

Josephine Taylor

ARTNEWS

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Catharine Clark
San Francisco

In this remarkable series of monumental works on paper, Josephine Taylor treats motherhood as central to a ghastly, yet beautiful, view of life as a struggle for survival. Like the Flemish painters Bosch, Breugel, and Van der Weyden—whose works exquisitely depict human depravity and excess—Taylor offers us a highly personal and disturbing vision of our own times.

A new mother herself, Taylor envisions a postapocalyptic world and situates her own family within it. Mother, father, and infant are plunged into chaotic subterranean spaces. In the “Bomb Landscape” series (2007–8), the cave is shared with snapping foxes. People wear fur and fox cubs suckle at the human mother’s breast. Fluids leak from mouth and breast. Anatomical details—eyes, noses, mouths, nipples, genitals, fingertips, and claws—are rendered in the palest of pink washes. Flesh in unblemished white paper contrasts with the dense blackness of the sumi-ink terrain. Taylor uses her

brush like scissors, sharply delineating hair, fur, and coiling ropes.

In the artist’s earlier drawings tapping into childhood memories of dysfunctional family life, the predominant mood was sorrowful, passive, and accusatory. Here, passive turns to active with a vengeance. In the eerie black-ribbed vortex of *Bomb Landscape 4* (2007), a nude woman squats, her fierce face covered with sores, her teeth gritted, her left eye gouged and blackened. A tube attached to her breast extends to both an infant and a strange, prone figure wearing an oxygen mask.

In another series, Taylor has used sunlight and stencils to bleach and burn construction paper to create brown-on-black images. The visually rich works, like *Me Drinking Milk and Saliva* and the mirror image *Clara Playing Pattycake* (both 2008), are haunting.

—Lea Feinstein



Josephine Taylor, *Bomb Landscape 5*, 2008, sumi ink, colored ink, and white pencil on paper, 8'4" x 12'5". Catharine Clark.

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