

MOTHERSCAPE

by

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A Thesis

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of

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in Partial Fulfillment of

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of

Master of Fine Arts

Art and Visual Technology

Committee:

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Fairfax, VA

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by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to all mothers, but especially those with colicky, difficult babies.

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ABSTRACT

MOTHERSCAPE

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George Mason University, 2021

Thesis Director: Paula Crawford

Motherscape, the MFA thesis of Jayne Matricardi, explores the psychological landscape of motherhood through paintings, video, mixed media and poetry. The exhibition shines light on hidden struggles of motherhood, investigates the metaphor of mothers as beasts of burden, questions motherhood myths, and reckons with the concept of scientific motherhood. Motherscape also creates a refuge of meditative space where challenging and contradictory aspects of motherhood may be heard and held. The exhibit was displayed in the Gillespie Gallery at George Mason University in March 2021.

[POEM 1]
MATERNAL TRANSLATION
CATULLUS, CARMEN 85

I love my children,
and I hate being a mother.
What kind of monster are you, you ask?
Perhaps the kind that is burdened by being
torn in two when her children cry
and stuffed to bursting then they smile.

INTRODUCTION

When I became a mother, I became a landscape. Flattened and silent, I became a backdrop to my children's everyday lives and sleepless nights. But beyond that, I also became a vast space as my body and being composed an entire world for my young children. Hence, my "motherscape" is a space of opposing forces: reduction and expansion, isolation and connection, anxiety and bliss, rage and love.

The imagery in this exhibition draws heavily upon photographs from various sources: family photographs passed down to me, vintage mother and child portraits, American "hidden mother" tintypes from the 1800s, RPPCs (real photo postcards) from the 1940s, and snapshots of animals from farms, zoos, and the wild. I began a dialog with these source images by means of scanning, zooming in, cropping, isolating, re-drawing, and re-painting. I then incorporated them into my own visual vocabulary by collaging, layering, and transferring. I also created a small, hand-sewn book of poetry (figures 1-4) to accompany my visual work. The poems are included in this text before each chapter. Ultimately, I reified my feelings, memories, and experiences of mothering through visual representations in a variety of media.

Given that "speaking publicly about private suffering was a signature act of second-wave feminism" (Arrow, 321), I have consciously situated my art practice in this

feminist sphere. My hope is to spur critical discourse and genuine conversations about the very real, but often silenced or ignored, challenges of motherhood.

