

Lenka Clayton

HYPERALLERGIC

Channeling the Nuances of Motherhood Into Art

The debut exhibition at New Mexico State University explores the nuances of labor — in birth, in childrearing, and in intergenerational collaboration.

[Coco Picard April 29, 2020](#)



Yoko Ono, "My Mommy is Beautiful," installation view, *Labor: Motherhood & Art 2020* (images by Trey Broomfield courtesy of New Mexico State University Art Museum)

LAS CRUCES, NM — The inaugural exhibition at the University Art Museum at New Mexico State University focuses on motherhood in contemporary art and the curious nuances of labor — labor in birth, labor in childrearing, and labor in intergenerational collaboration. The group exhibition, called *Labor: Motherhood & Art 2020*, features 22

artists, and was co-curated by museum director Marisa Sage and NYC-based artist Laurel Nakadate. *Labor* builds on a 2018 exhibition Nakadate organized at Leslie Tonokonow Artworks and Projects in New York.

That 2018 exhibition, comprised mostly of video and photography, was inspired by family separations along the US–Mexico border but focused on the tension of professional and maternal aspirations, particularly for artists. While a number of the same artists and artworks are presented in this 2020 Las Cruces edition of the show (including Tracey Baran, Patty Chang, Tierney Gearon, Kate Gilmore, Hông-Ân Tru’o’ng & Hu’o’ng Ngô, Mary Kelly, Justine Kurland, Marilyn Minter, Laurel Nakadate, Yoko Ono, Laurie Simmons, and Mickalene Thomas), Sage was interested in expanding the exhibition to present sculpture, fiber, performance, and painting. This iteration thus includes María Berrío, Lenka Clayton, Amy Cutler, Joey Fauerso, Jessica Jackson Hutchins, Las Hermanas Iglesias, Catherine Opie, and Wendy Red Star as well. Press materials situate Las Cruces in the “Borderplex” — a transborder conglomeration of cities, with El Paso and Juarez — but works presented do not reference the border explicitly. Rather, the exhibition focuses on time, anxiety, physical wellbeing, and different artists’ strategies to transform the constraints of child-rearing and wellness into art making.



Catherine Opie, “Self-Portrait/Nursing” (2004); Laurie Simmons, “Some New: Grace (Orange)” (2018); María Berrío, “Virgin & Child I,” (2014); installation view, *Labor: Motherhood & Art 2020* (images by Trey Broomfield courtesy of New Mexico State University Art Museum)



Kate Gilmore, "Top Drawer" (2014); Tracey Baran, "Daren meets his mother for the first time" (2003); installation view, *Labor: Motherhood & Art 2020* (images by Trey Broomfield courtesy of New Mexico State University Art Museum)



Yoko Ono, "My Mommy is Beautiful"; Jessica Jackson Hutchins, "SAP" (2012); installation view, *Labor: Motherhood & Art 2020* (images by Trey Broomfield courtesy of New Mexico State University Art Museum)



Still from Patty Chang, "Milk Debt" (2019), single channel video, 7:17 (courtesy of New Mexico State University Art Museum)

Standout works include Patty Chang's "Milk Debt," a single channel video from a larger (and ongoing) performance and video project during which a woman recites lists of crowd sourced fears while pumping breast milk in public. These chanted anxieties have a prayer-like quality and reflect the different geographies in which Chang's performance occurs. In this case, the speaker stands on an overhead bridge in Hong Kong as protestors march below. "The relationship I think I have established with god is just a fantasy," she says, flat and unflinching. "My son will be bothered by comments people made online even when he turns 30."

Playing on a similar premise of indexing is Lenka Clayton's "Mothers Days, 15 July 2019," a limited-edition artist book that appears behind glass alongside an excerpt of mounted pages that track a single day in the life of multiple mothers. A sense of humor, sleeplessness, intimacy, and obligation emerge as participants share the mundanity of their schedules (during which some art is occasionally produced). Complex mother-child dynamics appear via Tracey Baran's C-Print photo, "Daren meets his mother for the first time." Baran captures Daren and his half-sister gazing at the camera while seated in a hot tub; their mother stands beside them with her back turned. Her posture contrasts with the nudity of all three, tightly packed within the small tub, thrown into immediate acquaintance. Beside this is "Madame Mama Bush," a Mickalene Thomas photograph of Thomas's mother and former model, Sandra Bush, lying with breasts exposed on a chaise

