

Rebecca Baille

*Artist's Statement*

I am equally interested in the 'childless mother', the 'allmother', and in fantasies of maternity as I am in the actual experience. Along these lines, I think in particular of the artists Frida Kahlo, Tracey Emin and Tabitha Moses. I sometimes think that the reality of motherhood can hinder art making, and that being a 'mother artist' has nothing at all to do with having children.

Having said this, I continue to make art as a mother of two very young children. My practice is slow and interrupted. Compared to friends without children, my output is meager. I do like what I make when I get round to making though. Perhaps because I do not get the chance to make often, I really perfect that which I do. I recently made a series of nude photographs, covering my heavily pregnant belly in gold leaf for the daytime 'sun' shoot, and then in silver leaf for the nighttime full 'moon' session.

I am also interested in the under-depicted subject of miscarriage (which I experienced in-between my two, healthy full term pregnancies). *My Son 22.10.11* was made immediately following a miscarriage 8 weeks into pregnancy. After bleeding lightly for a couple of hours, I went to the toilet and a large bloody mass fell from within me. I knew that I could not flush this away, and that to retrieve the mass was my only chance to connect with the unborn foetus. I fished the contents from the bottom of the toilet bowl using my hands and carried them into my small studio. I found some paper and began to dissect the mass. At the centre, I found the tiny, cold, hard foetus. I kissed it and then began to use it as a kind of painting tool, drawing the outline of the lost child using its very own flesh and blood. I knew that to create a lasting and tangible portrait of 'my son' was the best way to understand the somewhat unreal and fleeting experience of miscarriage.

I thought of Frida Kahlo while making this work, thinking 'thank God' that I had a reference to miscarriage before it happened to me. I also thought of my childhood days spent on our family pig farm, and of all the dead pig foetuses that I had seen at various stages of development. Before the miscarriage, I thought little about the subject;

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afterwards, I recognise the profundity of the creation of a life that is never born. The experience is so common, yet so very rarely discussed or depicted.

I am interested generally in the use of medical imagery in relation to maternity and to art. For example: how the intimate, crudely sewn, pregnant and labouring sculptures of Louise Bourgeois recall Japanese birthing dolls and antenatal teaching aids. How the German artist, Annegret Soltau, uses literal suturing to re-unite ripped photographs of pregnant and naked female bodies, while British-Indian artist, Bharti Kher highlights the 'meaning' of 'abnormal' labour by simply embellishing straight medical illustrations with patterns of sperm bindis.

The very physicality of conceiving, carrying and birthing a child are all subjects particularly compatible to making art. Creating physical objects in your own image and then feeling terrified to let them go into the world, is a process that both artists and mothers experience alike. After making my miscarriage piece, I now find blood a very interesting medium and plan to draw a series of self-portraits using blood from my placenta. There is something about literally giving your own flesh and blood to a child during pregnancy that is connected to the all-giving process of art.