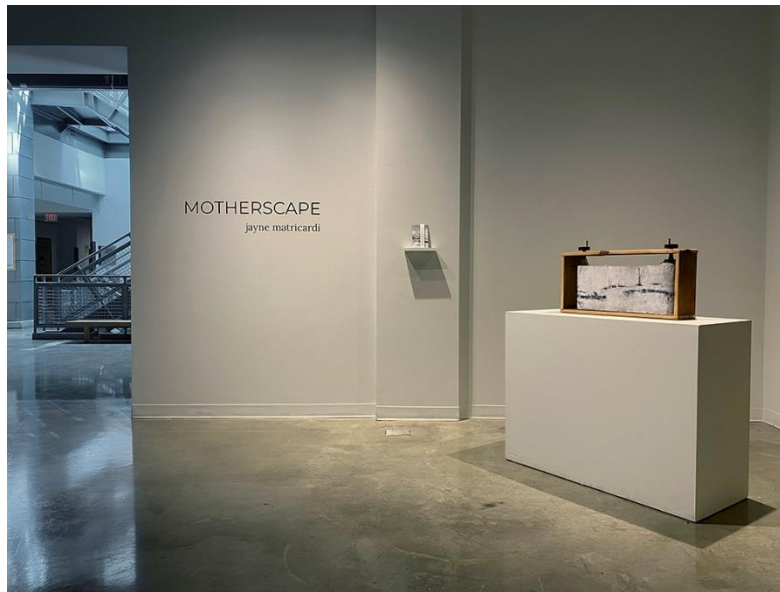


Figure 1: *Poems from the Motherscape* (center) installation view



Figure 2: *Poems from the Motherscape*, paper, ink, thread, edition of 30



Figure 3: *Poems from the Motherscape*, cover

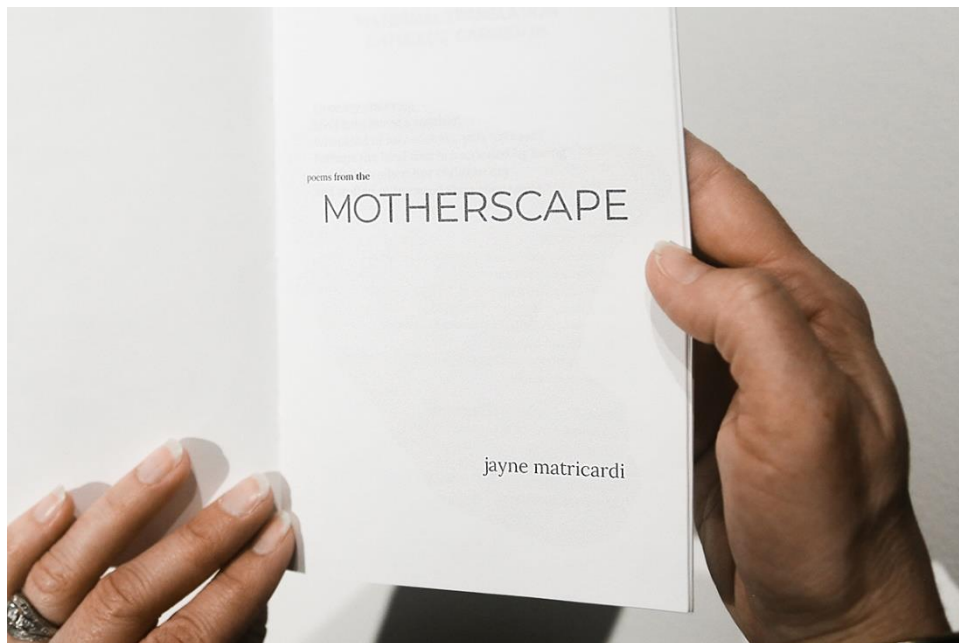


Figure 4: *Poems from the Motherscape*, title page

[POEM 2]
TIRED MOTHER

Your beautiful daughter
healthy, full cheeks
looking slightly out of frame.
Polka dot backdrop
strange bow in her hair
but it wasn't.
That was my first clue.

The second,
I noticed your hands merged with ruffles,
one on each side to stabilize.
I knew you might be back there covered
by a Persian rug, or scratched
at least your face blackened.
So with a sharp knife
I cut through the crusted glue
incising carefully.

Tin fell away from delicate oval
embossed paper no longer framing.
Thin, irregular metal in my palm
as you came into view, blurry,
easier to see at an angle between
the glare and sheen.

A shock.
To see your face with eyes on me
a sudden sucking in of air
too quickly, straight into my stomach
because I already knew you.

I knew your tired
your plodding
your weary
your holding

Your holding her. Always
holding still for the light, long exposure
to travel through time and space
behind the photographer's black drape.
For 100 years (or more perhaps?)
you sat
quietly behind the frame.
Holding.

And as soon as I saw you
I loved you
and I held you
Still.

HIDDEN MOTHERS – INVISIBLE STRUCTURES

Following a yearning to heal and make meaning from the difficult, early years of child-rearing that I experienced, I found myself drawn to maternal images, specifically a particular genre of Victorian era photography, commonly called “hidden mother” photography. Interestingly, hidden mother photos are not meant to be images of mothers at all, but of children. The young child sits front-and-center surrounded by folds of cloth, staring either directly at the viewer (photographer) or just to the left or right (at the photographer’s assistant). The children are rarely smiling. At times, the movement of an arm or leg has been captured as a blur. But most importantly in these photos, the background drapery has a distinctly, or indistinctly human shape: the mother has become a piece of furniture, or a landscape behind her child.

The hidden mother vernacular skips over the incidental child and drives directly to absence of the mother, pointing to the palpable presence of what was meant to be absent. The anonymous baby in a typical hidden mother photo becomes a near perfect example of Roland Barthes’ *studium*, the purported subject of the photograph as explained in *Camera Lucida*. The baby is the photographer’s intention, while the trace of the mother is the unintentional *punctum*, the detail that gives the photo life. For example, a patterned dress behind an infant, or a satin bow next to a child’s ear were seemingly

insignificant details, meant to be overlooked, yet they drew me in and stirred up unresolved emotions connected to my experience of motherhood.

Moved by the unseen presence of motherhood captured in the hidden mother images I found online, I started collecting the real thing: mother and child analog tintypes, from the 1800s. The small, irregular pieces of metal (iron, not tin) fit easily in the palm of one's hand. The edges are often clipped, or rounded, unevenly cut. Many come still glued to the original paper overlay, with an oval opening for the portrait, and a highly detailed and delicate embossment, mimicking a carved wooden frame. The paper, after a hundred years or more, has become yellowed and stained, matching the decidedly off-whites and creams of the lightest areas of the tintypes. Ghostly and ethereal, they are best viewed at an angle, due to the glare from the metal. Reading these images is an intimate affair: it takes careful handling, drawing the plate close to one's face, with a gentle shifting back and forth, similar to reading a book with a flashlight under the bedcovers.



Figure 5: tintype with paper frame (left) and without frame (right)

Of the mother and child tintypes I have collected, my favorite consists of an astonishingly vibrant little girl, probably about a year old, in a ruffled dress with tiny stripes (figure 5). Behind her is a polka-dotted drape, and in her hair is a white, stiff, and odd-looking bow. However, once the paper frame is removed it reveals that the bow is actually the mother's collar and the polka-dotted drape is a floral pattern on her dress. This mother, in fact, wasn't obscured in any way. She openly stared straight ahead, weary, with dark circles under her eyes. She clearly knew she wouldn't be included in the photo; she was just there to hold and support her daughter.

