

SUSTAINING THE CREATIVE IDENTITY
OF A TAIWANESE ARTIST
DURING MOTHERHOOD:
A SEQUENCE OF SIX ARTWORKS WITHIN
AN INSTALLATION

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Abstract

This practice-based PhD thesis examines the proposition that during early motherhood an artist can establish visual strategies for sustaining a creative identity to counteract the stereotypical role of a mother in the patriarchal society of Taiwan. The thesis comprises six artworks, consisting of photographic self-portraits and related boxes, within an installation, together with a written component and an Artist's Book.

In traditional Taiwanese culture, a mother's concept of herself is undermined once she is seen as fulfilling her allotted role as provider of a male heir for the husband's family. Most woman artists, especially if they are mothers in contemporary Taiwan, similarly contend with pressures from a male-dominated system, where it is expected that they will give up their artistic profession and surrender their own creative identity for personal, familial and social reasons. In this thesis, the reviews of mother artists and the art of motherhood since the 1920s in Taiwan have been established as the first systematic analysis for both academic and art circles of this particular issue from the viewpoint of a woman researcher. It provides a clear understanding and has benefits for research. The author's artistic practice has developed and is explored over the period of growth for mother and child, from pregnancy until her son's fifth year.

Three visual strategies, self-representation, the family photograph and time sequencing, have been developed and explored throughout the artist's own experience of motherhood and are illustrated by six artworks and an installation. Besides achieving physical objectives of a woman writing her personal 'herstory', they have set an innovative example for dealing with the difficulties of sustaining the creative identity of an artist during motherhood. The chronological development of these artistic creations, between 2000 and 2005, is discussed in terms of three concepts: asserting the self, measuring motherhood, and reformulating motherhood. They reveal key stages in the transitions involved in understanding and researching motherhood; from depression in the early stages, to sustaining the self-identity, and then to exploring creativity in motherhood and artistic practice.

This written component analyses the artworks and installation by using the autobiographical method and sets them against a larger cultural background relating to the expectations of a patriarchal society as expressed in its images of what the mother is to be. In addition, relevant works by women artists that have challenged gender orthodoxy are compared with occidental and oriental stereotypes in paintings and photographs.

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Author's declaration

I declare that while registered as a candidate for the University's research degree, I have not been a registered candidate or enrolled student for another award of the University or other academic or professional institution.

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

Signature:

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This practice-based research is based on the use of autobiographical visual practice, drawn from my own experiences, and also from cultural studies and the thoughts of relevant feminists, which were identified through image research. It explores and develops visual strategies through which the artist might sustain her creative identity during motherhood within Taiwanese culture.

This chapter presents an overview of the research, split into six sections: the genesis, the central theme and key terms, research questions, methods, development and research context. Firstly, it provides a basic background to this research through outlining how the project initially came about and what the central theme 'creative identity' is. Then, by clarifying the research questions and methodologies, the aims and procedures for executing this project may be refined. Finally, it expresses the development of this research from the very beginning of putting the women's issues in my art to the completion of this thesis; then, concludes by introducing the structure of this written component. Owing to the autobiographical research method as the main issue in this research, an autobiographical writing style has been purposely interwoven in the whole written component.

1.1 Genesis of the research project

In this section, the genesis of this practice-based research project is illustrated through my personal experience, which was the initial motivation for the project. The use of autobiographical writing emphasises that this research is based on the complex and complicated experiences of sustaining my own artist's identity within the expectations of motherhood imposed by Taiwanese culture.

1.1.1 My personal background: the cultivation of my motherhood¹

哥哥爸爸真偉大， *Elder brothers and father are all very great.*
名譽照我家。 *Their reputations shine upon our family.*
為國去打仗， *Because of being soldiers and fighting for*
our country,
當兵笑哈哈。 *they laugh heartily.*
走吧！走吧！ *Let's go! Let's go!*
哥哥爸爸， *elder brothers and father.*
家事不用你牽掛。 *Don't be concerned about family duty.*
只要我長大， *As long as I grow up,*
只要我長大。 *as long as I grow up.*²

妹妹背著洋娃娃， *A little girl carried a baby doll on her back.*
走到花園來看花。 *She went to a garden to see some flowers.*
娃娃哭著叫媽媽， *She pretended that the doll cried and called*
her mummy.
樹上的小鳥笑哈哈。 *The bird in the tree was happy and laughed*
*heartily.*³

Why should a girl act like a mother taking care of a baby? Why can a boy pursue something very great and not need to concern himself with housework? Why can a man be proud of himself and his achievements, but a woman can only play the role of pleasing and satisfying others?

When I was a very young child in a three-daughter family, these kinds of gender questions confused and deeply disturbed me. Without daring to express my feelings or to ask about them, I kept them secret because I was aware of the deep hurt and the pressure on my parents, especially my mother, because they had no son.

¹ Hsiao-Ching Wang. *Autobiography*. (Unpublished, 2003).

² *As Long As I Grow Up* (只要我長大), a famous children's song for boys in Taiwan. The song translated by Hsiao-Ching Wang.

³ *A Little Girl Carried a Doll on Her Back* (妹妹背著洋娃娃), a famous children's song for girls in Taiwan. The song translated by Hsiao-Ching Wang.

My parents were both born into traditional Taiwanese families which are extremely male orientated. My father is the fifth child and the first son in a six-child family.⁴ This afforded him not only his status through primogeniture but also an exemplary morality. Because of his academic success while studying in his hometown, my father became the obvious choice to honour his family. When my grandfather was very old, most of the family members severely criticised my mother for failing to perform the duty of producing a male-child to carry on the patriarchal bloodline. This had damaged my grandfather's and father's reputation. According to the Chinese proverb, "There are three bad things for filial piety, the worst one is being unable to produce a son", so, without resentment, my father decided to leave the family to which he had been faithful, because of his concern for familial harmony and traditional filial piety. Finally, he handed over the right of inheritance to my uncle, and set up his own unclear family - himself, my mother and three daughters - in the big city of Taipei.

On leaving my father's large, conventionally conservative family, my mother was released. My two elder sisters and I were far away from the suppression of gender issues. We had a happy, peaceful, free but not wealthy childhood. However, my family still had not moved out of the shadow of a patriarchal society. As I grew up, I was increasingly aware of some injustice that had affected my family. Whenever my mother and my grandfather's common law wife talked privately about the 'disgrace' of having no son and the lowly status of being a mother in my father's extended family, they were obviously and visibly moved. When we attended parties with my father's family my normally reticent father would become talkative. He would eagerly give his nephews the benefit of his wisdom, but he never taught us in the same way. In my little head, I felt that his daughters seemed not to exist.

My gender awareness was awakened early on by a vague consciousness of these paternally dominated family events and the issues surrounding the failure to produce a son. At elementary school, I understood the male-centred concept which existed in daily life everywhere in our society, and I was angry that girls should have to grow up within such an unfair patriarchal system. The thought of striving for equality with boys arose in my mind and 'Boys can, Girls can too' became my motto, encouraging me to cross the boundary and to become something other than a 'delicate girl'.

At puberty, my life became uncomfortable and inconvenient with the onset of menstruation. I directly experienced the first major 'disadvantage' of being a woman based on my body and my culture, and it urged me to rethink the difference between man and woman. In my innermost heart, I could not help myself envying men for having 'better' bodies with fewer

⁴ Carrying out her duty of producing more male children for the family, my grandmother died giving birth to my uncle.

restrictions; I could not resign myself to the discrimination of others, especially when a voice, deep within me, disliked the female body for making me 'inferior'.

*After several years struggling by myself, I still did not want the traditional role of a woman. I totally rejected the convention that a woman is inferior to a man. Therefore, I have done my best for twenty years to devote myself to breaking the role of these stereotypes. In my life, I have despised men for their presumption, but I often get along better with them than with women. In my artworks, I have revealed the plight of women in my society and my resentment about men's vested interests in the *status quo*. In all aspects of work, I have dedicated myself to establishing a reputation that is equal to or better than any man's. I did not do this only for myself: I wanted to prove that a woman could be as good as a man and, by doing so, I thought I would assuage my parents' regret at not having a son. Although I encountered difficulties and frustration in this process, I at last became more confident and relaxed - I had the courage to be a woman in my own way.*

"From time immemorial in Taiwan, a woman, once married, is in a completely inferior position." I understood this complaint often voiced by my mother and other women, but I was never afraid to challenge it when I was in my 20s. I believed I had the confidence to overcome the issue. When I was in love, at my wedding ceremony and during marriage, I was fully supported by my partner, and careful to avoid any concept of stereotypical gender bias which might destroy our relationship. We revised little by little the concept of the stereotypical couple - "the powerful man and the dedicated woman", the "husband singing and the wife following".

I believed the traditional role of the wife could not depress me within our marriage. However, when I found that our first child was unexpectedly on the way, and at the beginning of our PhD courses in the United Kingdom, I was very frightened. My husband and I were afraid the child would exhaust our energy and occupy our time, forcing us to give up our ideals. Moreover, fearful that my identity would be meekly imprisoned in the traditional role of selfless mother, I considered the little embryo would destroy the Utopia I had established. Because of this strong fear, I realised that motherhood might constitute a serious, even fatal injury for a woman. The duty of a mother in a patriarchal society, the responsibility for a family to produce a son in Taiwan: such notions about mothers began to create major problems for me. Therefore, at the beginning of my pregnancy, the pendulum between abortion and child preservation created profound tensions within me. After a period of thinking and consulting, I decided to continue with the pregnancy, to save the new life, and to give myself a chance to challenge the plight of motherhood, although I was in a state of complete anxiety.

1.1.2 The initial motivation for this project

The period of my early motherhood (2000-2007), through pregnancy and giving birth, to completing this thesis in the year when my son turned six, were the most exciting and challenging of my life. Pleasure, anger, satisfaction, fear, worry, upheaval, creativity, conflict, doubt ... I had many strong feelings that changed all the time coming from both sides – motherhood and being an artist. Sometimes, I felt I was happier and more productive than ever before; sometimes, I felt tired-out and that I would be forced to give up my artistic profession given the conventional expectations of being a good mother in Taiwanese culture. All this is the same for many other working mothers I have met.

On the other hand, as a mother, I felt the interaction between my son and me was very creative and flexible. Because I want to help his development, I feel I should frequently refresh my mind, my behaviour, my attitudes and my concepts of life in order to educate him in diverse ways. From my experience of being an artist, I see the creative process of motherhood as similar to artistic creativity. However, the sacrifice demanded of me impinged on my activities as an artist. I felt frustrated that the mother is not seen as a creative figure in the Taiwanese society into which I was born, particularly given my personal background in a traditionally minded family in which my mother was looked down upon for not having given birth a son. The role of the mother is not seen as having any connection with the role of the artist and is even considered to be contrary to it or indeed in conflict with it. There is little emphasis on the creativity of motherhood where men largely dictate a woman's priorities. Only stereotypes of ideal and sacrificial motherhood are permitted.

Therefore, with the initial intention of restoring the balance, I tried to develop a project centred on questions about my personal experience of motherhood in contemporary Taiwan. Through personal visual representation and research, I intended to create a means of sustaining the creative identity of the artist and to undermine and confound the conventional prejudices of my society. Moreover, I wanted to reframe and reform a visual interpretation of the relationship between motherhood and creativity.

1.2 The central theme and key terms

The central theme, 'creative identity', and six key terms, 'mother', 'motherhood', 'mother artists', 'patriarchy', 'creativity' and 'experience' each have specific definitions and cultural considerations within this thesis. They are briefly explained in this section.

A. The central theme, 'creative identity'

In a personal sense, the conflict between the identity of being a mother and being an artist happened for me when I noticed that I was pregnant in 2000 and it led to a severe crisis in my life. Kobena Mercer said, "...identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty."⁵ Such a crisis occurs when the rigid characteristics of motherhood within a culture limit and damage the motivation of women artists to pursue and develop their creativity. Therefore, in this thesis, I use the viewpoint of feminism to explore how motherhood can be an obstacle to an artist's creative identity.

The term 'creative identity', which is crucial to researching the conflict between motherhood and creativity for Taiwanese women artists, will be explored and defined. The importance of creativity for the artist is discussed in relation to the theories of Rollo May and relevant researchers, and the close relationship between artist and creativity is examined in historical terms. Bearing in mind the idea that creativity is essential to artists, I reveal the difficulty that women artists experience in sustaining their creative identity. Finally, looking at the transition for women who were prohibited from being artists to being accepted on a wider international scale, I prove that motherhood is still a crucial obstacle to the sustained creativity of women artists.

