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Visual Arts Research, Volume 48, Number 2, Issue 95, Winter 2022, pp.  
28-36 (Article)

Published by University of Illinois Press



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Art Mom Reflections  
Interruption/Disruption/  
Eruption

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KEYWORDS: Parenting, art making, feminist art, Indigenous motherhood, studio practice

The following exchange took place between two artist moms who labor in many aspects of our lives—the labor of the domestic, academic labor, artistic labor, and other forms of labor that leave marks on our bodies and our stories. We trace out these markings, which stretch from the loving to the inconvenient to the punishingly patriarchal in our experiences. Over a series of e-mail/image exchanges and Zoom conversations interrupted by sick kids, miscommunications, and connectivity issues, what erupts here is a kind of confessional conversation, the things we often don't have space to take up in our labors, a chance to connect and share our experiences across both common and disparate realities, as mothers, as artists, as individuals marked by our lives, loves, and labors.

JC—Part of the reason I didn't have a kid until 40 was because there wasn't room in my life for one with teaching full-time and studio practice. I placed the burden on myself rather than looking to the social structures in the United States that fail families. Women and children suffer here, as I'm sure you're aware.

In 2007, when I started my MFA program, a peer had just had a child. I saw the child as neither an interruption nor a disruption, but a solid steel door blocking success in all areas. I have come so far in seeing a larger picture.

Your kids were with you as you entered, worked on, and completed your degree. How did they impact the process?

tw—I mean, I feel like I barely remember my MFA degree. I was also building a house on my Indian reserve at the time. I made it through, but I actually also got sick. I ended up with gallstones and some inflammatory conditions, and that was a wake-up call to look at what an art career was doing to my family and my body. I needed to slow down and demand space for caring for my family and my body. I work on this collaborative project, BUSH gallery ([bushgallery.ca](http://bushgallery.ca)) (Figure 1) that is a conceptual land-based gallery.

Indigenous territory, and one of the reasons that was important to me, was I found I didn't have the space I needed to integrate my children into my work. I mean, let's face it: we have very little support in terms of labor conditions in our field for parents or caretakers in what is already a precarious reality for workers in the arts. People with these responsibilities face a barrier to the myth of the artist who lives and breathes for only their individual pursuit of greatness—it is often only cis white men who are afforded that. I also want to make space in this paper for all kinds of genders and bodies and experiences within parenting and caretaking; together we can be a strong voice, and I have been encouraged to see these conversations on parenting and art start to surface in the art world. So that process was hard, but also my assertion of the space for my kids within my practice really led me to some important developments in my work. I realized it was way easier to be home and on the land around me and to recognize the aesthetic processes of mine and their interactions with the land as opposed to trying to install an exhibition with a playpen and my infant interrupting me, or needing to breastfeed my infant while giving a talk, or chasing after a toddler at an exhibition opening. On the land, my kids and the art and the natural and human impacted world could all just be, and I could still make the space for art because, at the time, I didn't know if that was

# BUSH Gallery  
 Manifestos and other Emergencies  
 Instagram: @bush\_gallery  
 Manifesto  
 Opening of Light and of Land  
 Reciprocity  
 Bush(ing), Bunkin, Bingo Berrin  
 Come In and Stay  
 Station with PLUG IN CA  
 Guest Editors: C Magazine 2016  
 My Blog  
 Contact



possible. So that possibility was a huge breakthrough for me, to be able to feel like I could be with my kids and assert my Indigenous relationship to my land (and in some ways, my settler family experiences as well) and call it all art.

JC—I had to look up the difference between “interruption” and “disruption” after I read your e-mail. To disrupt is more volatile, while to interrupt can just be a pause. Until I read your words, I thought that my children interrupted my work, but in actuality, there’s been a huge disruption—like a fire’s permanent scar on the land after years of government “managing.” My kids sideline routines, dismantle prediction, and interrupt the course and unity in my working life and self-care. I want to believe that the disruption will strengthen me, my humanity, my work, just as a fire does to an old-growth forest or grassland. I want to believe that the disruption of caretaking cultivates sensitivity and humanity, which then flow into pedagogy, curriculum, and policymaking. When I’m connected to the moment, to the land and my children, I know this truth. But the titanic disruption terrorizes the week that classes resumed, the pandemic continued to rage, and the dysfunction of higher education stole teaching prep time, which also stole studio time—with any spare time dedicated to parenting (in this critical and finite chapter of childhood). I want to live in an abundant continuous flow, but the reality is that it often feels like warfare, a fight for time and space, even if the battle is solely in my mind, overpowering a true presence as I work and walk in the woods with my kids.