This tired mother, hidden beneath the frame for perhaps a century, until I found her, had a profound effect on my psyche and my art practice. I felt so connected to her. I shared her suffering, weariness, silence, and invisibility. I wanted to pay her homage and through her, pay homage to myself. I faithfully rendered the scratches, dust, and damage of the tired mother's portrait, first as a large-scale graphite drawing on vellum which I then printed on translucent fabric (figures 6 & 7), approximately 500 times the size of the original tintype. In my re-presentation and unveiling of this mother, bedraggled, raw, and vulnerable, I am not only revealing but re-asserting her presence that was supposed to have been hidden, ignored, overlooked.

I also rendered and printed on fabric a murky landscape taken from a photographer's painted backdrop. Distorted edges give a snow-globe like feel, referencing the all-encompassing world mothers provide their infants. The imagery in the third fabric piece, a mother's hands held in a delicate gesture, will be discussed in a later

chapter. Ultimately, through these printed drawings on fabric, I am attempting to form a quiet but expansive space to acknowledge the reality of the invisible structures which mothers provide.



Figure 6: *Tired Mother*, installation view, ink on voile, 10 x 7.5 feet



Figure 7: *Tired Mother*, detail

[POEM 3]
ANCESTOR'S NECKLACE

I wear a dead snake
around my neck. Ornament
of Shiva it's not. Without blessing
it serves me
no longer.

Weightless scales
press down, overlapping
selves and centuries.
A permanent, ephemeral

Imprint to collarbone
my serpent-scarf
fuses as I refuse to shed
the jewelry of my past,

fears of the future.
Teeth clasp tail, words
swallowed whole. No
ears hear ceaseless friction.

I listen only to chattering
ego, impermeable to rain.
I move as a wave
toward the stream.

Can I navigate the road,
the rocks and hungry hawk?
I hope to become nothing,
a drop of water

in the continuous river.

HOLDING ABSENCE – MATERNAL AMBIVALENCE

Regarding the invisibility of mothers as portrayed in the hidden mother genre, photographer Laura Larson notes how the images “poetically invoke the experience of maternity – how mothers have to balance the cultivation of attachment and independence when raising a child” (Gibson). This peculiar ambivalence created a sense of isolation and loss of self for me in early motherhood. As explained by Sarah LaChance Adams in *The Maternal Tug*:

Indeed, this is the realization of the existential fact of human intertwining. The human person is not a separable monad. As such, maternal ambivalence is not merely directed from mother to child. One’s child, though radically other, is also seamlessly one’s own. Maternal ambivalence is simultaneously directed from oneself and towards oneself. This involves a self-estrangement that earlier theorists did not always recognize. (16-17)

Attachment and independence, oneness and separateness, self-estrangement and self-lessness are simultaneously felt by mothers in varying degrees. They form the basis for my multi-panel painting *Holding Absence* (figures 8-10). It is both an image of any mother and daughter, and at the same time a particular portrait of an immigrant with her daughter: my grandmother and great-grandmother shortly after settling in the US, in the

early 1920s. Upon becoming a mother, I almost immediately and inexplicably felt an acute connection to the painful losses and separations of my ancestors. As I have portrayed them in this painting, bodies are shifted and dislocated across the panels, but closeness is still revealed in the bond between mother and child. Embodied by hazy photos, memories face in the shuffle of generations, but do not vanish completely.



Figure 8: *Holding Absence*, oil on wood panels, 4.5 x 10 feet



Figure 9: *Holding Absence*, detail



Figure 10: installation view of *Oratory* (left), *Holding Absence* (back right), and *Thought Forms* (front right)

Even in the digital world, images suffer loss: by process of scanning and compressing, enlarging, cropping, and projecting. Pixels shed along the way. I ushered my grandmother and great grandmother's portrait through these processes, and then back to the analog world by scratching away oil paint with sandpaper. In a sense it is through absence, through a disappearing, that I am revealing the ghosts of my ancestors, in much the same way that I often felt like a ghost while caring for my young children, losing my sense of self.

Derrida's concept of hauntology, a portmanteau of haunting and ontology, is essentially "the idea that the present is haunted by the metaphorical 'ghosts' of lost futures" (Ashford). Steering quickly away from the tendency to think of hauntology in a kitschy manner, as related to ghosts in a banal sense, it relates rather to the persistence of the past within the future. Mark Fisher explains "the concept of hauntology was in part a restatement of the key deconstructive claim that 'being' is not equivalent to presence." Just because a mother is there does not necessarily mean she is present, and conversely because a mother is not there, does not mean she is not present. One can be present in absence; a phenomenon I feel to this day with my ancestors. It is in this very specific sense that I think of my work as haunted. And, as Andrew Gallix writes about Derrida's hauntology: "When you come to think of it, all forms of representation are ghostly. Works of art are haunted, not only by the ideal forms of which they are imperfect instantiations, but also by what escapes representation."

[POEM 4]
PICTURE ON A PONY

Ankles turn on cobblestone
without constant vigilance.
Blinders on
led through the streets of Baltimore

Day in. Day out.

Sweet relief when a child is placed on my back
Just stand.
At a marble stoop
in front of a painted screen, pastoral of course
or near barred windows and formstone.