⁵ Kobena Mercer. "Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics." Identity: Community, Culture, Difference. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990) 4.

a. The artist's creative identity

Creativity is an essential element in the identity of an artist. Rollo May, as an American existential psychologist, explored creativity by participating in art and science instead of standing on the sidelines. He considers that the authentic form of creativity is “the process of *bringing something new into being*”.⁶ It not only represents “the highest degree of emotional health”, but exposes “normal people in the act of actualising themselves”.⁷ In recent years, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has systematically analysed creativity in a new way:

Creativity results from the interaction of a system composed of three elements: a culture that contains symbolic rules, a person who brings novelty into the symbolic domain, a field of experts who recognize and validate the innovation. All three are necessary for a creative idea, product, or discovery to take place.⁸

In fact, artists provided the representative example which helped researchers to understand creativity. May indicated that, “... those who present directly and immediately the new forms and symbols are the artists.”⁹ Additionally, Howard Gardner confirms that artists produce works within a genre to become something “new” by handling “new kinds of symbol systems” or “a new artistic language”, affecting others’ lives.¹⁰

In detail, the creativity of artists vividly expresses both their encounter with the real world and their imagination, by creating new forms and symbols in their art, which are beyond the existing boundaries of that time and which influence others. In doing so, they combat the insensitivity and indifference of many, who gaze without seeing and hear without understanding ‘the truth’. Rollo May, in The Courage to Create, stressed that creativity was a crucial characteristic for the artist. He pointed out “They (artists) love to emerge (immerse) themselves in

⁶ Rollo May. The Courage to Create (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994 (1975)) 39.

⁷ May 40.

⁸ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Creativity, Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996) 29.

⁹ May 22.

¹⁰ Howard Gardner. “Creators: Multiple Intelligence.” The Origins of Creativity. Eds. Karl H. Pfenninger and Valerie R. Shubik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 117, 138.

chaos in order to put it into form, just as God created form out of chaos in Genesis".¹¹ To expand on this, the process of creativity means struggling with 'non-being' to force it to produce 'being'. James Hughes also highlighted "The creative artist's ability to transmute imagination into reality is what distinguishes him or her from other people".¹² It is arguable that the process of creativity in yielding art is a necessary one in the development of the real artist. In other words, creativity is a decisive part of the artist's identity.

The close relationship between creativity and the artist is also revealed by an examination of the changing definition of the word 'artist' over time. In the history of art, the use of the term has changed; originally applied to a craftsman with great artistic skill, but later to indicate that a person displayed genius and talent and was a special kind of individual with the distinctive characteristic of creativity.¹³ In medieval Christianity, the artist was the vehicle for God's creative inspiration and identified himself merely as a craftsman without any personal accreditation. With the culture shift toward the purer human element in the Renaissance period, the artist became an individual who created works of art with new vision. The definition of genius for an artist applied to his extraordinary creativity and originality. Finally, in the 19th century, the romantic movement developed a new definition of the artist, as the fount of originality; also as a rebel who was critical of society and sought a better world with an extreme passion irrespective of money, family and more 'bourgeois' concerns. The 'modern' art of the 20th century and subsequent developments are indebted to, and influenced by, the romantic definition of the artist. As noted above, creativity is an important element in the artist's evolution.

From the above and my own experiences as an artist, the definition of 'creativity' in this thesis is the process of introducing new forms and symbols outside the limitations which exist at the time. These new forms and symbols are the vividly

¹¹ May 32.

¹² James Hughes. Altered States: Creativity under the Influence (New York: Watson-Guption Publishers, 1999) 94.

¹³ Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. "On the Creative Necessity of Sacrifice." Women, Creativity and the Arts: Critical and Autobiographical Perspectives. Eds. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona & Lucinda Ebersole (New York: Continuum, 2001) 2-4.

expressed product of the artist's imagination and their encounter with the real world. This innovation has not only been recognised by others member of society, but has also acted as a catalyst for potential changes in social and cultural values.

In conclusion, from the theories of Rollo May and relevant researchers, the evolution of artists in art history and the definition of creativity in this thesis, it is clear that creativity is vital for artists who wish to sustain their professionalism and productivity. Therefore, I use the term 'creative identity' to summarise the importance of creativity to an artist's identity.

b. The denial of creative identity as a mother artist

The term 'mother artists' in this thesis refers to those women artists who have to give special consideration to their motherhood. In this section, the denial of creative identity as a mother artist will be explored. Many feminist art researchers, including Rozsika Parker, Griselda Pollock, Christine Battersby and Marsha Meskimmon, seriously argued that in history the term artist has been equated with masculinity and masculine social roles; genius, for example, has been exclusively attributed to the male sex.¹⁴ Diane Apostolos-Cappadona indicated, "For better or worse, the western mythology of the artist has been modelled upon and idealised in the male of the species."¹⁵

Linda Nochlin also pointed out that a woman as an acknowledged 'outsider' to art was not permitted the luxury of training or the freedom to practice in the male-dominated field.¹⁶ Her creative energy and power were to be concentrated upon her major responsibility, that of maintaining the welfare of others; children, family and husband. In addition, with patriarchal attitudes that bind the male to culture, the positive, and creativity, and the female to passivity, nature and

¹⁴ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock. *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) 114. Christine Battersby. *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (USA: India University Press, 1990 (1989)) 23. Marsha Meskimmon. *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Scarlet Press, 1996) 15-18.

¹⁵ Apostolos-Cappadona 2.

¹⁶ Linda Nochlin. "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *Women, Creativity and the Arts: Critical and Autobiographical Perspectives*. Eds. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona & Lucinda Ebersole. (New York: Continuum, 2001) 42, 54-58.

obedience, women's creativity was bound to suffer oppression. Therefore, there was no opportunity for women to receive fair treatment as artists. Georgia O'Keeffe mentioned her unhappy experiences as a woman artist in a public speech and was quoted in the magazine Equal Rights in 1926. She said,

I have always resented being told that there are things I cannot do because I am a woman...But if a woman painter paints differently from a man, they say, 'Oh, that is a woman. That has nothing to do with painting.' They have objected to me all along; they have objected strenuously. It is hard enough to do the job without having to face the discriminations, too. Men do not have to face these discriminations.¹⁷

In 1919, O'Keeffe summarised her standpoint on being a woman artist in an essay. She believed that women had great creative ability and that their work should "live side by side with male produced Art".¹⁸ She also implied that the creativity of women would struggle to escape from the cage which restricted their talent because of their role as the bearers of offspring. In real life, she demonstrated her beliefs and gained publicity for women in art by remaining childless and, with the support of her husband, the well known photographer Alfred Stieglitz, continually created many excellent artworks.

In fact, due to the influence of women's movements and feminism in art, many women artists have decided not to follow the traditional life of women and have refused the role of wife or mother to avoid their rights as professional artists being destroyed. Apostolos-Cappadona indicated that those women who struggled to live a life of creative productivity often denied themselves the privileges of marriage and family to highlight that they were independent and creative individuals.¹⁹ Accordingly, sustaining motherhood and an artistic profession at the same time is a dilemma for women artists. It is recognised that

¹⁷ The quote is from Barbara Buhler Lynes. "Georgia O'Keeffe and Feminism." The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History. Eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper Collins, 1992) 442.

¹⁸ The quote is from Dorothy Norman. Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer (New York: Random House, 1973) 138.

¹⁹ Apostolos-Cappadona 2.

mother artists face many more difficult challenges than women artists who are not mothers, because alongside their struggles with the conventional denial of women artists, they need to fight against the social expectation that mothers are self-sacrificing and the simultaneous oppression of their status.

B. Mother and Motherhood

The term 'mother', as a noun, is defined as "a female parent of a child or animal; a person acting as a mother to a child" by the Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary, Sixth Edition.²⁰

Based on this definition, the term mother can be analysed from two different perspectives. One emphasises biological and blood relationships and their connection with the female body, and especially the experience of pregnancy and giving birth. As a development of this limited definition, a mother is often expected to continue the intimate relationship through the task of nurturing a child/children in society. An alternative definition refers to a person who plays the role of mother, such as a foster mother or a stepmother, or a figure who takes care of others with something like the love of a mother, perhaps a child minder, wet mother, a governess or a teacher. Integrating the above meanings of 'mother' and the definitions of 'motherhood' as 'the state of being a mother' in dictionary, the meaning of 'motherhood' could be broadly defined as a state, condition and experience of being, or standing proxy for, a biological mother.²¹

In this thesis, I only adopt the narrow definitions of mother and motherhood so that I may explore a woman's specific maternal experience and relationship with her children, starting with the biological female body in the human world. I do this because the experience of the maternal body is extremely profound, complex and personal for a mother and is hard to explain to a man or indeed anyone who has no experience of it.

In traditional Taiwanese culture, every adult female must also become a mother and needs to take overall responsibility for giving birth to a male and rearing

²⁰ A.S. Homby. *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary* 6th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 (electronic dictionary).

²¹ Ibid.

offspring for her husband's family. There is an English proverb which says, "Honey is sweet, a kitten is soft, a mother is sacrificial". Similarly, the meaning of the word mother in Chinese is closely connected with sacrifice and signifies an ability to consider other people as a priority; it is often accompanied by an attitude which ignores or denies the self. Dr. Carin Rubenstien indicated that many pieces of clever propaganda have made women believe that once a mother, a woman needs to sacrifice herself for her family, and that only by meeting this standard can she be applauded by society.²² Dr. Rubenstien also considered that this was a kind of cultural suppression which forced mothers to suppose that sacrifice was good and that attaching importance to themselves was wrong.²³ Prior to this, Shulamith Firestone suggested in 1970 that the specific biological capability of women to give birth was the origin of the oppression of women in a patriarchal system. Therefore, she advocated making use of birth control techniques to break their conventional role in reproduction.²⁴ In recent years in Taiwan, there has been a tendency towards gender equality in the public sphere. In order to maintain their rights to autonomy and liberty, many young women, including me, have tried to adopt this approach as a way to avoid the role of mother and the oppression which exists in the private sphere.

Despite having had to deal with the negative pressures previously described, however, in the uneasy process of facing my unexpected pregnancy and actually bringing up my child, I have found a kind of powerful positive characteristic within motherhood: creativity. This resonates with the opinions of Adrienne Rich who, in 1976, distinguished between motherhood as an experience and motherhood as an institution. Rich found that the reason behind women's state of bondage was not their capability to reproduce, but the patriarchal system which dominated rights within politics and the economy. The experience of motherhood itself should possess potential for creativity and happiness.²⁵

²² Carin Rubenstien. The Sacrificial Mother (Taipei: Yuan-Liou, 2002 (1998)) 31.

²³ Rubenstien 46.

²⁴ Shulamith Firestone. The Dialectic of Sex (New York: Bantan Books, 1970) 175-178.

²⁵ Adrienne Rich. Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (London: Virago, 1997(1977)) 11.

Research by Shu-Man Pan (潘淑滿) in 2005 found that Taiwanese women's definition of motherhood is similar to that of women in the West.²⁶ Both universally confirm that 'mothers' play a crucial role in actual parenthood. The difference is that Taiwanese mothers usually consider parenthood to be the personal responsibility of women, rather than of society or their country. Therefore, the duty and pressure of motherhood for Taiwanese mothers is much greater than for Western women, although Taiwanese women have now earned the right to prolong childlessness or not to have children at all. Pan also comments that the division of labour in Taiwanese parenthood between the two genders in the domestic sphere is still in a state of imbalance. Moreover, society has not provided well-arranged policies or proper support to reduce pressure on mothers in general.²⁷ On the whole, there is still a strong expectation that Taiwanese women will provide a male heir for their husband's family, although this is no longer a strict requirement. As Bih-Ru Chang (張碧如) concluded in her recent research, the role of the female in society today is diversifying, whilst Taiwanese mothers to a certain degree maintain their conventional role and make sacrifices for their family and children.²⁸

C. Mother artists

The term 'mother artists' is specifically created for this thesis and refers to those women artists who have to give special consideration to their motherhood. Mother artists are a group of woman artists with an extra identity as mothers. Emphasising the role of mother instead of using the universal term 'women' highlights the fact that the role of mother comes with producing a child and forces women artists into a dilemma between sustaining motherhood and their artistic profession. Women artists Georgia O'Keeffe, Mali Wu and the feminist Linda Nochlin pointed out that, due to the extra time and energy required to deal with prejudice and suppression in institutions and education, being a woman artist is much more difficult than being a male artist; let alone a mother artist has the additional role of responsible bearer of

²⁶ Shu-Man Pan (潘淑滿). "Images of Taiwanese Mothering." Journal of Women's and Gender Studies. Vol. 20 (Dec 2005): 41-42.

²⁷ Pan 42.

²⁸ Bih-Ru Chang (張碧如). "A Study of the Need and Adjustment of Housewives to Attend Groups: Hualien's Story-Telling Mothers as Example." Journal of Taipei Municipal University of Education: Education. Vol. 36.2 (Nov 2005) 113-139.

offspring.²⁹ The women artists Judy Chicago, Juin Shieh and the feminist Adrienne Rich, however, found that instead of being ignored or oppressed under the traditional dogma of motherhood, the actual experience of pregnancy, giving birth and bearing children became powerful and creative sources for mothers through in their representation of themselves.³⁰ In other words, the experience of motherhood helps women artists to develop their creative identity. From these two debates, 'mother artists' are a very particular theme within the realm of 'women artists'. Therefore, in this thesis, I distinguish between the two and single out 'mother artists' for special attention.

