

Vanessa Marr – Artwork - Upholding the Mother

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I present three artworks that visualise subjective ideals of 'normative motherhood': saintly, desirable, and fertile. They are inspired by versions of motherhood from art, religion, and ancient concepts of fertility. Each form is covered in grasping hands, drawn in a naïve, child-like style, to visualise the claim that 'normal' expectations of mothering place upon a woman. These hands stretch across her body and breasts, reach out from her groin and stomach, and cover her face, owning her completely.

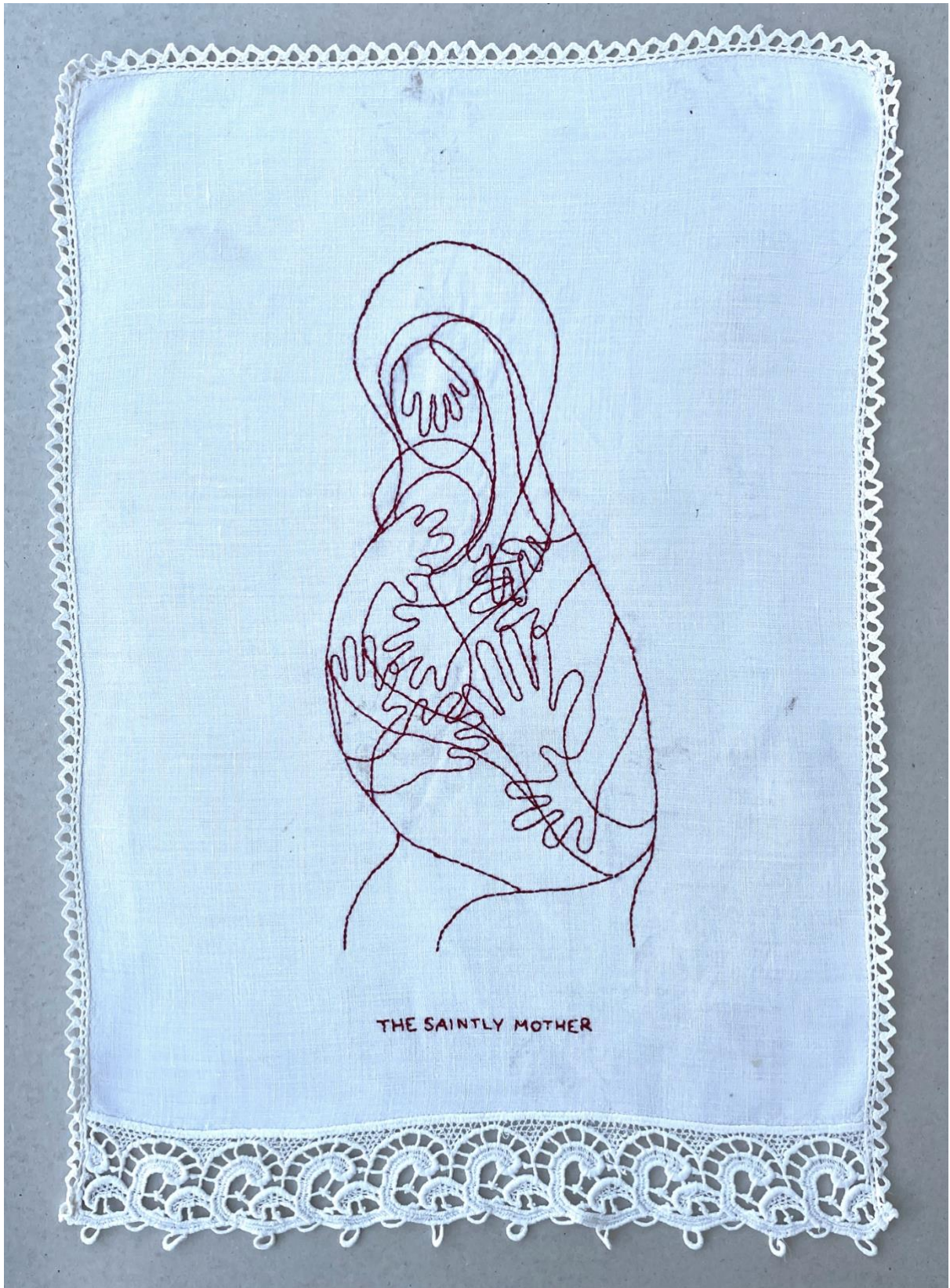
Each piece is hand-embroidered upon a vintage cloth, anchoring the mother in the feminine expectations that surround her. The use of embroidery hints at the legacy of stitch that has both empowered and disempowered women (Parker, 1984).

The Saintly Mother: Historical religious iconography of the Madonna and Child is suggested by a seated body with babe on lap, cocooned in distorted arms and complete with a halo wrapped around both their heads. This piece comments on the unrealistic expectations of patience, kindness, and exceptional virtue that are presented as 'normal' mothering.

The Desirable Mother: Botticelli's famous painting the Birth of Venus (1485) is suggested by the sweeping gestures of the famous pose, with her face, arms and hips wrapped in childlike clutches, a confusing collision of sexuality and mothering.

The Fertile Mother: The ancient Gravettian goddess Venus, an icon of Palaeolithic art c.28,000–19,000 BC, is made contemporary through this image of a fertile woman, with huge breasts and hips, covered in grasping hands. Conversely, this artwork also reminds us that some mothers struggle with fertility, not all mothers birth their own children, and that not all mothers are born female.

Please see images below.



The Saintly Mother. V Marr, 2021. Vintage cloth and embroidery.



The Desirable Mother. V Marr, 2021. Vintage cloth and embroidery.



The Fertile Mother. V Marr, 2021. Vintage cloth and embroidery.