Look at the camera. Over here!
Mother (father, less common)
crouches down between brick and saddle
to prop the little one.
Pretend not to see the dress or legs under my belly

It's just for fun.

Ears twitch before I distinguish the sound.
My cousin clip-clopping along, bells jingling
calls ringing with slight echo in the alley.

The A-rabber's pony has work heavier than mine
pulling a painted cart, piled high
with vegetables and fruits.
Corn Here! Tomatoes! Cantaloupes!
What is his carrot on a stick, if all the treats are piled behind him?
Me: that a boy or girl might take pity and ask Nan for an apple.

But I lose my patience
bite it right out of their pudgy hand – pinching
tiniest, tender piece of flesh with skin and core.
Swallowed almost whole
knowing the whip will come, and
not caring.

Under the lamppost on Sussex Road
where the fruit cart stops
reminds me – many years ago
out of the second-floor window I saw
a familiar ghost, a living skeleton.

Up for treatment in the morning
back down to home when the sun was low
until she wasted away.
Body no longer able to live on breath alone.

One year younger than me.

I used to think: I should have been her friend
given her a ride,
pride, and strength.
Thought I had that in me
and back then,
I did.

But mile after mile
my pack grew too heavy
and now, prescient time of pause,
I choose to walk as I please
with nourishing breath in each step.
Eyes unfocused

Seeing far.

BEASTS OF BURDEN – QUIET RESIGNATION

The poem above was inspired by a family photograph of my great uncle as an infant, propped up on a pony with his father crouched down behind the animal, only his legs showing (figure 11). They posed near the marble front stoop of their rowhouse in downtown Baltimore in 1920. However, beyond the surface of this awkward and humorous photo something more was represented: the pony's eyes and stance communicated a quiet resignation to the drudgery of her captive life. My empathy for the pony not only spurred the poem, but also the central series of artwork in this thesis: *Beasts of Burden* (figures 12-19).



Figure 11: photograph of the artist's great-uncle

As distant as it seems from my struggles as a working mother in the 21st century, this one-hundred-year-old family photo galvanized a self-realization and broader acknowledgement of the dilemma which I and so many other mothers face. I felt a connection to that pony, as I worked day in and day out for my children, in addition to my paid job, leaving no time for myself. Ironically, the COVID-19 pandemic, while bringing much of the world to a standstill, has brought the unacknowledged work and overwork of mothers to the forefront. In *The Primal Scream*, a *New York Times* Special Report published two months prior to my thesis show, Jessica Bennett examines the pandemic's effect on working mothers in America:

But there is no hiding anymore. The struggles of working parents — and moms, in particular — have never been more in our faces. And yet this work — the planning, the coordinating, the multitasking, the hustling — often goes unnoticed. It is largely unsung. Moms carry the burden. In opposite-sex couples, it is mothers who do the majority of the domestic chores and child-related planning, even when both parents work and the woman is the breadwinner.

The photographer's poor pony with the baby propped on it was for me very much akin to the tired mother who had been hidden behind the frame in my tintype. Although I translated the image of the pony and baby into multiple artworks, ultimately the one included in this show (figures 13 & 14) is a loose, watery, carbon painting on canvas. The

entire series is rendered in this style, which I associate with vague ink blots, faded penmanship, spills and stains.



Figure 12: *Beasts of Burden* series, installation view



Figure 13: *Beasts of Burden: Boy on a Pony*, carbon on canvas, 60 x 48 inches



Figure 14: *Beasts of Burden: Boy on a Pony*, detail



Figure 15: *Beasts of Burden: Baby on a Camel*, carbon on canvas, 72 x 60 inches



Figure 16: *Beasts of Burden: Baby on an Antelope*, carbon on canvas, 60 x 48 inches

Much as I imagined the pony must have felt, plodding each day through city streets so parents could pay for a photo of their child on her back, I found myself feeling trapped and overburdened by the physical and mental load of caring for my children while working full-time. Before becoming a mother I assumed that, with ease, I'd be able to continue my teaching career and art practice, have strong and vibrant relationships with my husband, family, and friends, give adequate time and attention to my inner spiritual life, all while raising my children. A study which looked deeply into broken expectations of motherhood, found "becoming a mother is regarded as a developmental transition that involved psychological, social and physical effort.... Mothers may experience the new responsibility as overwhelming.... As a never-ending regime." (Feenstra, 876) In the poem in the next chapter, I reference many, seemingly endless, repetitive tasks of mothering, which for me were a rude awakening.

In fact, the workload of motherhood forced me to put my creative practice on hold for about twelve years. As Daphne Merkin writes in *The New York Review*:

[T]he matter of motherhood and artistic creativity remains an either/or question, a deeply conflicted issue even now, despite the fact that the advantages of feminism have helped women pursue occupations and goals that were once out of grasp. It is as though we have not yet reconciled ourselves to the idea that the one generative desire need not necessarily preclude the other—that we can, within reasonable bounds, have it all, even if imperfectly which creative men have pretty much taken for granted right along.