D. Patriarchy

In this thesis, I mainly apply the recent definition of patriarchy explained by the feminist researcher Maggie Humm. She indicated that patriarchy is

A system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions. In any of the historical forms that patriarchal society takes, whether it is feudal, capitalist discrimination or socialist, a sex-gender system and a system of economic discrimination operate simultaneously. Patriarchy has power from men's greater access to, and mediation of, the resources and rewards of authority structures inside and outside the home.³¹

The concept of 'patriarchy' is crucial to this thesis. This is because discussion of the predicaments of being a mother artist requires a term which directly connects with the main cultural structure by which the totality of oppressive and exploitative relations that affect mothers and women artists can be expressed.

²⁹ Barbara Buhler Lynes. "Georgia O'Keeffe and Feminism." The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History. Eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper Collins, 1992) 442. Mali Wu. Personal interview. 15 Dec. 2002. Linda Nochlin. "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Women, Creativity and the Arts: Critical and Autobiographical Perspectives. Eds. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona & Lucinda Ebersole (New York: Continuum, 2001) 46.

³⁰ "Feminist Art Base: Judy Chicago." Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum. 07 Dec 2008.

<http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/judy_chicago.php?i=1559> Juin Shieh (謝鴻均). Original Goodness: Chora and Female Genealogy (Taipei: The Commercial Press, 2006) 30-32. Adrienne Rich. Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (London: Virago, 1997(1977)) 13, 39, 40, 280.

³¹ Maggie Humm. The Dictionary of Feminist Theory 2nd ed. (England: Prentice Hall, 1999) 200.

In contrast to Western culture, patriarchy in main stream Taiwanese culture is closely combined with the thoughts of the Confucianists. Accordingly, the 'law (道)' is a criterion which operates throughout the whole of creation and it provides the moral power which maintains harmony and order within and around.³² If every person follows the 'law' through 'virtue (德)' which is reached by self-cultivation, the nature of social order and harmony will be maintained. Therefore, Taiwanese people believe that every member of society needs to be mindful of his/her entrusted role and responsibility. There are five traditional cardinal human relations (五倫): that between the ruler and the ruled; between parents and children; between siblings; between husband and wife; and between friends. Each role should understand and complete his/her specific duty. For example, the relationship between parents and children is not based on equality, but on fixed rules of filial piety which children must always obey and respect their parents. As Confucius said, "Let the lords be lords, the subjects be subjects, the fathers be fathers, and the sons be sons."³³ Under the influence of globalisation in recent years, the concepts of individualism and democratic rights have shaken these rigid thoughts. For example, Taiwanese people are allowed to directly use the name or nickname of the president as part of the political aim of establishing the image of democracy. However, the traditional relationship between upper and lower classes still exists and is honoured within families, official organisations and non-governmental companies. In general the younger generation still cannot address the older generation by name and must use a respectful form of address. They must adopt the appropriate etiquette, must be polite in their speech, and in particular must not interrupt their elders.

The predicament of women under the Taiwanese patriarchal system is revealed by two classic and celebrated dictums from Confucius and Mencius: "Of all people,

³² Zi-Si (子思) explained Confucius' thoughts on the 'way' in Chapter 1 of *Moderated Way*. He said, "The commandments of Heaven are what we call 'nature'. To follow this 'nature' is the 'way'. To cultivate this 'way' is to be educated. The 'way' is something we mustn't depart from for a moment. If it is something that we can depart from, then it is not the 'way'." (天命之謂性，率性之謂道，修道之謂教。道也者，不可須臾離也。可離，非道也。) Bin-Ying Shieh (謝冰瑩). *The Four Books in New Interpretation* (Taipei: Three principles of People, 1998) 22.

³³ Chapter 12, Verse 11 of *The Analects of Confucius* (論語) records that Duke Ching of Ch'i asked Confucius about ruling. Confucius replied, "Let the lords be lords, the subjects be subjects, the fathers be fathers, the sons be sons." (齊景公問政於孔子，孔子對曰，君君、臣臣、父父、子子。) Shieh 201.

girls and servants are the most difficult to behave to.”³⁴ and “A gentleman keeps his distance from the kitchen.”³⁵ Although a small group of contemporary scholars have attempted to prove that these two wise men did not intentionally look down on women, these two fragments have been applied and handed down over many generations over thousands of years from the viewpoint of discriminating against women. Bih-Jen Ho considered that these biased quotations have already become deep-rooted mores and a long-standing value system in Taiwanese patriarchal society.³⁶

Since the 1970s, when Ms Hsiu-Lien (呂秀蓮) promoted the new feminist perspective “First be a human, then be a woman”, a stream of challenges from women’s movements to the patriarchal structure have tried to break the pattern of stable inequality in Taiwan.³⁷ In the 1980s the first feminist magazine, Awaken was published to raise women’s consciousness. Between the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s, many women’s groups were formed, and the issues of women and gender became main subjects of discussion on campuses across Taiwan. After 1997, when the Executive Yuan’s Women’s Rights Promotion Committee was established, gender policies and concepts were brought into the national policy scheme.³⁸ In recent years, the Legislative Yuan has passed laws concerning women’s rights such as the Sexual Assault Prevention Law (1997), the Family Violence Protection Law (1998), Gender Equality in Employment Law (2001), and the Gender Equality in Education Law (2004). Although these facts mean the treatment of women is much fairer than before, many who examine women’s rights have found that the concept and laws of gender equality are still

³⁴ This quotation in Chinese is “唯女子與小人為難養也”, spoken by Confucius and recorded in Lun Yu (論語 The Analects of Confucius): Yang Huo (陽貨) XVII. Shieh 278. Translated into English by Association Francaise des Professeurs de Chinois. 8 Dec 2008. <<http://afpc.asso.fr/wengu/wg/wengu.php?l=Lunyu&no=472>>

³⁵ This quotation in Chinese is “君子遠庖廚”, written by Mencius (孟子) and from Mencius: Book I, Part I, King Hui of Liang (梁惠王 上). Shieh 315.

³⁶ Bih-Jen Ho (何碧珍). “The Strategies and Efforts for Promoting Taiwan’s CEDAW Bid.” Research and Evaluation Bimonthly. Vol. 266 (Aug 2008): 43-53.

³⁷ Ms Lu Hsiu-Lien (呂秀蓮) is one of the pioneers of feminism and women’s liberation in Taiwan. She is also the first female vice president of Taiwan (the Republic of China). Murray A. Rubinstein. “Lu Hsiu-Lien and the Origins of Taiwanese Feminism, 1944-1977.” Women in the New Taiwan: Gender Roles and Gender Consciousness in a Changing Society. Eds. Catherine Farris, Anru Lee and Murray A. Rubinstein (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004) 244, 260-270.

³⁸ Lih-Rong Wang (王麗容). Report on Women’s Rights in Taiwan in 2003 (Taipei: Chinese Association for Human Rights, 2003) 10.

not applied in daily life.³⁹ A number of phenomena illustrate the fact that patriarchy still controls the status and rights of women: 1. Encouraging women to participate in social activities but not promoting improvements in women's rights; 2. Motivating women to learn throughout their lives but not urging them to leave their traditional role; 3. Paying great attention to women's rights concerning reproduction, but treating the issue of elder women's health as a fringe concern; 4. Urging women to vote but not encouraging them to participate in politics; 5. Violence is still a major problem for women; 6. Encouraging women to choose marriage but not providing economic protection; 7. Taking care of family in the name of love is a stumbling block to women's careers.⁴⁰ As described above, the conventional system of patriarchy still has strong control over, and an impact on, the life of Taiwanese women.

E. Creativity in Taiwanese culture

As this Millennium approached, under the impact of globalisation, many Asian scholars appealed to their governments to pay attention to creativity in the fields of education and production. They also considered that creativity was the key to promoting the competitive strength of their countries.⁴¹ In the book Why Are Asians Less Creative than Westerners? Dr. Ng Aik Kwang (黃奕光) emphasised that it was impossible to be creative in a state of 'social vacuum'; and it was a kind of personal behaviour strongly influenced by culture.⁴² Whereas the conventional Asian value system stressed the group, discipline and harmony, Dr. Kwang found that creativity was more likely to develop out of the Western concept which emphasised the self, liberty and an uncompromising attitude.⁴³ Taiwan is located in Asia and its core philosophy and culture were mainly influenced by the Confucianists within Chinese culture. Most people treat their family, human relations, filial piety and fraternal love as a priority and this is very different from the Western propensity for individualism.⁴⁴ Under the cultural norm of 'sacrificing the

³⁹ Shu-Man Pan (潘淑滿). Report on the Examination of Women's Rights in Taiwan (Taipei: Chinese Association for Human Rights, 2005) 2.

⁴⁰ Pan 24-28.

⁴¹ Wu, Wu-Dian and Jing-Ji Wu (吳武典、吳靜吉). White Paper on Creative Paper: Establishing a Republic of Creativity (R.O.C.) for Taiwan (Taipei: Ministry of Education, 2002) 5-6.

⁴² Ng Aik Kwang (黃奕光). Asian Creativity: Why Are Asians Less Creative than Westerners? (Taipei: Pearson Education Taiwan, 2003) 29, 121.

⁴³ Kwang. 52-65.

⁴⁴ An-Wu Lin (林安梧). Undoing the Incantation for Taiwan: Overcoming 'the Sense of a Master and a

small self to complete the big self' and considering one's group to be more important than the personal self, Taiwanese people often express their particular national characteristics in compromise, obedience and oppression.⁴⁵ Therefore, despite the fact that the Taiwanese government continually learn from Western countries and have, for several years, attempted to develop an international outlook, creativity does not come easily given the traditionally cultivated background where the needs of the self are compromised in favour of group harmony.

In 2000, Taiwan experienced the first transfer of the ruling party and the opposition parties. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) took the place of the Kuo Ming Tang (KMT, 國民黨) which had held the reins of government after Japanese colonisation, and promoted a policy of handing down orthodox Chinese culture. This transfer signaled that most Taiwanese people formally agreed with the DPP's political views on nativisation and the sovereign rights of Taiwan.⁴⁶ Besides striving for the rights of Taiwan internationally, the Taiwanese government began to be concerned with issues of culture, art and creativity; moreover, it actively explored and set relevant policies in action.

With the belief that culture is good business, in 2000, the government placed the development of the creative industry in its list of 10 projects for national development, scheduled for completion by 2008. This was the first time that cultural content had been listed as a priority in national development, linked with the aims of creating jobs, economic value and raising the quality of life for all Taiwanese.⁴⁷ However, when compared with changes in the public sphere, mothers, who are the primary concern of this thesis, still play the same role - restricted by the traditional limitations of domesticity and sacrificing themselves for other family members. In summary, the terms mother and motherhood still have few connections or associations with the term creativity which, at its extreme, takes account of the self and is uncompromising.

Servant' and Establishing 'a Citizen's Society' (Taipei: Li-Ming, 2004) 167.

⁴⁵ "Sacrificing the small self to complete the big self" in Chinese is "犧牲小我，完成大我" .

⁴⁶ Yen-Hsien Chang (張炎憲). "Toward a New 21st Century Taiwan." Taiwan History Center. 7 Jan 2002. <<http://www.twhistory.org.tw/20020107.htm>>

⁴⁷ Yu-Chiou Chen (陳郁秀). "Exploring a New Era of Creativity." Council for Cultural Affairs. 30 Aug 2003. <http://open.nat.gov.tw/OpenFront/report/show_file.jsp?sysId=C09201329&fileNo=001>

F. Experience in Taiwanese culture

The Taiwanese social value of looking down on 'experience' and looking up to 'knowledge' can be traced to the Imperial Examinations System. The proverb "the worth of other pursuits is small, and the study of books excels them all" reveals the unbalanced values of this system.⁴⁸ The Imperial Examinations System in China lasted for 1,300 years, from its founding during the Sui Dynasty in 605 to its abolition near the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1905.⁴⁹ It was used to determine who among the population would be permitted to enter the state's bureaucracy. These kinds of long-standing system for choosing the best people have influenced the Taiwanese, who were originally agricultural workers, to treat learning and knowledge as an important issue for their offspring, who might thus promote the whole family's status; but in so doing, they depreciate any other professional practical technique.⁵⁰ So far, most Taiwanese parents urge their children to study hard to pass examinations so that they can advance to a higher school, a job, or improve their status. Given the intense competition to enter a better school at the next educational stage, many schools suppress opportunities for providing practical experience and diversified learning for their students, but use the tactic of 'leading education by the examination' to spur them on, including recitation, and completing a lot of homework and written tests based on the textbooks selected for the examination. Although the Taiwanese government abolished parts of the unitary written examinations and implemented the new 'diversified admission program for universities and colleges' in 2002, the concept that the intellectual class is the best has not been broken.⁵¹ Nowadays, many young Taiwanese parents still send their children to private cram schools after formal school to strengthen their exam abilities in courses such as Mathematics, English, and Science. Even at the nursery level, most kindergartens that want to sustain their

⁴⁸ "The worth of other pursuits is small, and the study of books excels them all" in Chinese is "萬般皆下品，唯有讀書高".

