



MAMA!

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Artist Residency-in- Motherhood

Kara Thorndike, 2019-2020

Investigating the effects of motherhood on being by using fragmenting experiences of mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion in modern parenthood (as well as the absurd poetry of spending time with children) as material instead of viewing them as obstacles to overcome.

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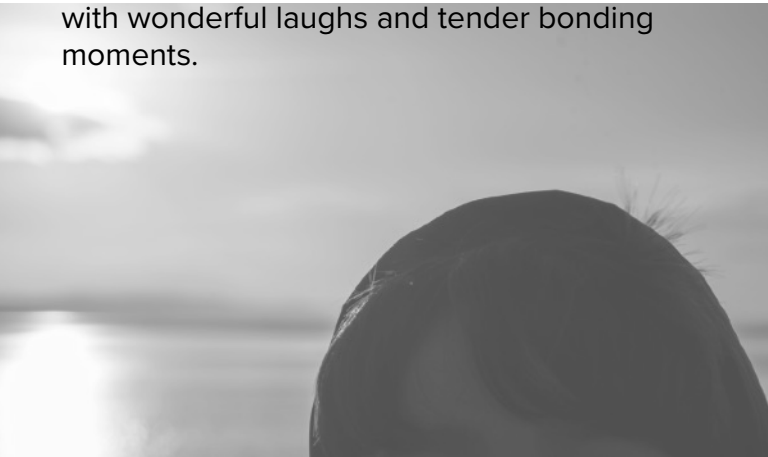
Being a mother

First is the massive anxiety that has come with *being* a mother without a good example to follow. As a parent who had little to no parenting herself, the fear of screwing up my son for years to come is ever present. Still healing from the abuse, neglect, and abandonment of my own childhood, I work extra hard to be mindful of my son's experience of childhood. So much so, that the self-imposed pressure often backfires, leaving me overwhelmed. This on top of already being an introvert who processes deeply and slowly. The urge to mentally checkout can be strong.

Thinking on how I could show this I started taking pictures *for* the residency, trying to recreate moments when I've felt anxious and overwhelmed. In trying to stage those moments, I realized that picking up the camera and taking photos of him was incredibly therapeutic.

Having the camera in hand allows me to take a step back, observe, and breathe. The pressure is off and we both can have fun. He's since taken an interest in what is going on with the camera, asking me to show him and wanting to take pictures of his own.

The focus has changed from taking pictures *for* the residency to taking pictures *while* in-residence. That bit of revelation has gifted us with wonderful laughs and tender bonding moments.















Being a lone parent

Second is the loneliness of being a single mother, examining the mental and emotional outcomes of being a mother little support and no backup. Being a lone parent from the time my son was newborn, the amount of down time is nil. The realities of being a lone parent means being on 24/7 with little decompression and recuperation time. In itself that's enough, for the reasons mentioned above. However, the physical downside of being a lone parent was one I hadn't paid much attention to 'til this residency.

Being in a demanding industry that insists on being available 24/7, being a mom 24/7, plus not being able to just pop out for a walk or cycle when I need some exercise to clear my head or focus on just one thing at a time has taken on toll on my body. I was always slim to skinny before having a child. That was 38-ish years of having a decent figure. After having life

abruptly upended, I developed some not so hot coping mechanisms. I eat. Food became something I could still do, and enjoy, within the limitations of being a lone parent. Food has been comfort, substitute socializing, and quiet introspection. It has replaced walking, playing tennis, riding my bike, reading in bed and even sex (no energy for myself has meant none to date either). The irony is, while thin, I was always worried about being fat... not being even close to fat.

Picking up the camera again to take a close look at how my body has changed has been empowering. I can observe with compassion hows and whys of the changes. Even the uneven lump where scar tissue from the c-section has built up and tied my uterus to surrounding organs is less sorrowful. I can look and know that this body does not define me, and it isn't forever. Even the immense pain and bleeding that happens once a month from scar tissue ripping open again, and again,



won't last forever. As my body changes again heading toward menopause, I can take comfort in change. And do.











Being **absurd**

Ah... the joys and limitations of being while being a mother. Exploring the absurd poetry of spending time with my child, “stuff” found on walls feels appropriately absurd. Never in my life, not even in the frat houses and dorms of undergrad life, have I encountered such questionable “stuff” on the walls. Never-ending “stuff” that seems to re-spawn immediately after cleaning. I say stuff in quotes because well, I’ll let you identify the “stuff”...





Despite this – or because? – the absurdity is the stuff of stories. The kind we tell over several drinks, madly giggling to ourselves – with others? – swapping guesses at how on earth it got there.

Think I'll not guess. Too gross to imagine. I'm sure he'll tell me later anyway.







De mégis.

~kara



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AN ARTIST RESIDENCY IN MOTHERHOOD