I found myself in this either/or space, in which my children won out over my art. Even if there were enough hours in the day for me to create work physically, I couldn't find the mental space and energy needed for my artwork. Being forced to choose between artwork and motherwork certainly wasn't a new dilemma for me or the women who came before me. As Virginia Woolf said about a century ago, "how any woman with a family ever put pen to paper I cannot fathom" (quoted in Merkin, 28).

[POEM 5]
ZEBRA

I thought I left the bars of the zoo behind,
but they travelled with me
tattooed on my hide.
I place my hoof
through the slats of your crib
to soothe you at night. Tethered
outside your cage is mine.

Pins and needles from sitting on bare wood floor.
Hour after
hour Night after
night Month after
month. Even year after year, which most don't believe.

Sometimes I would dream
until your cries pull up the reins — sharp snap.
Head jerking awake from the thinnest veil of sleep.

Soft, most tender weight on your back
brings quiet again, for a moment. Until creak
of floor thud
of door cast
of light
bursts in. And so:

change
sing nurse
burp bounce
rock swish
sway, walk
marching in a tight circle.
Repeat.
until just before morning.

Having survived the night, some comfort
barely enough
to begin again as you climb into the saddle
and swaddle yourself in me.

THE MYTH OF MOTHERHOOD – SILENT COLONIZATION

When my children were young, days and nights were a never-ending regime, a crushing workload that seemed to slowly obscure my sense of self. And my response: silence. Like an animal, I was mute. But why was I mute, considering all the contemporary resources on hand: the books, the latest research at the click of a button, the online groups, the family support? In “*Fake Smile: Everything is Under Control.*”: *The Flawless Performance of Motherhood*, researchers Jocelyn DeGroot and Tennley Vik study “the intense burden of performing motherhood flawlessly on and offline” and they call for “investigating the invisible work that mothers currently accomplish, how that invisible work can contribute to issues of workload imbalance, and implications of such a discrepancy.” In another aptly titled research article, “*Silenced, Silence, Silent,*” Lorelei Carpenter and Helena Austen explain:

The present dominant version of this myth can be characterized as a mother who is self-sacrificing, nurturing, selfless. A person who is in an interdependent relationship, is emotional, compassionate, connected to nature, and gives efficient and effective attention to everyday tasks; she is always available to her children and assumes complete responsibility for them; she is unselfish and supportive and her children are always in need of her, in particular when they are young.

Rather than being a blissfully selfless and happily self-sacrificing mother as described in the myth above, my trapped and muted feelings led to frustration, anxiety, and anger. Maggie Doherty, in a forthcoming book about women writers and artists in the 1960's, states that poet Anne Sexton "found herself reacting with anger and violence to her children's needs" and she "described herself as a 'caged tiger' to her psychiatrist" (quoted in Merkin 27).

While I, too, frequently felt like a caged tiger, one day I was referred to as a cow by my father-in-law when I was breastfeeding my son. This joke, while seemingly innocuous, was far from it and provoked feelings of absolute rage in me. Yet at the time, I remained silent in my anger. "Mothers are often 'strategically silent' to avoid confrontation or judgement from others. In other words, confessions of why motherhood is challenging go unsaid, unexplained and all together unacknowledged" (Degroot & Vik, 56). It was only through the cathartic process of creating the *Beasts of Burden* series that I was able to give voice to my feelings about the incident. In the poem that follows this chapter, and in the painting below (figures 17-19), I speak through the persona of an angry goat.



Figure 17: *Beasts of Burden: Goat Cart with Two Children*, carbon on canvas, 48 x 60 inches



Figure 18: *Goat Cart with Two Children*, detail



Figure 19: *Goat Cart with Two Children*, detail



Figure 20: *Thought Forms*, found objects: doll and View Master toy, 8 x 6 x 5 inches



Figure 21: *Thought Forms*, detail

Several paintings in my *Beasts of Burden* series reference goat and dog carts, which were popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s to pull a wide variety of relatively small loads such as milk, tea, firewood, ammunition, and children. Just as these draft animals were domesticated by their masters and obliged to bear their burdens, I felt colonized by my children's needs and ashamed of feeling so. How could such a small baby be regarded as a burden, or even a colonizer? And what kind of mother was I for

such feelings? I didn't fit the mold; I couldn't live up to the myth. And I had no idea that many other mothers felt the same way. I was unaware that:

A double-bind is created for mothers where they reflect the flawless performance of mother, yet succumb to the social pressure to perform motherhood flawlessly.... Performing the perfect mother is reified and reinforced so much by society that there often remains little room for diverting from the dominant script (Degroot & Vik, 54).



Figure 22: *Thought Forms*, installation view

I found myself in this double-bind, my body colonized by my children's needs, and my mind colonized by society's expectations. I represented these feelings in a singular sculpture titled *Thought Forms* (figures 20-22): an armless doll sits passively, her head replaced by a television set. Additionally, I consciously stretch my personal reference of colonization to colonialism in the *Beasts of Burden* series with European infants on animals such as zebras, camels (figure 15), and antelopes (figure 16). In doing so, I point to the absurdity and damage of colonialism whether on the scale of entire populations, or that of an overworked mother.

