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Conversational Threads: Teaching, Making, & Mothering

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After an initial conversation on the relationship between studio practice and teaching art education, Kit and I decided to collaborate on four visual pieces. We each started two, sent them to one another in the mail, and then we completed the pieces we received. Dominant in our conversations and imagery were the threads of parenting and the intertwining of our domestic and professional lives. We talked about the changes in art education over time, health policy differences in Canada and the United States that shaped and shape our working lives as mothers, and our regional connection to Salish land. The relationship and ideas grew as time progressed, as the process of thinking, creating, and writing connected us across borders of politics and time. For each of us, maintaining a studio practice has been important. Kit had the great fortune of finding a group of artist/teachers who supported this intertwining from art shows to visual journal assignments for her students to a/r/tography as a research methodology. My continued studio practice allows me to analyze from the point of view of creator, not educator, which strengthens my teaching position. Creating artwork elevates the image, making it equal to the written word. We walk our talk when we shift into makers.

Jennifer and I both had our babies later than the average age, and we both fought for a change in the established norms in our academic units. I never regretted that I breastfed my babies at the Faculty Club, at sessions at NAEA, during InSEA meetings, and in my university classroom with the blessing of my students. The faculty meeting that I was asked not to attend with my baby was the last one I attended until he was 3. We each had varying degrees of resistance and support



Figure 1. Jennifer Combe and Kit Grauer, 2018, *Art Education: Then and Now* [Archival pigment print, permanent marker: 11 × 8.5 in.].

but were able to act in ways that might change a few minds in academia and re-think what professionalism might mean.

I decided to change the metaphor that a career and children required balance between two worlds and attempted to intertwine my mother, artist, teacher, and scholar selves. Under Jennifer's words of frustration between teaching for the School of Art and College of Education is the image of my retirement with my family, current and former students, and current and former colleagues weaving together their connections to me and to each other. In weaving, the warp and weft are always in tension.

How do we approach studio practice? What are the barriers and supports? Throughout a long and successful career, Kit maintained a studio practice that complemented her research, while I focus primarily on creative scholarship. Kit's work includes textiles, photography, and painting, to name just a few. The minia-

