to the fact you are a mother in the art scene?

Not really but ones I was having a conversation with a collector on my work and the subject of motherhood came up, I observed that after finding out that I was a mother, the person's interest in me and my work suddenly decreased. It was awkward.

Mother artists vs father artists : What are your thoughts?

While there are no concepts such as male artist or father artist, women's motherhood and womanhood are always emphasised. This is a big discrimination in itself. An artist's fatherhood is never an obstacle to his career. Unfortunately, the

main reason underlying this is that traditional gender roles are still accepted even today. If we think that an artist's motherhood will interrupt the continuity of her production, the underlying reason for this is that we do assume that the mother will take care of the child for the most part.

- **Do you integrate your child/children in different occasions regarding your work (premieres, openings, rehearsals etc.)? If yes, what is your experience with that?**

Yes, of course. I also get her opinion about my work. I think it's great for a child's development to be involved in a creative process and it's very exciting. It is also very nourishing for me. Children often have an unfiltered and unique perspective on things.

- **How do you feel about the problematic of mothers being taken serious as artists?**

People and organisations with this kind of point of view never inspire respect in me. In the 21st century, I think it is shameful that we are still discussing these issues...

- **The pandemic magnified and aggravated these pressures on women in the arts industry who were already juggling their careers and independence with childcare. How did you experience it?**

I experienced that period relatively mildly at the beginning, purely by chance. My husband's work stopped completely with the pandemic and he took over the daily care of our child full time. In this way, I was able to continue my work as before . But the whole thing hit me hard after a year. I started having financial problems and wasn't able to afford my studio anymore so I had to leave it. I started to work from home which was hard because there is not enough space for my work. My daughter wasn't allowed to go to kindergarten, so she was most of the time at home. It was extremely challenging to keep working in those conditions.

- **During the past two years of the pandemic fear, insecurity and mental load dominated everyone's life. How all these are re-shaping your artistic practices?**

Although it has taken on a new dimension with the pandemic, unfortunately, these concerns were already present in the lives of artists. I often experience living with crises and ups & downs through the profession I have chosen. The truth is that I don't deserve these conditions and I don't accept them. I can say that this process encouraged me again to present my work without any compromise and on my own terms.

- **What did we learn from that?**

First of all, we have seen how precarious and fragile this system has been all these years. We have painfully experienced that when things go bad, culture and art are the first to be sacrificed. In the case of Germany, I, as a parent, have also seen that politicians have not been able to come up with a constructive policy to deal with the problems that children had during the pandemic, and have not even tried hard enough to address these issues.

- **Where do we go from here?**

It's a difficult question. It's a time when we can't see ahead. It's hard to know where we're going. We are in limbo.

- **What policies can be proposed that can support women's roles in arts as financial providers and parents?**

There could be funds that only mother artists can apply for, residency programs that they can attend with their children and a budget for childcare. These are the first things that come to my mind.

Second stage: Meeting, discussions, proposals

Due constraints imposed by Covid-19 restrictions and the formidable challenge of synchronising common time slots, the initially proposed in-person studio meetings underwent a transformation to an online format. In this virtual space, the artists engaged in thoughtful discussions, shared perspectives, engaged in spirited debates, and proffered a variety of proposals. The focus of these deliberations was to explore innovative ways for promoting visibility and initiating constructive dialogues surrounding the deeply entrenched bias associated with the under-discussed issue at hand. The virtual realm became a dynamic platform for creative minds to converge, collectively addressing challenges and envisioning different approaches to elevate and confront this enduring societal bias.

What might make a difference?

- **Equal Representation in Theaters, Festivals, Exhibitions and Galleries**

Implement policies that ensure equal representation of male and female artists in exhibitions and galleries. This can be achieved through quotas, diverse selection committees, and transparent curatorial processes.

- **Fair Compensation**

- **Flexible Working Arrangements**

Support flexible working arrangements to accommodate the needs of artist mothers. This could include part-time schedules, job-sharing options, and the ability to work remotely when possible.

- **Parental Leave Policies**

Advocate for and implement parental leave policies that support both male and female artists. Provide adequate paid leave for new parents, acknowledging the unique challenges faced by artist mothers.

- **Childcare Support**

Establish on-site or subsidised childcare facilities at art institutions and creative spaces. This helps artist mothers focus on their work while knowing that their children are well cared for.

- **Mentorship and Networking Programs**

Develop mentorship programs that connect emerging female artists, especially mothers, with experienced mentors in their field. Networking events and workshops can also provide opportunities for skill development and professional growth.

- **Promotion of Family-friendly Events**

Encourage the organisation of family-friendly events, making it easier for artist mothers to participate in the art community without feeling excluded. This could include daytime events, child-friendly spaces, and family-oriented programming.

- **Educational Initiatives**

Implement educational initiatives that challenge gender stereotypes and biases in the art world. Encourage schools and art institutions to provide equal opportunities and resources for male and female artists.

By implementing these proposals, the art world can take significant steps toward creating a more equitable and supportive environment for all artists, regardless of gender or parental status.

Third Stage: Reflexion

Reflecting on the long-rooted bias against motherhood in art reveals a pervasive inequality that has persisted for generations. The art world, historically shaped by traditional gender roles, has often overlooked and undervalued the contributions of mother artists. This bias is deeply ingrained, perpetuating a systemic imbalance that hampers the artistic prospects of women who choose to embark on the journey of motherhood.

The inequality manifests in various ways, from the challenges of balancing artistic pursuits with caregiving responsibilities to the subtle biases that undermine the professional credibility of mother artists. Stereotypes surrounding the idealised image of a committed and uncompromising artist often clash with societal expectations placed on mothers, creating a dichotomy that hinders the full recognition of their artistic talents.

Despite these challenges, there are promising perspectives emerging. The discussions among artists in response to this bias are fostering a renewed awareness and commitment to change. The virtual studio meetings, prompted by the constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic, have become spaces for dialogue, exchange, and proposal. Artists are engaging in conversations that not only address the bias against motherhood in art but also shed light on the mental health toll this bias exacts.

These perspectives hold the potential to reshape the narrative, challenging preconceived notions and fostering an environment that celebrates the intersectionality of motherhood and artistic expression. The recognition of the unique perspectives and insights that mother artists bring to the creative process can lead to a more inclusive and diverse art landscape.

As we navigate these reflections, it becomes evident that dismantling long-standing biases requires collective effort and a commitment to change ingrained attitudes. The prospects for change lie in continued dialogue, advocacy, and the implementation of policies that support the needs of mother artists. By addressing this bias head-on, the art world can evolve into a space that values and uplifts the diverse voices and experiences of all artists, irrespective of their parental roles.

Conclusion

Navigating unapologetically the Beautiful Chaos of Creativity and Redefined Boundaries

Artist mothers are sharing stories of renewed focus and transformative shifts in their art. And we need to acknowledge them and to listen closely and carefully. As they continue to redefine boundaries, the art world witnesses a cultural shift that embraces the multifaceted identities of women in pursuit of art, fostering an environment where creativity and motherhood coexist harmoniously.

As Hettie Judah mentions in her essay (Representation of female artists in Britain during 2019): **The secret is that this is the best life. Fucking hard work, but full, messy and beautiful!**



Venus of Willendorf, c. 28,000–25,000 B.C. Image by Helmut Fohringer

The nature of this research project was not audience focused in itself, but the documentation is available upon request to every individual, initiatives, groups that are interested in the theme.

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