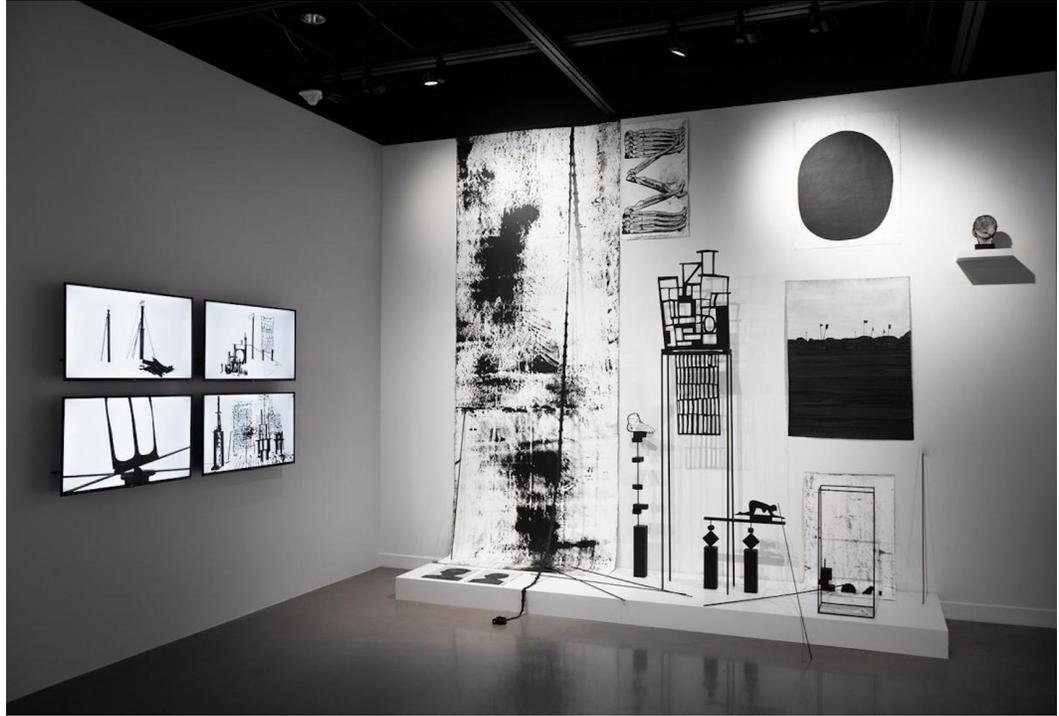
lounge. The photo would almost mirror Manet's *Olympia*, except that the subject looks upward, eyes closed.



Las Hermanas Iglesias, "Motherlove" (2019), installation view, *Labor: Motherhood & Art 2020* (images by Trey Broomfield courtesy of New Mexico State University Art Museum)



Justine Kurland, photographs from "Of Woman Born" (2006); Jessica Jackson Hutchins, "Deviled Eggs and Red Wine" (2011); installation view, *Labor: Motherhood & Art 2020* (images by Trey Broomfield courtesy of New Mexico State University Art Museum)



Joey Fauerso, "You Destroy Every Special Thing I Make" (2017-2019), installation view, *Labor: Motherhood & Art 2020* (images by Trey Broomfield courtesy of New Mexico State University Art Museum)



Wendy Red Star, "Apasálooke Feminist #2," (2016), installation view, *Labor: Motherhood & Art 2020* (images by Trey Broomfield courtesy of New Mexico State University Art Museum)

The collaboration of children is additionally platformed, though the power dynamics of these relationships are regrettably marginalized. In "Apasálooke Feminist #2," Wendy Red Star presents a collaborative self-portrait of herself with her daughter, Beatrice Red Star Fletcher. They wear bright elk tooth dresses, subverting the predominant portrait history of Apasálooke (Crow) women, taken in black and white by white male photographers. Las Hermanas Iglesias's "Motherlove" is a woven installation produced by three generations including two sisters, Lisa and Janelle (Las Hermanas Iglesias), their mother, Bodhilde, and Lisa's child, Bowery. The weaving patterns reference Sheila Hicks and Anni Albers and present multiple geometric cloths that drape over a wooden frame reminiscent of a loom or canvas stretcher.

In Joey Fauerso's multimedia installation, "You Destroy Every Special Thing I Make," the artist invited her two young sons into the studio and, in the midst of her own health issues, filmed the kids interacting with (and often tearing down) her stark black and white sculptural tableaus in painstaking but nevertheless cathartic explosions. Two lush Justin Kurland photographs depict mothers walking naked through landscapes. Wall didactics describe the artist traveling the country with her child to photograph radical and progressive communities. In addition to mothers, the show quietly implicates children,

examining the conflict between a commitment to one's art and a commitment to one's child, particularly within a public realm.

Editor's note: Please note that physical viewing hours for this exhibition have been temporarily suspended in light of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Discussions around art and culture remain important during this time, so we have opted to publish this review to enable readers to explore the exhibition virtually as many of us continue to self-isolate.

[Labor: Motherhood & Art 2020](#) continues at the University Art Museum at New Mexico State University (1308 E. University Ave, Las Cruces, NM) through August 16, 2020. The exhibition was curated by Marisa Sage and Laurel Nakadate. The UAM has curated a series of online programs associated with the exhibition, called ALONE/TOGETHER. For more information visit the [museum's website](#).

<https://hyperallergic.com/556805/channeling-the-nuances-of-motherhood-into-art/>