[POEM 6]
YOUR MOTHER, THE COW

Soft Pillow. Affectionate title,
bequeathed by my son
to my postpartum stomach.
Perfect height, perfect density
for a three-year old forehead
to rest.

Patient puppy sitting by my side
an author penned of hers. In mine,
I saw a teddy bear in profile
nose upturned, yet flat,
cheeks billowing out.

Even my mother agreed- it looked funny.

Worse still, all my innards fell out
by the end of each day.
To sit up took forethought.

Stuffing clumped unevenly
on left and right sides
of a canyon. Stick my hand straight in
disappear up to knuckles, muscles
bowed.

Even my doctor agreed- it was deep.

With ambivalence and apprehension
I got cut from hip to hip
to expose and knit, a wall of four layers
sewed back up in three.
Skin never right nor tight and no feeling
but at least I was strong again.

Strong, as an ox? Funny you should ask.

I suppose,
caring for my youngest one triggered
his young one — undone.
Ask your mother, the cow!
said he
spitting laughter towards my older
red face round
bursting gleeful metaphor.

Meant to hurt.

Not as much as the silent room.
In his gone-ness, less.
Even when I tell the tale of his shame
to entertain
or to shock
or to touch the sore.

Now, to settle the score:

How dare you!
Can you not see my:
 One woolen coat, pure as fresh snow?
 Two powerful horns, like ribbons of steel?
 Three point harness, fit fine as a glove?
 Four built-to-climb hooves, hard as diamonds?

I suppose,
similes are lost on you.
Maybe you have black spots on your glasses
or heart.

But still,
you can fold your knees up to chest,
climb in my cart with the kids.
I'll pull the whole lot of you.
Because,
you're a child really
in need of a nanny.

That's my job,
and besides, I bear your name.

IN YOUR HANDS – THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY

Historian Rima D. Apple, who specializes in women's history and the history of medicine, explains that "(s)cientific motherhood is the insistence that women require expert scientific and medical advice to raise their children healthfully" and it is a primary reason as to why my maternal mind felt so colonized. In the United States, the ideology of scientific mothering began in the late 1800s, and as it gained a firm hold in the 1900s:

Increasingly women were told not just that they needed to learn from scientific and medical expertise but that they needed to follow the directions of experts.

This aspect of the ideology presented women with a tension-laden contradiction: it made them responsible for the health and welfare of their families, but it denied them control over child rearing. In other words, women were both responsible for their families and incapable of that responsibility (Apple, 91).

One example of a scientific motherhood document is *My Book House*, the 12-volume series of literature, poems, and biographies published from 1920-1970. The accompanying guide for parents, *In Your Hands*, (figure 23) begins by stating:

Your child is in your hands! Many parents stand in awe when they first read this challenging statement and fully realize the responsibility it places on them in determining the success and happiness of their child. It was to help the thousands

of parents who were finding it so difficult to secure the material they needed to do their all important job successfully that [this] Plan was developed (Miller, 1).

In Your Hands gives parents detailed instructions and exact scripts to use with their children to accompany carefully chosen nursery rhymes and stories. It presents social, emotional, and cognitive benchmarks for children according to age, which are purportedly “based on data obtained from observation, tests, and school courses of study” (Miller, xiii).

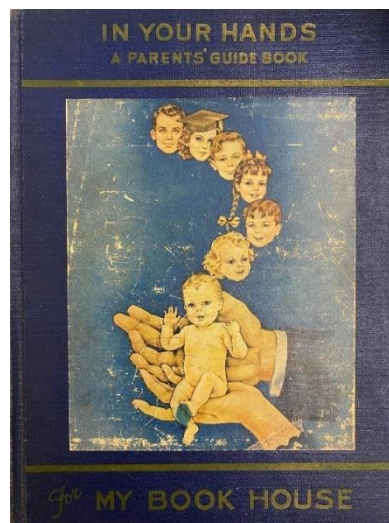


Figure 23: cover of *In Your Hands*

I selected pages from *In Your Hands* and created poetry by using white paint to obscure parts of the text, allowing the remaining text to form the poems. I paired each poem with a transferred photograph of my hands (figures 24-27). I mimicked the precise positioning of mothers’ hands as they held their children in my previously referenced collection of tintypes, yet in these photos, my hands were empty. This series of mixed media works comments on the immeasurable weight placed on mothers from the late

1800s to today, by making them responsible for all aspects of raising their children, but forcing them to follow parenting prescriptions which only fit into a narrow mold of acceptability. In these works, my hands hold the invisible weight of responsibility while the poetry muddles and subverts the 'scientific' advice.