This is the patriarchy. . . . We are in it, but if I don’t take quiet, uninterrupted time, I flounder. I can only bend so much.

tw—I love seeing our kids in images and feeling okay to say they are part of our life and work, as they are not separate spheres—this is only true under patriarchy. I remember realizing when I had babies how insanely not designed for our own future generations mainstream society is—like babies are mostly supposed to be at home. What I mean by this is there are limited changing rooms, breastfeeding places, or even areas to sit in any kind of way that promotes caretaking with babies—literally, the design of our cities rarely considers the needs of infants and their caretakers. But in many Indigenous communities, babies are just around more and part of things—not perfectly, and we can do a lot more in many kinds of spaces for parents and caretakers in Indigenous communities, but it is still markedly different. It is a much more common experience in Indigenous communities I am a part of or have visited, that babies are just around and moms and dads and kids and cousins just respond and get their meetings and conferences and events done in a way that includes the babies. We had a pretty bad forest fire season in 2021, and most of my family were on evacuation alert. We live in a forested area, and the threat of wildfire is very serious for us, and we all had go-bags packed and so on. The wildfire season finally petered out without any close family’s homes burnt, but the land suffered, and I know people who lost their homes and studios. It was mid-September though and the season was—we thought—pretty much over, but then a grassfire broke out, and it was really close to us. In the end, this is ultimately healthy for the land,

and cultural burning practices are something the land has suffered without but this wasn't that, though burning in the shoulder seasons is better and can promote some of our traditional foods to have a good year the following year. Anyway, the entire hillside was blackened just up the road from us. I was making a short video work for a projection/night festival, *Luna*, in Revelstoke, BC, and I was making a work about woodland caribou, *Caribou Renaissance* (2021), about an endangered woodland caribou herd in that area of our traditional territory. My friend and BUSH Gallery collaborator Jeneen Frei Njootli had gifted the collective a juvenile set of caribou antlers (Figure 2).

I was getting my oldest to help me with this project because I needed an extra set of hands to film and so on. I wanted the contrast of these white antlers against the blackened grass. My oldest son then proceeded to take a bunch of pictures with the built-in filters, which I didn't see until I was reading the memory card and importing images. I used some of these images in the final work, and I think this was the first time I credited my kids and had collaborated on a work in a direct way. I have two sons, and they influence a lot of what I do, but not in overt ways. This photograph is of my land, our ancestral territory and also part of an Indian reserve; part of moving back to my home territory was a decision about my kids and ensuring they had access to something that was taken away from us—access to land, language, and culture. I am mixed Secwepemc and settler ancestry, and my kids are



also Scottish, so they have mixed ancestry. But both settler and Secwepemc sides of my family have been in Secwepemcúlecw for the last few generations, and obviously my Secwepemc family, since time immemorial. All of this always ultimately affects my work and the context of my practice as a mother and an artist.

JC—I am sorry you experienced a fire close to your home last September—that must have been terrifying for all of you. The photo pulled me in, with the sweet texture of the antlers against a purple scar, death and growth referenced in the antler, the fire scar—so many levels. To find the image as you were scrolling through your snapshots must have paused your trajectory, in the awesome way our kids’ actions and being do.

In just this past week, I read Robin Wall Kimmerer’s chapter on traditional burning practices on Cascade Head (Oregon) in *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Then I listened to a podcast on the apocalyptic orange skies in California from fires in 2020. Your words mark the third reference to fire this week. This is the new normal.

In my youngest child’s first year, 2017, the smoke particle levels reached the highest recorded in U.S. history, just 30 miles from my home. I will always wonder what long-term damage took place in his tiny, developing lungs. And now, with a fifth season in our reality, Fire Season, our kids’ relationship to climate collapse is lived for large parts of every year. And millions more experience the collapse year-round, and have been for longer than it has impacted me. Last week, at age 5, my son painted this image (Figure 3) in my studio as I was cleaning (note that I wasn’t





making art at the time). He explained: “It’s you and me, Mommy, sleeping with a burned log between us.”

I am of settler, colonizer heritage from Europe: Bohemia, Germany, France, and England. My ancestors were primarily farmers and ranchers, engaged in extractive relationships with the land. I grew up recreating in the Cascade Mountains, which I view as similarly extractive. We traveled to the mountains to benefit the self; we took the view, the run, the meadow’s scent, without giving back; there was no honoring of the land. With an awakening that came with age and having children, I began to search for a more reciprocal relationship with the wild. I currently live on aboriginal territories of the Salish and Kalispel people in Montana. Themes in my writing and art works do not reference the land or wilding, but they inform my work, as the family spends a lot of time outside, especially when my work has been interrupted. These small interruptions (and big disruptions) facilitate the continuum you so beautifully wrote about earlier. It is in this space that I find innovation, creativity, flexibility: complete connection—specifically through an 8-year-old conductor who makes objects with wild materials that she finds when she isn’t inside four walls.