⁴⁹ Chang-Rui Run (阮昌銳). "The Culture of the Imperial Examination." A System of First Degree Scholars to High Scorers: Catalog of the Culture of the Imperial Examination. Ed. Zi-Liang Zeng (曾子良) (I-Lan: National Center of Traditional Art, 2006) 2.

⁵⁰ Jenn-Wu Wang. "The Reason and Myth of Education Fanaticism: A Historical Review." Indigenous Psychological Research in Chinese Societies. Vol. 17 (June 2002): 3, 11.

⁵¹ Yi-Fen Chen (陳憶芬) and Da-Sen Lin (林大森). "Cram School Attendance and College Entrance Exam Scores of Senior High School Students in Taiwan." Bulletin of Educational Research. Vol. 52.4 (Dec 2006): 38-39.

business and conform to most parents' expectations brazenly violate the educational regulations. They teach phonetic symbols, and Chinese and English words in reading and writing at an early stage in the child's education in order that their pupils will surpass others in the field of knowledge; however, they harm infants' physical health, particularly with regard to the eyes, and have little concern for the importance of learning from experience by play, practice and exercise.⁵²

Looking down on 'experience' and holding knowledge in high esteem have also occurred in the fields of gender and art. Generally, women pay much more attention to feelings and experience because of their biology and brain as well as cultural cultivation.⁵³ However, the female ability to gain wisdom from experience is often ignored or looked down upon by patriarchal society which values knowledge and logic. Similarly, in the field of art, most women artists esteem the personal experience of life much more than do male artists. Chi-Hui Kao (高千惠) found a particular phenomenon in her long-term investigation of contemporary art in Taiwan: there is a tendency for the styles of men's and women's artworks to differ, with men's work emphasising 'experimentation' and women's artworks stressing 'experience'. However, 'experimental' works are still better appreciated than 'experience' based ones in terms of public opinion.⁵⁴

Thus it can be seen that whether the field is education, gender or art, experience is still readily treated as inferior to knowledge in Taiwanese society which places greater importance on rationality, logic and experimentation.

⁵² Win-Yi Lee (李文儀). "Teaching Writing in Nursery, Hurts Little Hands and Eyes." The Liberty Times. 11 Nov 2007. <<http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2007/new/nov/19/today-education1.htm>>

⁵³ Tien-Song Lin (林天送). "The Different Structure of the Brain between Male and Female." Yahoo News. 20 Feb 2003. <<http://tw.news.yahoo.com/health/>>

⁵⁴ Chi-Hui Kao (高千惠). Between the Boundaries: A Journey to Contemporary Art (Taipei: Artist, 2001) 40-42.

1.3 Research questions

There are six main research questions as follows:

1. What is the creative identity of an artist during motherhood?
2. Why is it difficult for Taiwanese mother artists to sustain the creative identity?
3. What are the stereotypical codes of representing motherhood in Taiwanese art?
4. How do contemporary women artists break the stereotype of motherhood through their experience of motherhood?
5. How do I, as a woman artist, use visual strategies to sustain my creative identity under the burden of Taiwanese motherhood?
6. Can I discover a new viewpoint, based on the artist's experience, which will revise and revive the value of motherhood which has been oppressed by patriarchal society in Taiwan?

1.4 Methods used in this practice-based research

The three main methods used in this practice-based PhD research are discussed in this section.

1.4.1 Research through practice

Practice-based PhD research is different from traditional academic investigation which mainly concentrates on thinking but often ignores the importance of practice and action. This project uses the 'research through practice' method which is based on Donald A. Schön's competent practitioner concepts of 'knowing-in-practice' and

'reflection-in-action'.⁵⁵ Schön indicated that "... practitioners themselves often reveal a capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of action and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situation of practice."⁵⁶ In applying his ideas, I would like to breach the limitations of hard knowledge, science and scholarship, and to clearly reveal the tacit knowledge that exists in practice. I aim to use and develop the function of reflective practice to explore my themes and to expose the processes in my practice. In addition, I will employ Schön's method to provide a creative contribution to knowledge and to bridge the long-term gap that still seems to exist between theory and practice in academic fields.

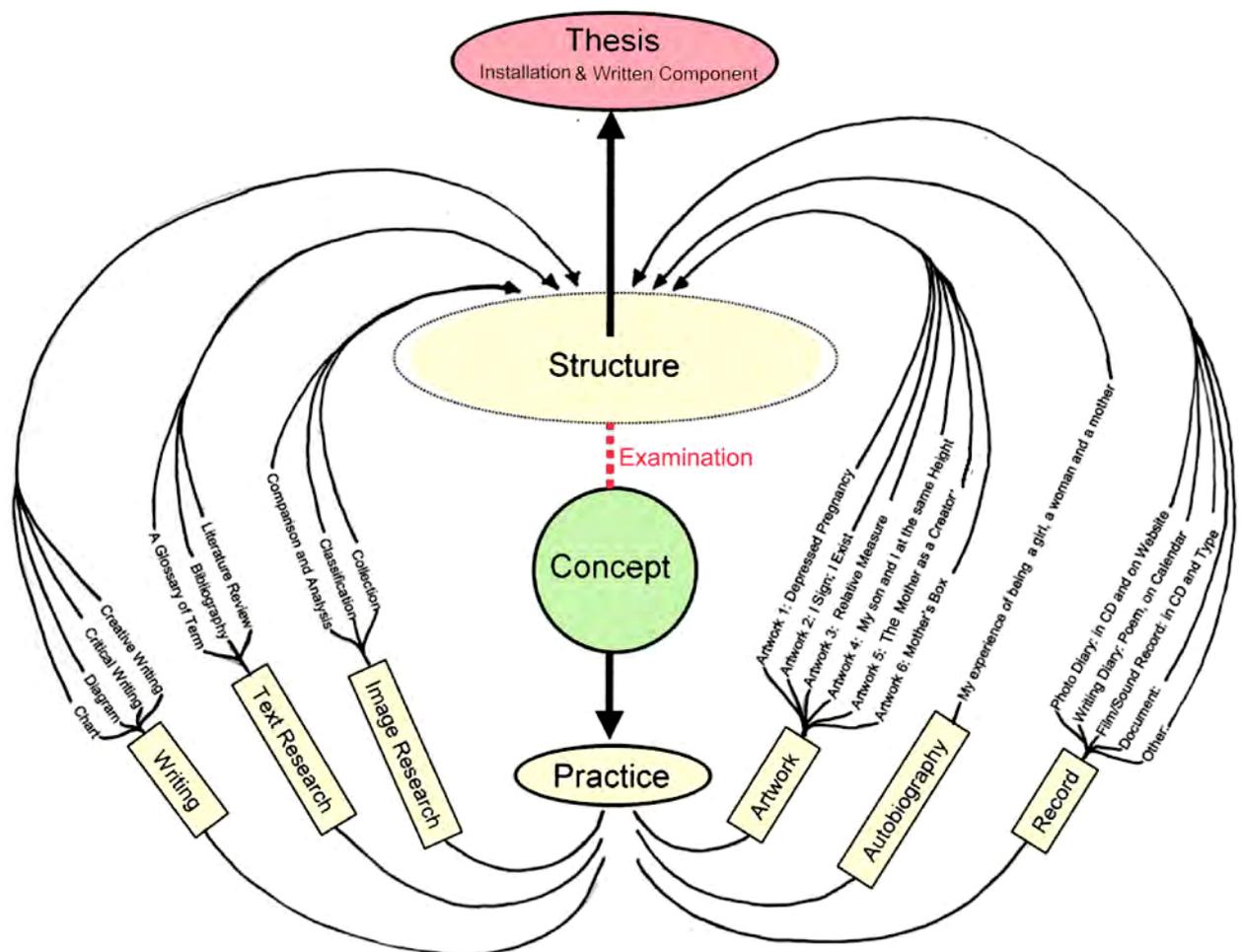


Fig 1.4.1 A diagram of the methodology and process for this practice-based PhD research.

⁵⁵ Donald A. Schön found that competent practitioners exhibited a kind of knowing-in-practice and reflection-in-action in their professional practice. Donald A. Schön. The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action (USA: Basic Books, 1983) viii and ix.

⁵⁶ Schön viii and ix.

'Research through practice' is fundamental to this project, but I also believe that my academic training in theorising and examination will enhance the strength of practice and research, and not limit my intuitive creative potential. There is a never-ending cycle of thinking and making, then rethinking and remaking in the process which helps me to dig ever deeper into myself and my research. Diagram Fig 1.4.1 shows in detail how this cycle has worked in developing the project. In this diagram, the green circle located in the centre indicates the starting point for the research. Through the repeated flow of practice, structuring and examination, it grew from a small initial idea to a significant concept which is central to my research. For example, the initial theme of this research was concerned with feelings of depression I experienced as a pregnant woman. After many iterations of the cycle, through revision and development, the central concept eventually focused on the creative identity of a mother artist. The yellow parts indicate practical work which takes various forms, including records, autobiographies, artworks, image research, text research and writing. Structure is something separate to these forms of practice; it is a cognitive convention for the overall organisation which helps me to clarify, to examine and to revise any detail that obstructs the flow of my research. The final result is the thesis which consists of an installation and a written component. The installation, six sequences of artworks as the visual component of my artistic research, is the heart of the thesis. The written component was produced after the practice and installation, and provides a precise discourse on and exploration of the project's complicated practical denouement.

1.4.2 Autobiographical practice and research

As a mother artist, I wanted to strengthen and emphasise the close relationship between artistic creation and 'the self' in order to challenge the myth of the selfless mothers, as defined in our patriarchal society. As I claim in section 1.1 artists express both their encounters with the real world, and with their imagination. The process of artistic creation cannot avoid relating to or exploring the self. In other words, an artist's creation reveals a kind of self-representation from the conscious or even unconscious mind. However, women's voices are still tiny whether in art or in society. Women are often represented in art or society for others, not for themselves.

Therefore, in this project, I give a political application to this phenomenon and make it the principal approach to the issues of mothers with artistic professions who struggle to sustain their identities. This reflects the standpoint of Hélène Cixous' 'L'écriture Féminine'. In 1975, she asserted in The Laugh of the Medusa,

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement.⁵⁷

From a historical viewpoint, whether in literature or art, many candid expressions of female experience have been suppressed as fringe subjects, or subjected to prejudicial handling within an environment long controlled by men. In the last ten years, encouraged by women's movements, more and more Taiwanese women have begun to write their own stories challenging the cause of their predicament and to research their writing, in which men always write on behalf of women.⁵⁸ Through this active practice, not only do they understand more about themselves, but they prove that women have their own lives as well as their own 'herstories'. Some artists have used the idea of autobiographic practice in their paintings, photographs and other media to explore themselves and to develop new forms of art. Take, for example, Jo Spence's re-staging of herself with photography, as therapeutic politics (photo-therapy), exploring her own identity as a girl, a daughter, a woman or a breast cancer patient. Her visual practice helped her to heal herself, and is also a visual autobiography expressing her assertions. She has inspired many women artists to voice their thoughts and to establish their own 'herstories'. In fact, Jo Spence is my spiritual icon. Her works and insistent attitude were the source of much powerful inspiration and encouragement when, whilst developing this autobiographic research, I felt stifled by unfriendly maternal environments and an uncomfortable pregnancy.

⁵⁷ Hélène Cixous. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000. Ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) 627.

⁵⁸ Juin Shieh. Taiwan Contemporary Art Series: A Remark on Femininity and Queerness for Emerging Artists (Taipei: Council for Cultural Affairs, Executive Yuan, 2003) 36-37.

1.4.3 Examination: three aspects of the creative identity of an artist during motherhood

I suggest that to research the issues of mother artists we need to discuss the whole process of artistic creation, including the artistic profession, interaction between motherhood and creating art, and the creativity in the artwork. The reason is that all three aspects affect the practice and the thoughts of mother artists who are in a particular situation which no other groups share. As both a mother and an artist, I am especially aware that the interaction between motherhood and creating artworks is full of flexibility, diversity and creativity. Given these dual identities, the experience of motherhood has made a deep impact on my art. Therefore, in this section, I aim to identify these three aspects in order to use them to examine the sustainability of the creative identity of an artist during motherhood.

A. The artist's profession

Not only is an artist a special kind of individual with the distinctive characteristic of creativity, as mentioned before, but he or she also has a kind of rebellious ability which makes society frightened.⁵⁹ As Rollo May said,

Artists are generally soft-spoken persons who are concerned with their inner visions and images. But that is precisely what makes them feared by any coercive society. For they are the bearers of the human being's age-old capacity to be insurgent.⁶⁰

If they do not accept the fate of giving up their artistic professions, how do those women artists with strong self-awareness and self-realisation, apply their ability to rebel – which comes with the pursuit of creativity – and their ability to challenge and overcome the obstruction of the myth of motherhood?

Throughout art history, most high achieving women artists (for example, Rosa Bonheur (France 1822-1899), Mary Cassatt (USA 1844-1926), Georgia O'Keeffe (USA 1887-1986), Dorothea Tanning (USA 1912-), and Mali Wu (Taiwan 1957-)

⁵⁹ Csikszentmihalyi 72.