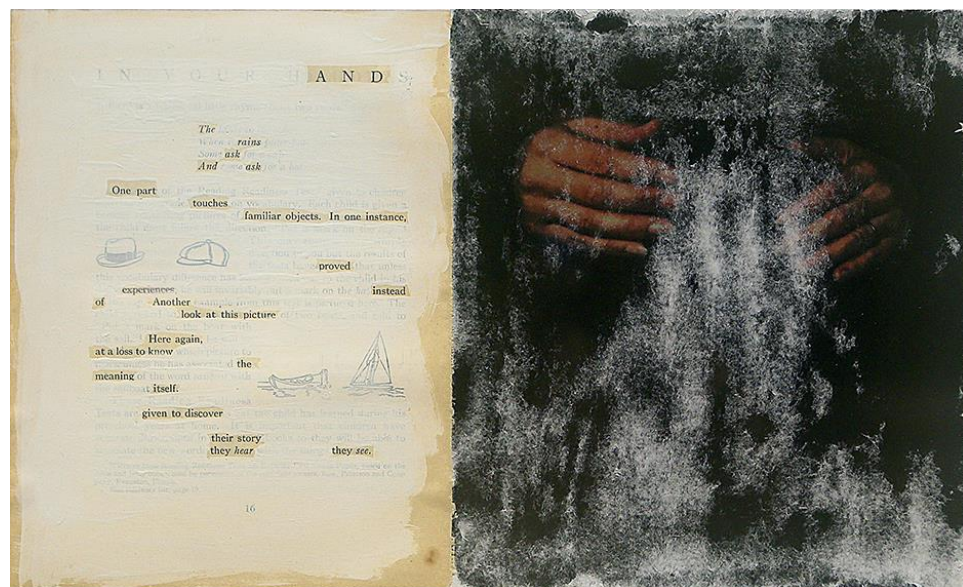


Figure 24: *In Your Hands: And the Rains Ask*, paint and image transfer on paper, 14 x 20 inches



Figure 25: In Your Hands series, installation view

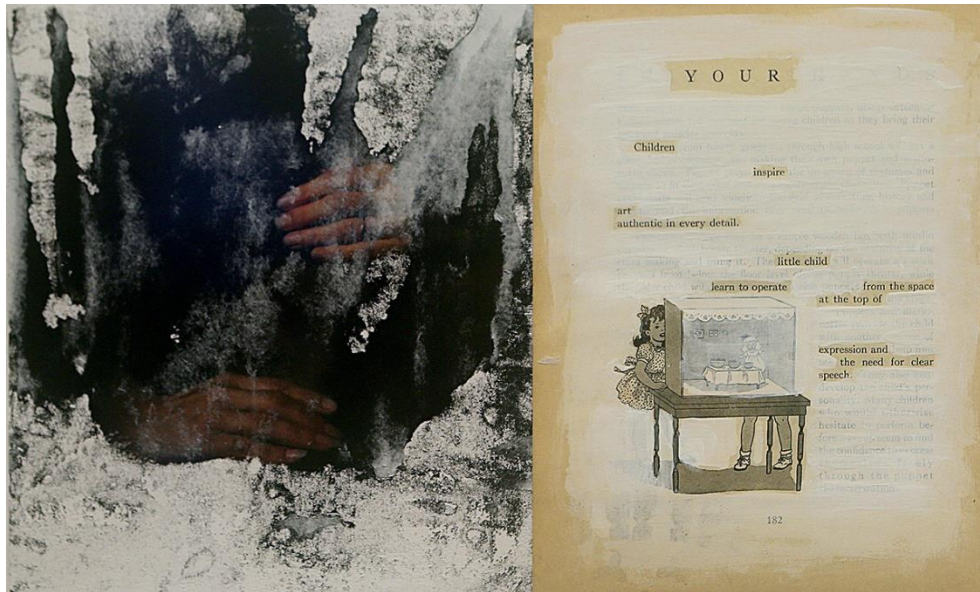


Figure 27: *In Your Hands: Your Children Inspire*, paint and image transfer on paper, 14 x 20 inches

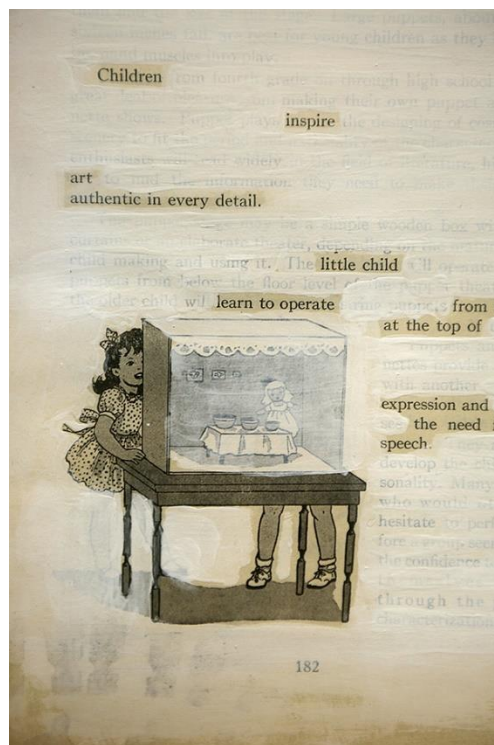


Figure 26: *Your Children Inspire*, detail

[POEM 7]
MOTHERSCAPE

My stomach became a mountain
but I wasn't a landscape, yet.
I became two, plus two
equals one
the same way red isn't red, until
it becomes so in the space between eye and brain.
A phenomenon of perception.