In this picture (Figure 4), she holds a bundle containing a stick, wintered bear-grass, and yarrow. She often places her creations in our home. These surprises remind me of my disconnect, and they remind me to thank the plants and trees that gifted her, gift us—and to practice gratitude for the gifts more regularly.

tw—And kids are drawn to many aspects on the land, and for me, the land accepts and challenges us in similar ways, and through that, deep bonds develop. I remem-



ber listening to Syilx Elder and knowledge keeper Richard Armstrong speak about how the land and animals are like our parents because who else but a parent gives everything they have to support another being.

JC—Oh, yes. What I love about this deep and new giving is how when my kids grow older, I want to give even more and more. It's a complete love affair that has cracked open my heart and connected me more to community and the land. I didn't put others first before having kids, which I'm embarrassed to say. Lovers, through the years, have commented on how I consistently put my needs in front of theirs. My mom taught me to fight and take to survive in the world. I so appreciate her for blazing the trail for me, yet I know that care and kinwork are part of feminist work too. For years, I operated in a hugely self-serving way, with such a blind heart. And the heart, like the tamarack's needles, gives and gives and gives to be full(y human).

And I wonder about gender with this statement: What happens when we give everything to support another being? What can we hold on to in order to remain whole . . . and what do we sacrifice while our partners hold on to more of their interests than we do? Or, is this the question: What do they lose when they don't fully immerse themselves into care and kinwork?

tw—That list and its blurring of to-dos I really relate to. I often think about how I need so many admin skills in parenting! The image in Figure 5 is from making snow





sculptures and hanging out with headlamps at night with my youngest—highlighted in his headlamp is a small Saskatoon berry bush. Between all our to-do lists as mothers, artists, workers, there are these moments on the land that are everything. An interruption can be distracting as well as generative.

JC—I started experimenting with cardboard over the past semester, in the dark early evenings of winter. I'm back teaching in person this semester and am trying to find a way to shift my practice so it's more compatible with parenting; painting is so totally consuming in terms of clean-up. I think I also hold a mental burden with painting, like I can't break away from the genius male narrative you mentioned earlier. Anyway, I had the urge to build forms with cardboard, which emerged while gluing and taping repurposed recyclables with my kids. I found the process of building forms to be a salve, with the turmoil of the world taking place outside my four walls. I then sewed together scraps of canvas I had saved from years of stretching my own canvases, making protective, yet imperfect, coverings for the forms (Figure 6). I love the connection to the women in my lineage who sewed and mended with saved scraps.

I find this type of work with sculpture and textiles more flexible with a robust schedule, as I can finish projects in communal spaces in the home and on the road rather than alone in the studio. It is a re-creation out of detritus—a reforming of what is no longer and a rebuilding of the present moment.



## Eruption

JC—I made the work right after I heard a story on NPR about childcare in the United States, and how the pandemic’s impact on those from lower socioeconomic levels penetrates more deeply and is more deadly. And also how the pandemic has dramatically impacted young children and their families. January 2022 is proving to be the most challenging part of the 2-year pandemic—the workforce is back in full swing, while many care centers and classrooms are closed or understaffed and underfunded. We know that young children thrive on routine, play, and loving adult caretakers. Caretakers are not able to provide children with what they need when they are working and caretaking simultaneously.

TW—Hey, Jennifer haven’t heard from you so just checking in, but I also feel like January is a long haul, and I am facing a lot of pressures everywhere so sending “I hope everyone is feeling better vibes” and hope your January groove is motoring.

I just thought I would send this poem my youngest wrote as another avenue for starting conversations. Today, I am losing the battle of doing it all, as moms/caretakers do sometimes, but trying to let it wash over me and give it a good try tomorrow :).

Look forward to hearing from you. No worries at all if this is something you find you don’t actually have time for. I don’t mean to add any pressure if you are feeling any. This poem was both inspiring and funny.

JC—No prob! I’m home with sick kids . . .

Someone is crying . . .

Someone needs me . . .

The dishes need to be done. . . . And what am I going to make for dinner?

TW—The Latin root word for interruption, disruption, and eruption is “rupt,” and it means to “burst.” I don’t want to leave this exchange with the idea that it is our children who are the interrupters and disruptors (though that may seem very real, lol); it is in fact patriarchal systems and designs of the physical and ideological in settler society that have disrupted and interrupted intergenerational, familial, and relational practices. If we think back to the fires, that disruption, when happening in balance, is good for a forest; it brings new life, and forest systems have been designed to cope with fire—cones that only release their seeds after scorching can rebuild the forest, for example. So the disruption that can come with children in our lives in art is also nourishing and loving, and together, we are growing an erupting of care to submerge and smother the settler colonial politics that would see caregivers and children as separated from society, work, art, and culture. Every day that I experience frustration as a parent I also experience a bursting, as my heart bursts with love for my children, and I know that they will also bring new life that will seed a new forest, because love always ruptures the structures of containment.