⁶⁰ May 32.

have rejected giving birth in order to rebel against the oppression of the myth of women's 'natural vocation'. In doing so, they could maintain a sense of self, heighten their own consciousness, and devote themselves to creating art.⁶¹ However, there is also a small group of women artists with great courage who did not give up their opportunities to become mothers and, at the same time, artists. In fact, they broke down the apparent stigma of motherhood, layer by layer and, instead, enhanced the insurgent characteristics of the artist against existing limitations. The following are a few examples:

Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (France 1755-1842) broke away from the thinking that a 'good' mother should sacrifice herself and treat her children as a priority. In her memoirs she expressed her pride that she did not allow the initiation of motherhood to hinder her from being a professional artist and persisted in painting between labour pains.⁶² Berthe Morisot (France 1841-1895) still painted at home with a wet nurse's assistance after her marriage. She exhibited as one of the Impressionists each year, except the year she gave birth to a daughter.⁶³ Barbara Hepworth (Britain 1903-1975) worked at the nursery she established to earn money, took care of her own children in the morning and, at the same time, devoted herself to creating carved sculptures after her children went to sleep in the evening or during the short break in her morning's work. Käthe Kollwitz (Germany 1867-1945) and Frida Kahlo (Mexico 1907-1954) departed from the conventional representation of blissful motherhood and expressed the extremely painful hopelessness of motherhood after the death of their respective children. Mary Kelly (Britain 1941-) and Sally Mann (USA 1951-) are artistic professionals and also mothers, and transferred their experience of bearing children to the resource of creation. Having achieved a stable income and a certain status in the art world, both Chin Chen (Taiwan 1907-1998) and Juin Shieh (謝鴻均, Taiwan 1961-) decided to have a child despite both being over the age of 40, and still continued to produce many artworks in conjunction with well organised child-care.

⁶¹ May 44.

⁶² Whitney Chadwick. *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996 (1990)) 170-171.

⁶³ Frances Borzello. *A World of Our Own: Women as Artists* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 125.

Recently, a small but increasing number of women artists have decided not to give up the combined experience of motherhood and professional art creation. They have tried to use the spirit of creativity to struggle against the limitations imposed by motherhood. Until now, compared to men, mother artists have needed to give a great deal of thought to sustaining their artistic profession during motherhood. There is no appropriate system for assisting with childcare and supporting artists in society, so if a mother artist wants to sustain her profession, she needs to have great enthusiasm and commitment to her creativity; indeed, she must use the characteristic of creativity to change the attitudes of her family members, so that she has time and space for creating art. One successful mother artist, Fang Luo (羅芳, Taiwan 1937-) sighed with emotion and said,

According to etiquette, we (mother artists) need to spend extra time and energy to concentrate on the housework; therefore, our achievement appears especially extraordinary. Society should respect us and hold us in higher regard.⁶⁴

B. The interaction between motherhood and creating art

The interaction between motherhood and creating art refers to the way in which mother artists apply the characteristics of the artist to their motherhood. At the same time, they feed back the creativity of motherhood to their creative arts. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona in her book, Women, Creativity, and Arts, referred to the effort of some mother artists. She said,

More recently, buttressed by both the feminist mythology of superwoman and changing family patterns, women artists are having children *without* sacrificing their urge to create. For some their creative nature is even increased by the experience of motherhood.⁶⁵

Where motherhood is construed as responsibility without creativity, some mother artists have used their creative abilities to discover the rich creativity in the reality

⁶⁴ Fang Luo (羅芳). "Group Exhibition of Women Artists in 2001: The Brilliant Expression of Women (I am not only the best of the group of women)." Prolong and Change: The Catalogue of Fang Luo's Ink Painting (Taipei: Foundation of the Pacific Ocean, 2001) 142.

⁶⁵ Apostolos-Cappadona 4.

of motherhood. Their motherhood has become the source of their inspiration, full of the power of creativity. For instance, as with most women in art history, having taken care of her three children, in 1979 Sally Mann's photographic awareness and energy had almost disappeared, but she inadvertently and accidentally found a new balance between her motherhood and photography. One day in 1984, touched by the sight of her daughter Jessie's swollen eye which had been bitten by a mosquito, she took a picture entitled Damaged Child (Fig 1.4.2). Although the motive for taking the picture was to record an event in Jessie's life, she developed the idea the next day, re-photographing the event with her daughter and adopting the concept of performance, as an artistic photographic record. Therefore, a series of photographs recording the growth of her children in the form of family theatre began.⁶⁶ With the excitement of observing the creativity in motherhood and finding a way to express it, she sustained her profession and also developed a special way of documenting events by moving between actual life and fabricated design.⁶⁷ Consequently, she not only solved a part of the conflict between motherhood and her profession, but also evoked the creativity of motherhood through her photography.



Fig 1.4.2 Sally Mann, Damaged Child, 1984. Black & white photograph.

⁶⁶ Sally Mann collected and published her photographic works in the exhibition and catalogue Immediate Family in 1992, which record her children when they explored their woodland home in Virginia. Sally Mann. Immediate Family (New York: Aperture, 1992).

⁶⁷ John Pultz. Photography and the Body (Taipei: Yuan-Liou, 1997 (1995)) 144-145.

Even after Käthe Kollwitz' beloved son Peter died in the First World War, she had the strength and a need to work; the motherhood in her life did not end at that point. The drawing Woman with Dead Child (Fig 1.4.3) and her diary entry of August 22nd, 1916 explain how she sustained the creative identity of motherhood through artistic practice, struggling with unbearable sadness at the death of her son.

Make a drawing: the mother letting her dead son slide into her arms. I might make a hundred such drawings and yet I do not get any closer to him. I am seeking him. As if I had to find him in the work.⁶⁸



Fig 1.4.3 Käthe Kollwitz, Woman with Dead Child, 1903. Etching on paper, National Gallery of Art, DC.

From the above we see that, whether the child is present or recalled, artists such as Sally Mann and Käthe Kollwitz transfer the encounter of actual motherhood and artistic practice into a creative cycle. This helped them to reach a new balance and a unique state that is different from that of traditional motherhood, and it also opened up a wider world for other mother artists to feel free from the restrictions that exist in the conflict between motherhood and artistic practice. Therefore, I consider this creative cycle as the second aspect of creative identity.

⁶⁸ Käthe Kollwitz. "The Diary and Letters of Käthe Kollwitz." The Fruit of Labour: Creativity, Self-expression and Motherhood. Ed. Penny Summer (London: The Women's Press, 2001) 111.

C. Creativity in the artwork of motherhood

Creativity in the artwork of motherhood implies that the artwork itself can break through limitations in art and express something new in its form and concept; also, an artwork's innovative value affects others and is validated by appropriate experts. Rollo May considers that "Creativity is the encounter of the intensively conscious human being with his or her world".⁶⁹ Besides evoking an interaction between motherhood and creative art, as discussed previously, it also expresses "the tension between spontaneity and limitations".⁷⁰ In other words, the limitations on the art of motherhood indicate that the spontaneity of mother artists has a base from which to develop new artistic forms and symbols.

This focuses on the assumption that artists are fully conscious of the limitations inherent in the art of motherhood. Being aware of one's limitations is an essential element for creativity. James Hughes pointed out, "All creativity has a destructive component since the mode has to be broken in order to make something new."⁷¹ Using the river as a metaphor to explain the importance of limitations, May suggested,

The limits are necessary as those provided by the banks of a river, without which the water would be dispersed on the earth and there would be no river – that is, the river is constituted by the tension between the flowing water and the banks...limitations... (like the river banks) forcing the spontaneity into the various forms which are essential to the work of art or poem.⁷²

In the following section, I would like to use examples of Mary Kelly's work to illustrate how mother artists struggle successfully against the limitations of the conventional representation of motherhood in their artwork, and develop a 'controlled' and 'transcendent' form to reach a creative breakthrough.

Mary Kelly's Post-Partum Document is a thoughtful artwork of motherhood produced continuously from 1973 to 1979 and contains six documents. In this

⁶⁹ May 54.

⁷⁰ May 115.

⁷¹ Hughes 11.

⁷² May 115.

artwork, she utilises maternal objects (used diapers, collections and manuscripts about her son), and some text from her diary and extracts of dialogue between mother and son, to unfold the story of how he grew and how the mind and thoughts of a mother can be locked in this isolated role. The artwork reflects a form of complication in the experience of motherhood. Taking, for example, the most controversial document Documentation 1: Analysed Fecal Stains and Feeding Charts (Fig 1.4.4), she incorporated her son's used diapers, experimental charts, and some theoretical notes which explored the psychological effects of motherhood on femininity, to reshape the once-negative image of motherhood and to challenge the boundaries of domesticity in art. Although the mass media made a huge fuss over the "Dirty Nappies" (Fig 1.4.5) and the mainstream art audience denigrated it in the first exhibition of the artwork at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London in 1976, it liberated the issue of motherhood at different levels.⁷³ The more people argued about whether the dirty diapers and the concept of domestic motherhood should be recognised in art, the more it aroused the realisation that she was breaking limitations in her work. Lucy R. Lippard (the American feminist critic), Griselda Pollock (British feminist art researcher) and Pei-Chun Lin (林珮淳, Taiwanese feminist artist and researcher) have strongly praised and approved of Kelly's innovation and contribution.⁷⁴

From the viewpoint of breaking conventional representation in her work, Kelly's strategy of using private themes in public art had moved beyond the earlier achievements of Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's project Womanhouse (1971-1972) which expanded boundaries by celebrating the mystical, historical and private experiences of being a woman in the public eye. She sharply focused women's issues in general into the more challenging subject of motherhood. Regardless of the form or perspective of the work, Kelly utilised the structure and concept of rational and analytic documentation to visualise the important but scorned work of changing nappies and observing the infant's excrement in early motherhood. She also broke the conventional image of 'mother', who had

⁷³ Lucy R. Lippard. "Foreword." Post-Partum Document. Mary Kelly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999 (1983)) xiii.

⁷⁴ Pei-Chun Lin (林珮淳). "Women, Art and Society: Exploring the Female Artistic Language Which Destroys the Patriarchal Culture through the 'Post-Partum Document' by Mary Kelly." Women/Art/Discourse (Taipei: Fembooks, 1998) 211-212, 220.

traditionally been depicted as a dependent, emotional and subordinate person without professional ability.⁷⁵



Fig 1.4.4 Mary Kelly, Documentation 1: Analysed Fecal Stains and Feeding Charts (detail) (from Post-Partum Document), 1974. 28 units, 71.1x35.6 cm each.



Fig 1.4.5 Dirty Nappies. The news article about the Post-Partum Document exhibition from the Evening Standard, London, October 14, 1976.

The artwork has expanded consciousness of the issues of motherhood and created a new form for its representation. Self scrutinising, and also questioned and criticised by the public, she insisted on facing the limitations of motherhood, continually creating new forms and symbols in a further five series of the Post-Partum Document. Hughes said, “Successful creativity carries out a transformative role in society, changing the world in some small or large particular.”⁷⁶ This viewpoint on the innovation and contribution of her art indicates that Mary Kelly’s artwork on motherhood is an original model of excellence, accomplishing the third aspect of creative identity highlighted by this research.

⁷⁵ Estelle B. Freedman. No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women (London: Profile Books, 2002) 320-321.

⁷⁶ Hughes 11.

1.5 The development of this research

1.5.1 The development of my art on women's issues



Fig 1.5.1 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, Black Tides, 1992. Black crayon on paper, 47x64 cm.
(Middle) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The Woman Descending in Black Tides No. 5, 1993. Black & white photograph, 30x37 cm.
(Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The Woman Descending in Black Tides No. 12, 1993. Black & white photograph, 30x37 cm.

For several years leading up to 2000, I was interested in women's issues, and especially in representing them in my artworks. In 1992, I began to explore my innermost feelings about the pressures of being a woman by painting and photographing women's portraits. The series Black Tides and The Women Descending in Black Tides (Fig 1.5.1) reveal the speechless depression of being a woman in contemporary Taiwan. Between 1993 and 1997, through my paintings and photographs, I criticised the Taiwanese vogue for spending a lot of money on romantic and hypocritical commercial wedding pictures. In Fig 1.5.2-1.5.4, I used an irony to reveal the chasm between fabricated, sweet Taiwanese weddings and the realities of a bitter marriage. Then, between 1998 and 2000, I created a series of metaphorical bodily images as visual artworks (Fig 1.5.5-1.5.7) which explored my body and its inner power which I had always purposely ignored. At the same time, I researched the relationship between the representation of the body and women artists for my MA thesis The Body and Female Artists.



Fig 1.5.2 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Wedding 1994, 1994. Oil on canvas, 74x182 cm.