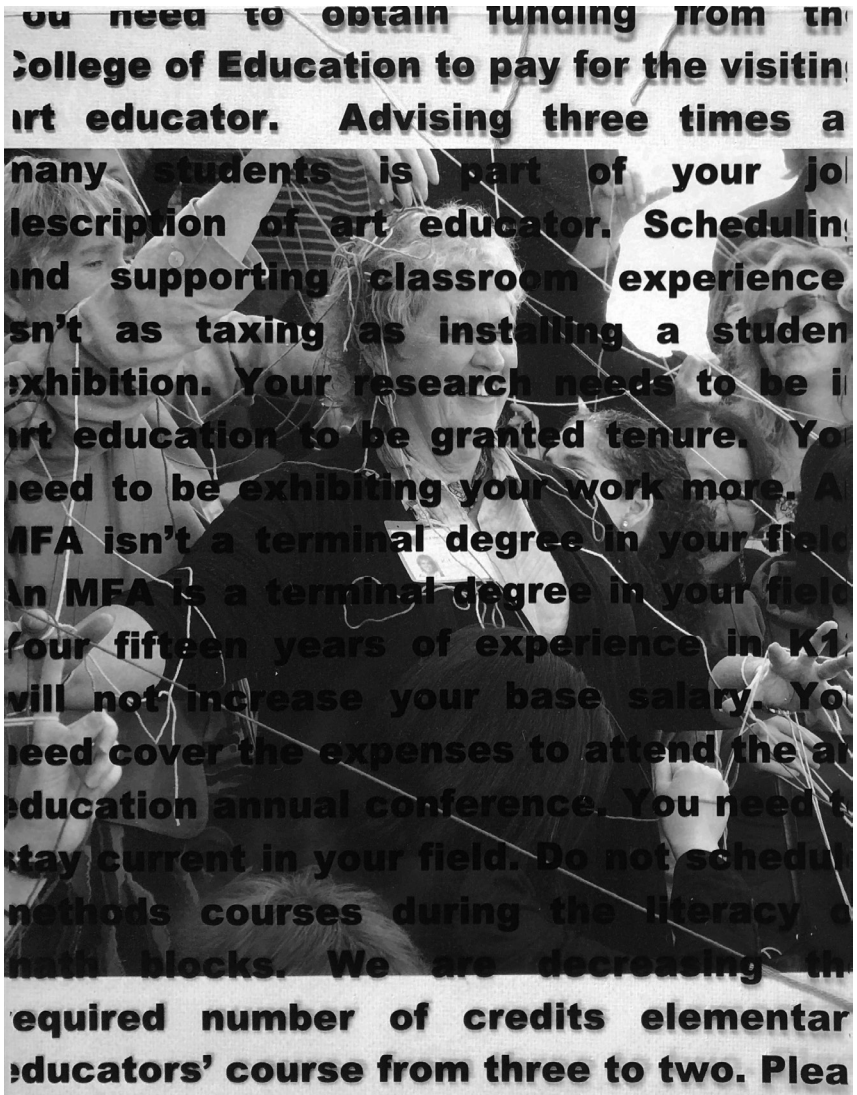


Figure 2. Jennifer Combe and Kit Grauer, 2018, *Art Education: Homelessness* [Transparency, archival pigment print. 8.5 × 11 in.].

ture paintings she sent me in response to studio practice in our lives neatly fit into an economical 8.5 × 11 in. envelope. Upon opening it, I immediately noticed the scale, which led me to think about downsizing from large canvases to smaller ones once I had children. This, in turn, led me to think about the interruptions we have in our research and creative scholarship, in the form of service, advising, and



Figure 3. Jennifer Combe and Kit Grauer, 2018, *Studio Practice: Interruptions* [Acrylic, oil on canvas. 6 × 9 in.].

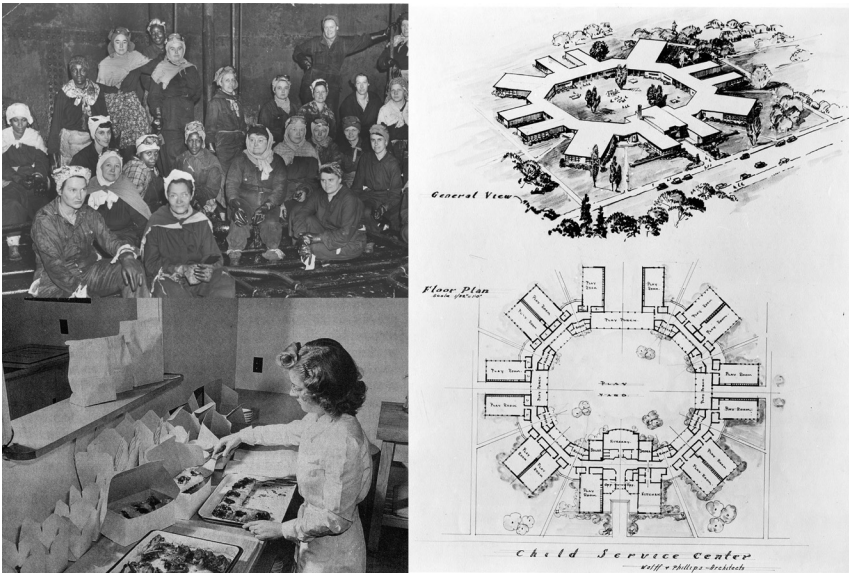


Figure 4. Jennifer Combe and Kit Grauer, 2018, *Mothering* [Photo collage. 11 × 8.5 in.].

domestic responsibilities. To top that off, since each of us had two children, our work had been dotted with over 8 years of mothering young children whose incessant questions and needs resulted in sporadic work patterns. Interruption is constant, and takes the form of children, administrators who value written research over visual creative scholarship, and budget cuts that increase service workloads. Interruption dots the studio landscape.

How have our children impacted our careers? Kit sent me an image of her children and her résumé. I printed out an image of my kids, as we planned to integrate the photographs in some fashion. Kit was interested in the fact that in her 30-year career, her children are mentioned only once in her résumé, and, she was curious about the fact that their growth and development, which unarguably made her a better-informed educator, had been rendered professionally insignificant. I am interested in the struggle that working families experience with zero or minimal support from the federal government. Our children are intentionally missing from this photo collage. The piece instead features working women from World War II supported by government-funded child-care facilities that not only looked after children but also provided a cooked dinner and the week's food rations to take home, mending services, and an infirmary for sick children. While government support of working parents is stronger in Canada than in the United States, the responsibility of caring for children is still not valued in the professional sector.