I became a landscape all at once
and in bits and pieces
falling apart, melding back together.
Welded to form your structure
your backdrop
your world.
At least from my perspective.

Long before I became a landscape
looking out the backseat window
land and air whipped by.
High voltage power lines
became mother and child holding hands
In five-year-old eyes.

After I became a landscape
phone lines draped from house to house.
Materialized memories of laundry drying
flower-printed sheets, flowing in the breeze
whether there, or in spirit alone
A reminder of connection.

Ancestors called from lands beyond
voices singing on the ringing of bells,
floating into my room in the treetops
on evening's warm breath.

No one heard them but me.

Grandmother, off to work at C&P
connecting voice to voice
before she became a landscape.
"Number, please" in a pleasant voice "I'll connect you."
As hand stretched cord across switchboard.

Grandfather circled the globe
traveling through landscape, not becoming.
Merchant ship silently linking, port to port
ghosts of the oceans, at least they hoped to be
unseen in the dark of night, but not absent.
Or the war would be lost.

Postcard landscapes collected in a shoebox, size 8
unceremoniously taped in brown.
My name, first and last, scrawled on top and side
handed to me in the cold attic of Morningside Drive.
Why were they destined for me?

Southampton, Lisbon, the Suez Canal
Civitavecchia (pronounced with pride)
churches, monuments, bays, hillsides, piazzas
a tree on the side of a dirt road,
thatched huts, a grave,
vessels that become floating factories, a young nun.
Too beautiful to ever be a landscape.

Collected haphazardly, saved methodically
or the other way 'round for a future grandchild,
or grandchild's child
to be viewed many times but only appreciated once.
She became a landscape.

HEALING THE MOTHERSCAPE – KNITTING A REFUGE

In this exhibit, I also utilize imagery of my hands in another way: hands in the act of knitting become a multi-faceted metaphor for holding and moving through positive, negative, and ambivalent aspects of my motherhood experience. In my video, *Oratory* (figures 28-30), I layer slow motion footage of my hands, both knitting and unravelling what has been knit, along with footage from a favorite spot along a stream near my home. Trees are reflected in the gently moving water, while meditation bells and vocals can be heard in the background.

The repetition and rhythm of knitting references the seemingly endless tasks of mothering infants and young children: the changing, cleaning, folding, rocking, nursing, burping, bouncing, walking, and soothing. The delicate and intricate gestures of hands in the act of knitting speak to mothers' gentle tending and tiny acts of care which accumulate over time and amount to something much larger, like knit and purl stitches in a blanket. Along with the inextricable linking of myself to my children as they were raised, I simultaneously felt an acute connection to my ancestors as noted above, and I point to that feeling of connection in this video — as if my life were simply one small stitch, intertwined in a string of lives lived.

I use another type of moving image, albeit analog rather than digital, in the piece *Wish You Were Here* (figures 31-33). Based on moving panoramas and crankie boxes of

the 19th Century, a long scroll of transferred landscapes winds from spool to spool and must be hand-cranked. Rather than telling a narrative story, as in traditional crankie boxes, my scroll is a panorama of ghosted postcard memories collected from around the world by my grandfather during his time as a Merchant Marine in World War II, and referenced in the final poem *Motherscape*. As I transferred the images, I forced a continuous horizon line, by revealing only parts of the original image, allowing portions to remain obscured or semi-obscured with the paper backing. In this piece I knit together disparate places and times to form one unbroken landscape. Both the knitting video and the scrolling landscape link past and present, and create meditative spaces which serve as refuge; an escape to a land beyond the motherscape.



Figure 28: *Oratory*, installation view



Figure 29: *Oratory*, digital video projection, 8 x 14 feet



Figure 30: *Oratory*, still



Figure 31: *Wish You Were Here*, with viewer interacting



Figure 32: *Wish You Were Here*, wood, canvas, and image transfers, 8 x 12 x 24 inches



Figure 33: *Wish You Were Here*, detail

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BIOGRAPHY

Jayne Matricardi is originally from Baltimore, Maryland, and has been living in the Washington DC area since 1996. She has been teaching studio art in Fairfax County Public Schools since 2001. Matricardi graduated from the University of Virginia in 1996 with a double major in Painting and Art History, while spending one semester at the Lorenzo de' Medici Institute in Florence, Italy. She earned a Master of Education degree in 2001 from the George Washington University.

Matricardi was a resident artist in 1996, 1999, and 2002 at La Cipressaia, in Tuscany under the direction of the collaborative duo, Rosenclaire. She was also a resident artist at the Arlington Arts Center in Virginia from 2000-2002. Matricardi received a Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Professional Fellowship in 2002. She has participated in numerous local juried art shows, including exhibits at the Fenwick Library on George Mason's campus, the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, the Ernst Cultural Art Center at Northern Virginia Community College, and the Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery in Washington, DC.

Matricardi had a solo exhibition at the Workhouse Art Center in Lorton in 2018. She will receive her MFA from George Mason University in May 2021. She teaches art in Fairfax County where she lives with her husband and two sons.