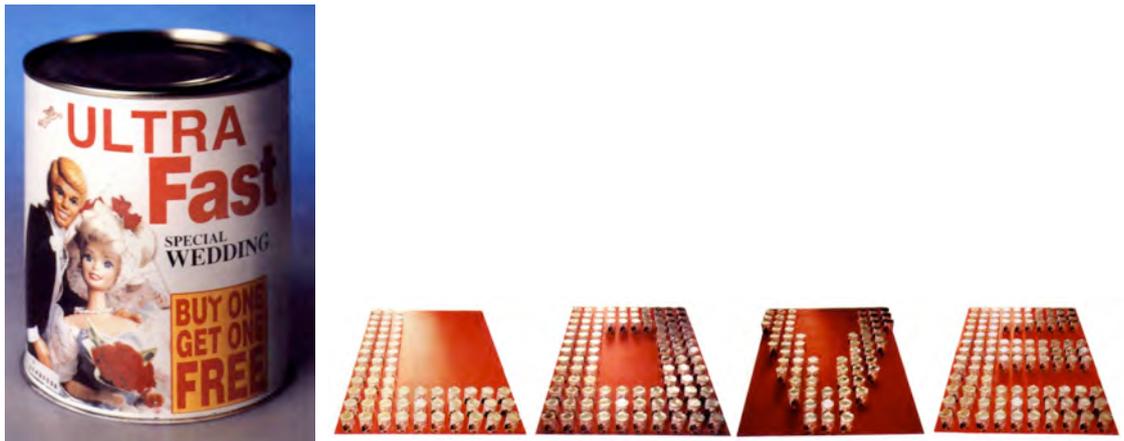


Fig 1.5.3 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Ultra Fast Wedding, 1997. Colour photograph & 400 cans, 720x200 cm.



Fig 1.5.4 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Century Wedding No. 3 & 4, 1997. Colour photograph, 122x98 cm.



Fig 1.5.5 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Conker No. 1-4, 1999. Oil and acrylic on canvas.

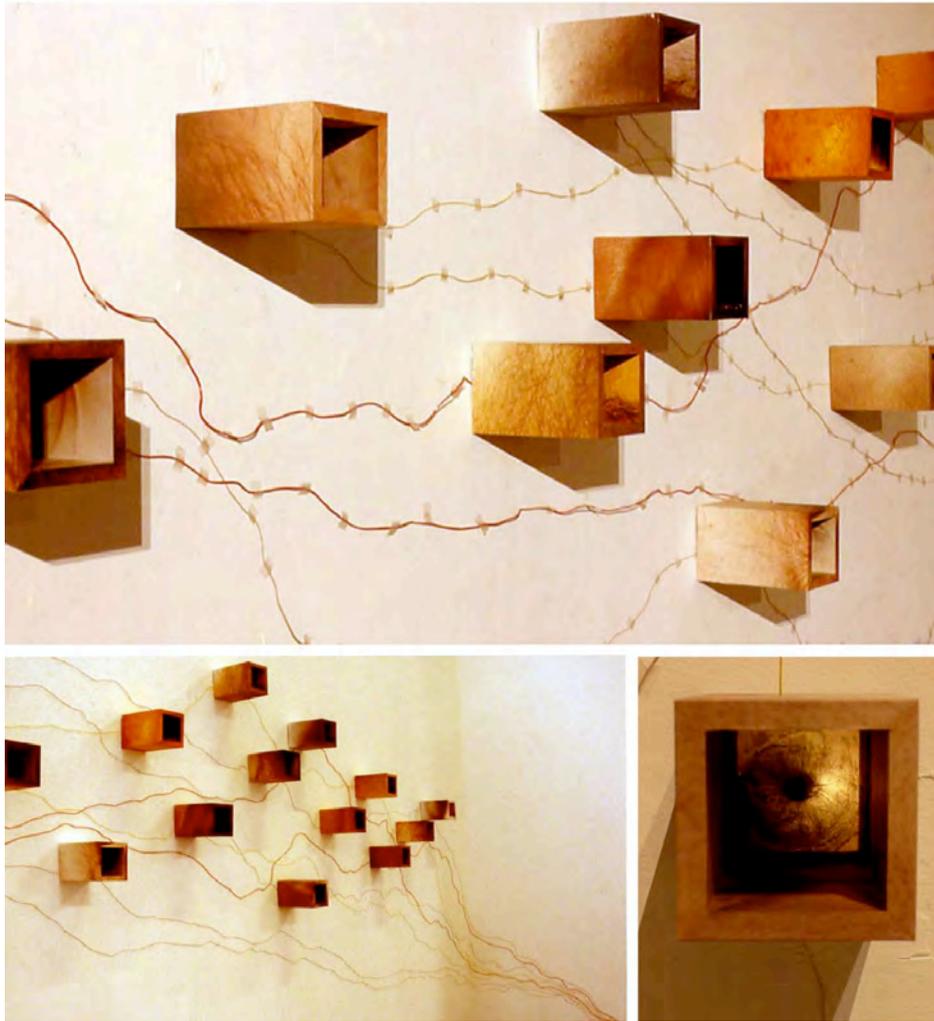


Fig 1.5.6 Hsiao Ching Wang, Facing Bodies No. 1, 1999. Mixed media.

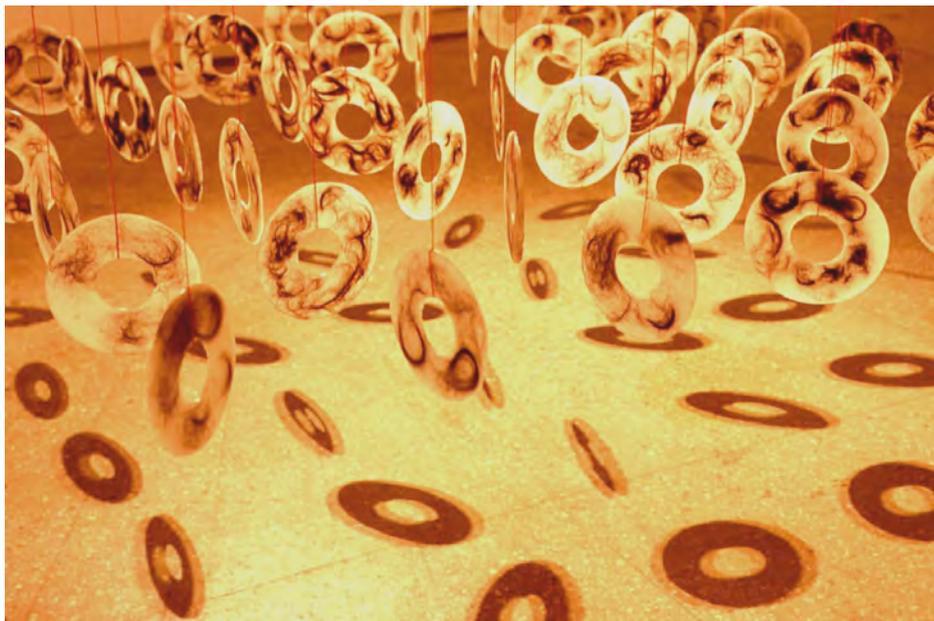


Fig 1.5.7 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Facing Bodies No. 4, 2000. Mixed media.

1.5.2 The three steps in developing this research around the issues of motherhood

In October 2000, significant bodily changes, an uncomfortable pregnancy, and the threat to my identity as an artist, prompted me to use visual art to explore the issues surrounding my pregnant body, motherhood and my culture; I had previously avoided these things. I initially rejected the issues of motherhood because I thought they were not necessarily popular topics. Also, I felt that the selfless mother myth was a serious obstruction to free creativity of Taiwanese artists. I lacked the confidence to shift my research towards motherhood. It was too close to my personal life. However, I wondered, if I were to follow the example most Taiwanese mother artists and give up my artistic life in order to take care of my children, or abandon the right to be a mother to avoid destroying my creative identity, never personally striving to experience, to venture, to question, to research or to challenge the conventional expectations of motherhood, would I be able to prove that it was difficult or even still possible to be an artist during motherhood?

Gambling on an adventure, I proceeded with this project whilst feeling weak from my pregnancy. I got through the first year by sheer willpower, progressed slowly with the autobiographic research and, at one time, nearly gave up. In the throes of unendurable morning sickness, I received extremely frustrating advice from a senior researcher. This lady was an older British photographer who lived in London and was, herself, a mother. She seriously questioned my choice of subject and considered that this autobiographical project was not worth researching, particularly at PhD level. She indicated that, from her experience, people would seldom be interested in me and my story about motherhood. This was especially so since I came from Asia and wanted to discuss it in a 'white-man's society' (sic). She advised me to find something sharper, a more powerful issue to show I was on top and extraordinary. After losing my confidence for a period and doubting myself, I fortunately received totally different feedback from Dr. Chris Mullen. Although he is a 'white-man' and agreed that the issue of motherhood used to be ignored by society, he thought this project was important in terms of re-interpreting the mother, and that it had great value and the potential to develop. He agreed to the adoption of an autobiographical approach, so that my full sense of self could be compared with the selfless

Taiwanese maternal traditions. In September 2002 he became my PhD supervisor. With his kindly encouragement and provision of many diverse sources, this project was given the necessary boost to continue through deeper exploration and more creative expression.

After seven years the research was at last completed. Although it went through a cycle of continual development and revision (see Fig 1.4.1), three main steps are discernible. The first step was inspiration and research planning; the second, exploration and creation; and the third, completing the thesis.

A. Inspiration and research plan



Fig 1.5.8 Hsiao Ching Wang, exhibition Motherhood and Creativity, 2003.

The first step began when I decided to continue with my pregnancy (Oct 2000), and includes the start of my part-time PhD course at the University of Brighton

(Sept 2002) up to the approval of the Thesis Outline (Mar 2003). During these two and a half busy years as a new, full-time parent, I did my best to concentrate on adventurous motherhood, developing various ways to visualise my position – for example, photo diaries, text diaries, sketches and creating art. Organising the inspiration gained from practical motherhood, artistic practices and the artworks and relevant theories of women artists, I set up a formal research plan and sought endorsement for my Thesis Outline Approval. The plan included a project description, an exhibition entitled Motherhood and Creativity (Fig 1.5.8), statements for artworks 1-6 and a presentation. I sought to prove the strategy of using self-representation to challenge selflessness in motherhood through my practice; six photographic artworks were selected and I had plans to continually develop them. At this stage, I also pondered first losing the self, then reasserting the self through my artistic practice, rooting this in my experience of motherhood. This research was temporarily entitled “Motherhood and Creativity: Self-representation in Time of Mother and Child Growing Together (Subtitle: Strategies in Opposition to Patriarchal Structures in Contemporary Taiwan)”.

B. Exploration and creation

Exploration and creation were the main tasks of the second step. These two years, which included the Mphil/PhD Transfer Meeting (Apr 2004) and completing six artworks for my solo exhibition, Picturing Motherhood (2005), were an exciting research period. They were highly productive years and I found I was full of creative thoughts. The interaction between practice and research was helpful to both these elements and helped to define the central concept of the PhD – an exploration and development of sustaining the artist’s creative identity during motherhood under the influence of Taiwanese culture. I discovered that putting thought into action lent clarity and that artistic creation was, thus, a direct help to the concepts underpinning my research. On the other hand, the history, theory and image research inspired and imbued my artistic creations with deeper meaning and more creative expression. The family photograph and time sequencing strategies were developed and refined with the close interplay of both theory and practice. In this step, recording the working process and organising the documents was very important. These documents were effective sources that kept a clear and thorough working history, and provided a base for exploring and reviewing the link

between practice and research. In my Mphil/PhD Transfer Meeting, I explained my research and future plans in the form of a statement (Fig 1.5.9), a presentation and two individual rooms. To emphasise the use of the ‘research through practice’ method in this project, I presented documentary details of my research in the Diagram Room, and examples of my practical work in the Artwork Room (Fig 1.5.10-1.5.12).

