

**Interview with Izabela Brudkiewicz by Katy Beinart
for the exhibition *neither here nor there* at Gallery DODO.
The interview took place by email during November 2020.**

Katy Beinart: In an interview I watched with Lynn Barber, the artist Phyllida Barlow says having children is completely incompatible with being an artist (she had 5) – but then she managed to keep going, teaching and raising 5 children. And she talks about having a kind of perseverance of carrying on making art whether or not you have success. Do you think that having children is compatible with being an artist? Is success important to you?

Izabela Brudkiewicz: In this interview, Phyllida Barlow also speaks about the hope and love that she needed for survival. I needed art. I cannot mentally survive without making art. I never separate myself as a mother and an artist. Consequently, I have become more creative. I needed to determine what was most important for me and, without any sentiments, throw out of my life things that were making unnecessary noises. Once I did that, the goals became very clear. Without the background noises, it's easy to stay focused on the purpose of life. Of course, these choices shape the compromises, shifts and changes in my artwork. Likewise, duration has transformed to the length of a child's attention span. If I had just tried to carry on as I did before being a mother, my mental and physical endurance would have totally broken down. The extreme exhaustion that, before, I was experiencing only during live performances, has escalated to everyday fatigue. Perceiving everyday life throughout motherhood as an artistic inspiration or potential art project eases the difficulties I am facing in modern society.

Is success important to me? If success is to wake up in the morning, shower, put makeup on, get your children ready, and get through the day without hating yourself? Then yes, it is. In terms of artistic practice, I haven't defined success yet. My works cure personal reality. Precious but intangible experiences are difficult to commodify.

How did you come to take part in the Artist Residency in Motherhood, and how was it of value to you as an artist?

After finding out about my first pregnancy, I started researching artist-mothers. I came across the artist Lenka Clayton who is the founder of the Artist Residency in Motherhood. I signed up, printed out the manifesto, asked my partner to sign it, so consequently he was totally aware that I will not quit art. We pinned it to the fridge. The Artist Residency in Motherhood determined remaining creatively active during these, the most difficult days of postpartum. That was when I started to perceive motherhood from a more artistic perspective. I realized that I don't have to compromise my passion for art, only that I need to find a way in which to unite parenthood and art.

In the piece *Mama*, you lock yourself into a room with your son for a durational performance. This reminded me of the Joseph Beuys piece *I Like America and America Likes Me*, where he was locked in a room with a coyote for 3 days, in the sense that he was trying to highlight divisions in America. Your piece highlights the division between trying to be a good artist and a good mother. I found it quite painful to watch because I strongly identified with it.

Can you say a bit about what gave you the idea for the performance and what it was like to carry it out?

It's interesting that you compare a child to a coyote. Joseph Beuys' performance was very political. The artist wanted to highlight the predominance of American art at the time. The

coyote is a spiritual symbol for Native Americans. The *Mama* video performance is about the ambiguity of the social values I come to face as a woman, artist and mother. The idea emerged after research I was working on at that time. The conclusion was that for many mother artists, once they find the energy, time and space for making art, then the feeling of guilt arises. It is a vicious circle. In terms of the actual making of the piece, the final video lasts for only ten minutes, whereas we had been locked in that room for over three hours. This speaks for itself. It took a couple of hours for the children to get used to the equipment and to lose interest in playing with it. After that, the art was made.

I didn't really intend to compare children to coyotes...

That's ok - I can clearly see the link between the two performances of Beuys and mine. I took this comparison as a compliment more than anything else. Also I see the similarities. The coyote had to adjust to a new situation with all its fears and natural instincts, the same as Beuys had to learn how to live with a wild animal. The same as my children had in some ways to adjust to that setting and I needed to learn how to deal with the presence of my children. Plus, above all I had to learn how to accept the children's dominance and my lack of control in the situation. I think this is quite something. From a social perspective, this could be quite a controversial way of seeing things... in a good way, of course.

In the piece, you say 'I want to be a good artist and a good mother'. What does 'good' mean to you in the context of artist or mother? Do you think it is possible to be good at both, simultaneously?

I love to imagine that I am a perfect mother, artist, housewife and all the other stereotypical nicknames that women are called - whatever 'perfect' may mean. The culture of today expects a modern mother to be a working woman, a housewife, to take care and raise the children, to be pretty, drink Starbucks coffee and so on. Social media powers this narrative and has irrational expectations. If social media exemplifies what a good mother is, I am doomed to failure.

In *Imagine Her Erotics* you confront the sexuality of the mother, and you say the piece 'highlights significant sexual metamorphosis that young mothers go through.' Do you think that mothers in society are seen as desexualised? Or in some cases, mothers have to attempt to remain sexual beings whilst also being too exhausted to have erotic feelings? Who is imposing these views onto us?

No. I don't want to generalise or stick on labels. This piece is based on personal experiences. I felt desexualised and still often do. Please do not forget that often when a female becomes a mother, the male becomes a father. In the case of *Imagine Her Erotics*, I dealt with a modern father that was equally involved and totally infatuated with the children. Both of our needs were left behind. Secondly, all the physical changes that I never read about in pregnancy/postpartum books, changes that no one ever mentioned. This was exasperating. Suddenly I had a new body that I did not understand.

I found that I was doing many repetitive tasks when I became a mother and I began to make work that was repetitive, which also referred to the work of artists like Mary Kelly. Has the meaning and use of repetition in your work changed since becoming a mother?

Yes, I had to introduce a routine for the wellbeing of my children. Because it is absolutely necessary and cannot be compromised. It has almost the opposite effect on my artworks. The lack of time and the mundane routine made my artwork more authentic and expressive. I did not have time to edit works and I had no opportunity to repeat the recording over and

over again until I was fully satisfied. The children would not have it. They quickly get bored and/or upset. Through that, I want to express the pure reality - no edits, no corrections.

Your work *Insignificant* refers to the ‘significant physical and mental metamorphosis that mothers go through every day’ – can you explain a bit more about what you mean by this? I find that one has to move between roles as a mother/worker/woman, but I wonder if you could explain what the idea of a physical metamorphosis means to you.

Insignificant deals with PMDD (Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder). I wanted to highlight the significance of the demand of everyday tasks, like the priority of a daily hygiene routine that often becomes a struggle. By the physical metamorphosis, I mean, for instance, the change of clitoris colour after a natural birth.

Your recent work has very much focused on motherhood. Do you see this as a continuing direction for your work?

No. I express the present. When I am a girlfriend, lover, wife, mother, or any other label one wants to stick on, I try my best to express the current feelings, difficulties, and inspirations. For me, being an artist is a state of mind. I am an artist even when I'm doing the dishes. Who knows what the future brings?

What are the challenges of making work whilst having young children? I have found that time and space were the key challenges for me, and that being a mother has reduced the number of opportunities that are open to me. Are there specific challenges for you or did you see having children as an opportunity for your practice to shift and change?

The biggest challenge is to maintain the beauty of the relationship with my children and their fascination with art. These relationships are the most powerful inspiration and driver for my art. The relationship I have built with them is crucial. Due to that ethical relationship, live video performances are so natural. The children are curious and love to participate. I want to maintain it, develop it. Moreover, the biggest challenge I am facing now is how to comprehend the amusement of how naturally it came to me to be a mother. With all the challenges motherhood inevitably brings, the children have fitted in naturally to the artworks too.

Katy Beinart is an artist whose work includes installation, public art and performance. She is also a mother. [Katy Beinart](#)