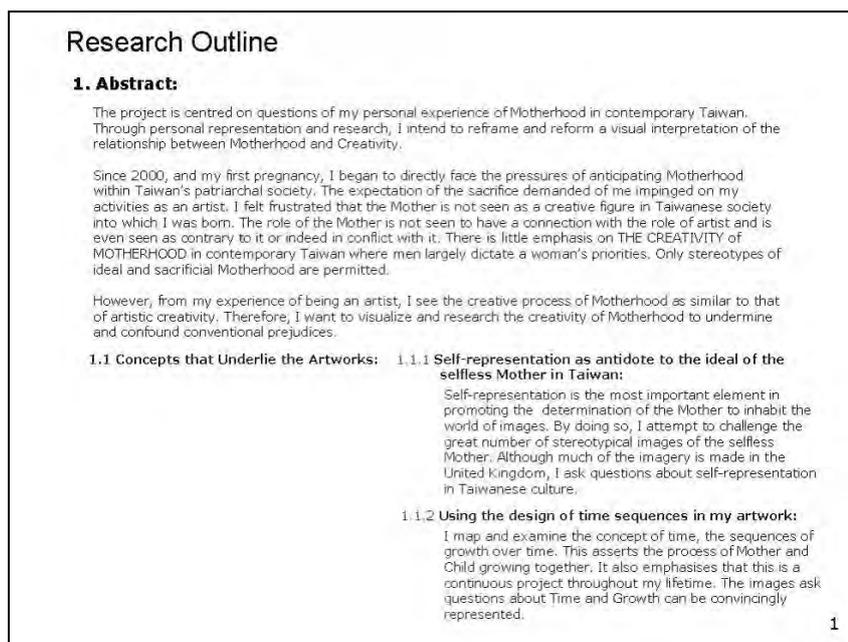
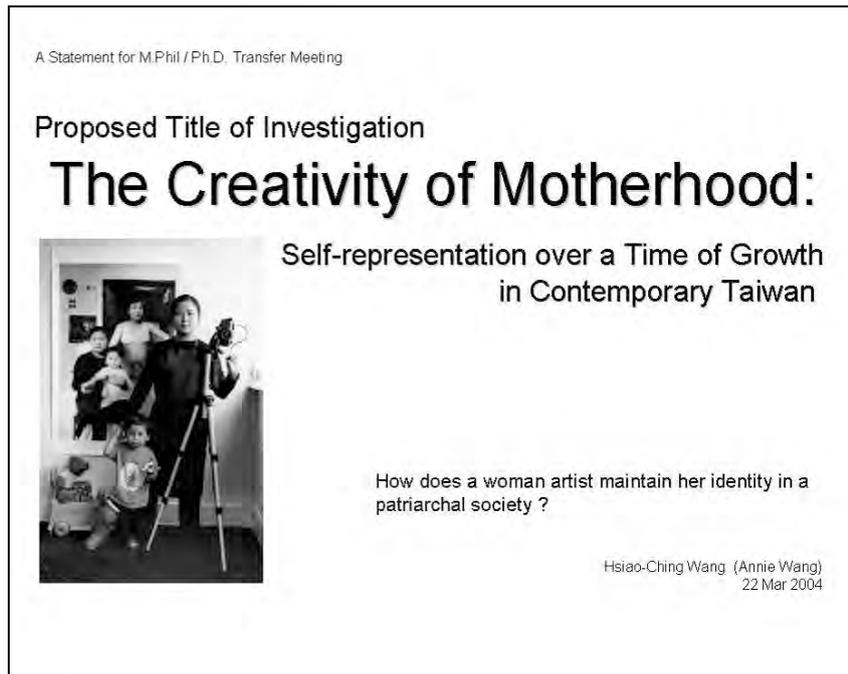
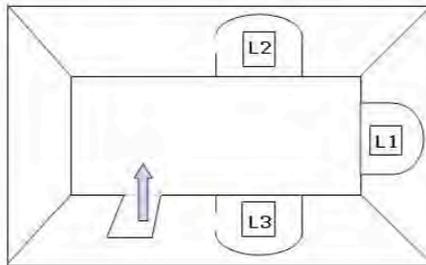


Fig 1.5.9 An excerpt from the report produced for Hsiao-Ching Wang's Mphil/PhD Transfer Meeting. The cover and the first page, 2004.

The Contents to Present in the Meeting

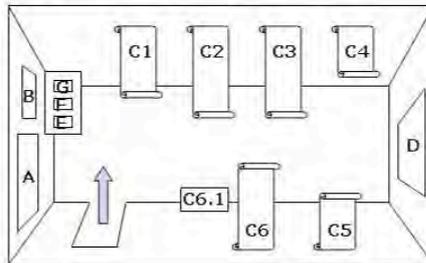
1. Artwork Room (Bat Cave)



Installing Artwork 3: *The Mother as a Creator*

- L1 (Layer 1): The day before giving birth, Taipei studio, 2001
- L2 (Layer 2): My son and I have busy hands, University of Brighton, 2002
- L3 (Layer 3): Me with my tripod and my son with his plaster cast, home in Hove, 2003

2. Diagram Room (206A)



- A Thesis Structure: Units, Ideas and Contents
- B Timetable for the Project: Plan and Process
- C1~C6 Six Research Charts for Artwork 1 to Artwork 6
- C6.1 Two models for Artwork 6
- D Methodology and Process: a Diagram of Flow from Practice to Structure
- E Image Research: Classification System of Comparison
- F My Writing, Autobiography and Draft for Written Component
- G References and Glossary

9

Fig 1.5.10 Illustrations of the Artwork Room and Diagram Room for Hsiao-Ching Wang's Mphil/PhD Transfer Meeting at the University of Brighton, 2004.



Fig 1.5.11 Images of the Artwork Room for Hsiao-Ching Wang's Mphil/PhD Transfer Meeting, 2004.



Fig 1.5.12 Images of the Diagram Room for Hsiao-Ching Wang's Mphil/PhD Transfer Meeting, 2004.

C. Completing the research thesis

This PhD thesis, including the installation Picturing Motherhood (Fig 1.5.13), the written component (Sustaining the Creative Identity of a Taiwanese Artist during Motherhood), and an Artist's Book, is the result of the final step in the entire process. Establishing a precise structure and discourse for the whole research project with strong connections to the main concept and all contexts – organising, reviewing, writing up, revising, examining and re-structuring – demanded

continuous re-assessment. The two and a half years (including one year's rest owing to sickness) between arranging the installation Picturing Motherhood (2005) and completing the written component (2007), were a great challenge for me. My work was subjected to many external and internal difficulties.



Fig 1.5.13 Documents about the installation Picturing Motherhood, 2005. (Left) The invitation card. (Right) Scenes from the exhibition.

In addition to being a productive mother artist, I needed to be a PhD research student and to carefully refine my project from the huge supply of practical and research sources that I had collected. I had many new roles to play, as funding applicant, curator, designer, technician, cleaner, carpenter, painter, document maker, print maker... to successfully execute my exhibition, and to complete the written component and an Artist's Book. Unfortunately, at the beginning of this stressful period, my supportive supervisor unexpectedly resigned and my health began to decline. Holding on firmly in the face of adversity, I made every effort to continue with the project and to hold the exhibition which turned out to be successful. Despite all the positive feedback, pressure to move on to the next phase of my research without an intervening rest period, made me seriously ill and I needed to temporarily withdraw for a year.

As a result of these frustrations I discovered the characteristics of maternal time which had previously gone unrecognised during my practice. This helped me to change my stubborn attitudes, making me more flexible and able to rethink my research. After a period of rest, I set out to complete my thesis in a healthier and more positive frame of mind.

1.6 Research context

This thesis consists of six artworks within an installation and one written component with an Artist's Book. The written component and the Artist's Book are stored together in a slip case with two openings.

1.6.1 The six artworks within the installation

The installation Picturing Motherhood is the heart of this PhD research and was exhibited in August and September 2005 for two weeks at the University of Brighton. It presented my early motherhood to the public through an arrangement of six artworks and a large box-like crimson structure which I built in a room that used to be a painting studio. Rather than simply displaying my artworks on a wall as a conventional exhibition, I installed them using careful interior design, lighting, colour, and dimension. I consider audience reaction to my installations as vital, central and significant. The exhibition helped me to examine and refine my research at every stage of the process, from constructing and revising the installation to receiving feedback from the audience.

1.6.2 The Artist's Book

The Artist's Book is a miniature, visual document of my six artworks and the installation Picturing Motherhood. I regard it as a portable exhibition which allows me to communicate with my audience anywhere and at any time without the formal limitations of time and space associated with gallery. It breaks the boundaries between the public and private spheres by using the concept of a family album to represent and communicate personal issues to others. This flexible exhibition provides an opportunity for viewers/readers to hold a pure and complete 'manifestation' of the project in their hands, with only the essential textual explanations. It was purposely designed to function in a different way to the written component.

1.6.3 Structure of the written component

Different to the installation and the Artist's Book, which are art forms, the written component provides a precise research structure, together with discussions, illustrations, and many details which explain the thesis. The following introduces the structure of the written component.

Chapter 1 is the introduction to the whole research project. It includes the genesis of the research project, the central term 'creative identity', research questions, methods used in this practice-based research, the development of the research and the research context.

Chapter 2 investigates the art of motherhood in Taiwan since the 1920s from two main points of view. Firstly, it asks why there are so few Taiwanese mother artists and explores the difficulties of sustaining an artist's profession within the conventional expectations of motherhood. Secondly, it concentrates on analysing Taiwanese artworks of motherhood and unmasking the attitudes of society and the artists themselves on the issues of motherhood. The research identifies a change – from stereotype to creativity – in the art of motherhood. It exposes the contribution of some mother artists who have begun to challenge the long-term

impact of Taiwanese patriarchal culture and, in recent years, to break the boundaries between motherhood and fine art through their own maternal experiences.

Chapter 3 explores the conceptual frameworks of this thesis, interweaving my artworks on motherhood with discussions of challenges to gender orthodoxy and stereotyping in paintings and photographs. The three key elements, self-representation, family photographs and time sequencing, are developed from my practical work during motherhood as a response to the chief research question: How do I, as a woman artist, use visual strategies to sustain my creative identity under the burden of Taiwanese motherhood? Recognising the strong power of institution imposed on mothers (see Chapter 2), these strategies adopt Adrienne Rich's idea of the experience of motherhood as a creative resource which can be employed, through artistic practice, to free a mother from the stereotype of motherhood.⁷⁷ Their effects are summed up by examining the three aspects of an artist's creative identity during motherhood which are defined in section 1.4.3.

Chapter 4 is the main body of this thesis. It outlines the development of and gives details of six sets of artworks and an installation which were aimed at sustaining my creative identity during motherhood. Based on the significant changes which took place during this artistic practice, three periods are discussed, reflecting my personal experience of motherhood over the five years from 2000 to 2005.

In the first period, highlighting the importance of the transition between loss and existence during pregnancy and of 'asserting the self', Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy, and Artwork 2: I Sign; I Exist, explore the idea of maintaining the self in order to perpetuate artistic creativity and to rebuff the expectation of selflessness in motherhood.

The second period, 'measuring motherhood', focuses on the growth of mother and child over a period of time by discussing the idea of a maternal viewpoint and a

⁷⁷ Adrienne Rich. Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (London: Virago, 1997 (1977)) 11.

visual form of accumulation in Artwork 3: Relative Measure and Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height.

Finally, the third period, 'reformulating motherhood', provides a new concept of active memory-making through Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator, Artwork 6: Mother's Box and the installation entitled Picturing Motherhood.

These artistic practices not only recreate motherhood, but also develop new expressions revealing the close relationship between creativity and motherhood which break the stereotypical representation of motherhood in art.

Chapter 5 reviews the academic contributions to this thesis which establish the theme 'creative identity', provide a new critique of the art of motherhood in Taiwan, and offer three practical visual strategies for sustaining the creative identity of a mother artist. It also explains the positive effects of this research on my personal development. Finally, some suggestions are given for further research.

Chapter 2 An Investigation into the Art of Motherhood in Taiwan since the 1920s

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Why have there been so few professional mother artists in Taiwan?

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2.4 Conclusion

2.1 Introduction

The main aim in this chapter is to review, by investigating the art of motherhood in Taiwan, the difficulty of sustaining the creative identity of Taiwanese women artists during motherhood and the contributions of mother artists who have broken the boundaries between motherhood and fine art. The reason for choosing the period from the 1920s to the present day is that Taiwanese women began to have an opportunity to enter the formal education system to learn fine art at the beginning of this period. The first professional woman artist, Chin Chen (陳進, 1907-1998), began to practice and by the first year of the Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition (1927), was officially acknowledged.

Firstly, by answering the question, “Why have there been so few professional mother artists in Taiwan?” the general attitude of Taiwanese women artists towards motherhood within the context of Taiwanese culture is revealed. The survey concentrates on the first aspect of creative identity, artistic profession, and looks at how Taiwanese women artists struggle with the limitations of conventional motherhood.

Next, I explore the reasons why there are so few artworks of motherhood in Taiwan and analyse their stereotypical code. In so doing, the expectations of ‘mother’ in the world of art are clearly revealed. Finally, using as examples ten selected Taiwanese mother artists who have fought against the plight of motherhood, I expose the present situation with regard to sustaining the second and the third aspects of artistic creativity during motherhood in Taiwan.¹

¹ The second and third aspects of an artist’s creative identity during motherhood are “the interaction between motherhood and creating art” and “creativity in the artwork of motherhood”.

2.2 Why have there been so few professional mother artists in Taiwan?

This question came to me when having to make the distressing choice between my artistic profession and motherhood at the beginning of my pregnancy in 2000. The weighty pressure to choose one option was difficult for me, but also for most other Taiwanese women artists who wish their motherhood and creative art to coexist. It is an expansion of the provocative question, “Why have there been no great women artists?”, a point forcefully made in public by the feminist art historian, Linda Nochlin, in 1971.² Nochlin suggested:

“The fault lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycle, or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education – education understood to include everything that happens to us from the moment we enter this world of meaningful symbols, signs, and signals.”³

After the 1990s, more active women artists began to appear in Taiwan. However, most of them used the strategies of turning down marriage, late marriage, divorce, refusing to give birth or late childbirth in order to sustain their creative identity, because they recognised that marriage and motherhood might be detrimental to their artistic professions. This section, following the course set by Nochlin’s question, discusses ‘institutions’ and ‘education’, in order to examine the expectations of being a mother and an artist, and to explore and re-visit the difficult situation that coexists between motherhood and the artistic profession in Taiwan.

² This question was asked by Linda Nochlin in the essay “Why Are There No Great Woman Artists?” in the book of *Women in Sexist Society* edited by Vivian Gornick and Barbara Moran (New York: Basic Books, 1971), pp. 480-510. It was then revised as “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” in the magazine of *Art News*, January 1971, and *Art and Sexual Politics* edited by Thomas B. Hess and Elizabeth C. Baker (New York and London: Collier Books, 1971).

³ Linda Nochlin. “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” *Women, Creativity and the Arts: Critical and Autobiographical Perspectives*. Eds. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona & Lucinda Ebersole (New York: Continuum, 2001) 46.

2.2.1 The dilemma of being a mother artist opposing stereotypical expectations

In the first historical book of Taiwanese women artists, History of (Contemporary) Taiwan Women Artists 1945-2002, published in 2002, the author Victoria Lu (a recognised feminist scholar) notes that few Taiwanese women artists from the 1920s are formally recognised; their role as artists was easily suspended or totally withdrawn because they had to strictly obey the traditional duties of a wife, helping their husbands and teaching the children.⁴ After the 1980s, the situation changed. The reasons are not only the greater expectation of society to pursue the new in an environment of greater economic development, but also the recognition by art institutions of the importance of feminist thought and feminist art. This way of thinking was introduced and promoted by active women artists and intellectuals who had studied in Europe and America, as well as by women's groups and a women's bookstore.⁵ A number of women were encouraged by this improvement and developed the confidence to strive for their right to exhibit and to sustain their artistic profession. However, most of them, in order to reject the traditional concept of marriage and motherhood, decided to maintain or return to their unmarried status. Recently, more women have abandoned this stance and will marry, because it is more feasible for a wife to sustain her artistic profession in marriage owing to near equal opportunities for education and work, as well as universally available contraception. However, being a mother is still the main and obvious obstruction to sustaining a creative identity for Taiwanese women artists.

The following explores two aspects of the dilemma of being a mother artist in Taiwan: Firstly, the general issue of the working mother; and secondly, the lack of harmony that exists between stereotypical characteristics of being a mother and of being an artist.

⁴ Victoria Lu (陸蓉之). History of (Contemporary) Taiwan Women Artists 1945-2002 (Taipei: Artist, 2002) 58.

⁵ The most important women's group, Women Awakening, published their magazine in 1982. The first women's bookstore and publisher, Famebooks, was established in 1994. Juin Shieh (謝鴻均). "Why Do We Want to Discuss the Art of Women?" The Century of the National Education. Vol.184 (Feb 2000): 28-29. (These representative active women artists and intellectuals are Ming-Huei Yan (嚴明惠), Mali Wu (吳瑪俐) and Victoria Lu.

A. The plight of motherhood for the working mother

Although there is near-equality of status and work opportunities for men and women in contemporary Taiwan, working mothers are still asked to perform traditional duties and be in charge of domestic issues. These include producing a son to carry on the husband's bloodline, bearing children, taking care of parents-in-law and doing housework.

From the historical viewpoint, nothing is more important than giving birth to a male and rearing offspring for the husband's family. This is an ingrained expectation for women in Taiwan's patriarchal society. Being the mother of at least a son is a priority, and exhorted in many proverbs and canons, including the quotations "the second sin of women is not giving birth to a son" from Hsun Nu Bao Jen (訓女寶箴) and "The worst thing for filial piety is cutting off the bloodline of the husband's family" from Nu Er Jin (女兒經).⁶ Today, it seems more acceptable for a mother not to have a son. Nevertheless, when a woman encounters first-hand what it is to be married, she understands the status of having a son and the hardships to be borne if she fails to do so.⁷ Therefore, some women still concoct secret recipes or experiment with artificial reproduction techniques; even coercing or forcing other women to cooperate with each other.⁸

With the help of contraception and the economic transformation in Taiwanese society, most women have decided to have only one or two children in recent years. However, the phenomenon of fewer children in the family has created an obvious problem with regard to producing at least one male heir, and many seek the help of artificial intervention of gender selection methods such as the Artificial Reproduction Technique (ART). In the last thirty years, some married women, in order to make sure of having a son, have willingly subjected their bodies to the

⁶ The quotation from the ancient book of Hsun Nu Bao Jen (訓女寶箴, The Valuable Exhortation to Women): "The Seven Sins for women: The first sin is being an unfilial daughter or daughter-in-law; the second is not giving birth to a son; the third is promiscuity; the fourth is being unyielding and jealous; the fifth is talkativeness; the sixth is having a noxious disease; the seventh is being a thief." The quotation from Nu Er Jin (女兒經, The Canon for Daughters): "The worst thing for filial piety is cutting off the bloodline of the husband's family. If your husband has no son, you should persuade him to have a second wife. Having a male progeny to carry on the family name is the most important thing for you." (最不孝，斬先脈。夫無嗣，勸娶妾。繼宗嗣，最為切。)

⁷ See in the appendix 1 about my three-daughter family.

⁸ Qian-Lin Su (蘇芊玲). Don't be a Fine Model Mother Again (Taipei: Fembooks, 1996) 22.

pain of female foetus abortion, artificial insemination, Chorionic Villi Sampling (CVS), or sperm separation.⁹ Therefore, although there is no “one-child policy” in Taiwan that limits couples to have only one child by using fines, forced sterilisation, pressures to abort a second or subsequent pregnancies, the ratio of infant genders is similar to Mainland China in that there are many more male than female infants.¹⁰ Fig 2.2.1 shows that the imbalance is becoming more serious each year. In 2007, of 221 countries monitored by the Central Intelligence Agency of the USA, Taiwan was reported as having the fourth highest unbalanced gender ratio for newborn children.¹¹

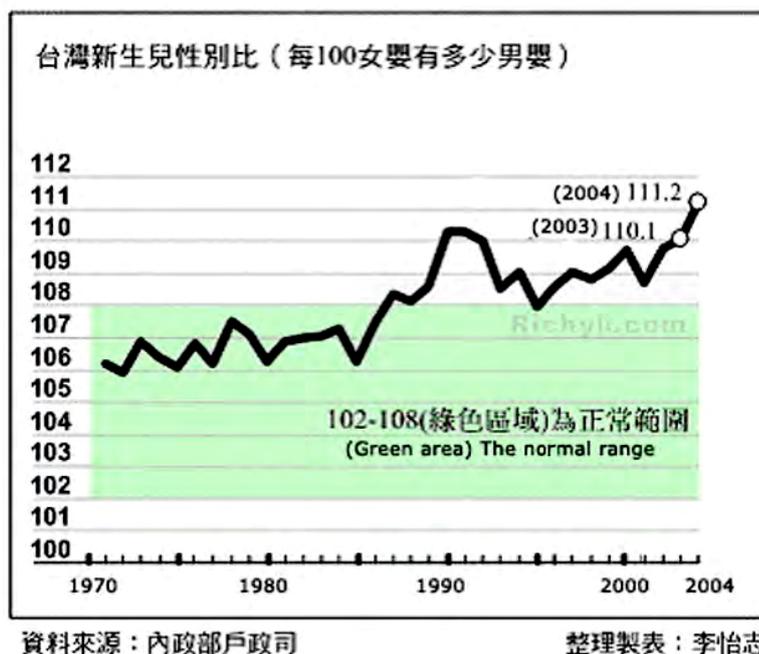


Fig 2.2.1 The Disparate Ratio of Newborn Children's Gender in Taiwan from 1970 to 2004.

The number on the left of the chart is the gender ratio (the number of males for every 100 females). All information is from the Taiwanese Ministry of the Interior. This chart was produced by Yi-Zhi Lee(李怡志) in 26 Jun 2006 and revised by the author.

⁹ Sh-Zhu Ho. "The Mission of Giving a Male Birth for Taiwanese Women." The Report of Applied Ethics Research. Vol. 17 (Jan 2001) 9-11. Yi-Zhi Lee (李怡志). "The Fake One-Child Policy? The Unprecedented Gender Imbalance of the Newborn Baby." Richy Li. 26 Jun 2004. <http://www.waley.com/richyli/report/2004_06_26_OneChild.htm>

¹⁰ The one-child policy was established in 1979 to limit communist China's population growth. Because the traditional patriarchal culture, this rule has caused a disdain for female infants by abortion, neglect, abandonment, and even infanticide. Such draconian family planning has resulted in the disparate ratio of 118 males for every 100 females. To reduce this difference, China has recently allowed some parents of females to try for a male as their second child. From: "About China's One-Child Rule." Geography. 27 Sep 1999. 24 Oct 2004 <<http://geography.about.com/library/weekly/aa092799.htm>>

¹¹ "Taiwan Has the Fourth Highest Gender Ratio of Newborn Children in the World." The China News. 4 Feb 2007. <<http://news.sina.com.tw/china/chinanews/cn/2007-02-04/101812334061.shtml>>

The tendency for having few children and using artificial reproduction techniques to ensure male offspring has changed the gender structure and may undermine social order in the future; scholars have expressed extreme concern about this possibility.¹² However, I believe the imbalance is only the tip of the iceberg. It indicates that the stubborn, male-favouring attitude rooted in Taiwanese patriarchy, and the tendency by mothers to compromise, will perpetuate the plight of being a mother. In other words, when a mother accepts the expectations forced on her and makes an effort to ensure that at least a son is born by artificial help, she has fallen into the conventional trap of motherhood and domesticity. She allows years worth of highly publicised efforts to attain gender equality to shrink dramatically. Adding in the close biological connection with the child during pregnancy and breast-feeding, it becomes harder for the mother and her female offspring to escape the stereotypical constraint of “Men in charge outside and Women inside” during motherhood.¹³

In what follows, surveys of the working mothers of Taiwan are discussed. All of them show that working mothers have not substantially reduced their housework, although they join in with and share responsibilities which traditionally fell to men outside the home. Typically, they experience strong pressure from both sides. According to the Survey of Time Arrangement in 1990, married working women spent a shorter time than married working men (around 3 hours and 42 minutes per week) in the public sphere; however, they spent longer than men (around 18 hours and 47 minutes) in the domestic sphere, undertaking childcare and housework.¹⁴ From an analysis in 1998 of writings and experts’ suggestions to parents educating their children in Taiwan, Yung-Chia Chuang(莊永佳) discovered that the ‘good mother’ was required to provide a more moral and appropriately disciplined approach to raising children than previously. She concluded that a

¹² Prof. Heng-Da Bi (畢恆達, Genders and Cities, National Taiwan University), Prof. Chen-Ti Hsue (薛承泰, Sociology, National Taiwan University) and the expert De-Hsiong Sun (孫得雄, the Structure of Population) were all concerned about and warned of the unbalanced ratio of the genders in Taiwan for many years. From: Yi-Shan Chen (陳一珊) and Ting-Yu Huang (黃庭郁). “The Series Imbalanced Gender Ratio of Taiwanese Newborn Babies: After 20 Years, 200,000 Men Will Find No Wife.” China Times. 4 Feb 2007 <<http://tw.news.yahoo.com/article/url/d/a/070203/4/a551.html>>

¹³ The proverb, “Men in charge outside and Women inside” (男主外,女主內) was used universally in the Chinese culture and is still heard frequently in Taiwan today.

¹⁴ Yu-Hsiu Liu (劉毓秀). Women, Nation, the Work of Taking Care (Taipei: Femworks, 1997) 258.

mother was expected to devote herself to childcare and to be child-centred; otherwise, she would be thought of as a selfish bad mother. This did not, however, apply to the father.¹⁵ In short, high expectations have greatly increased the burden on working mothers. A 2004 investigative report by the 1111 Job Bank analysed the plight of these women. It showed that in order to look after both career and family, 21% of working mothers had no time to do what they themselves wanted to do and on average could rest for only around one hour per day. Even half of them had suspended their career because of marriage or giving birth and 32% of them were suffering from pressure on two sides, and had considered giving up their jobs to take care of their families.¹⁶

Housework and bearing children are always considered private things for a mother; moreover, they are treated as a kind of unpaid natural vocation, full of selfless love. Adopting the traditional concept of private, unpaid and invisible motherhood, the government ignores easily the needs of the mother and only provides limited support to deal with their complicated, time consuming, isolated and onerous work style.¹⁷ If a father and other family members do not share the responsibility for housework, working mothers have the following choices: to endure the overload on both sides; to give up their jobs and achievements in the public sphere; or to be 'holiday mothers' or 'run-away mothers' easily censured by others and suffering from guilt.¹⁸

No matter what the situation, if a mother wants to keep her job, she is overworked to a greater extent than the father. Her efforts on both sides of her life do not,

¹⁵ Yung-Chia Chuang (莊永佳). Study on the Motherhood Practice of Taiwan Female. (Taiwan: MA Thesis, Graduate Institute of Sociology of Education, Nan Hua Management College, 1998) 35-37.

¹⁶ "Taiwanese Working Mothers Only Have One Hour for Themselves Everyday and 2/3 Consider Giving up Their Jobs." Da Ji Yuan. 7 May 2004. <<http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/4/5/8/n532967.htm>>

¹⁷ Jin-Ming Hsu (許靖敏). The Exploration of the Experience and Institution of Motherhood with Developmentally Delayed Children: Analysis from the Viewpoint of Feminism. (Taipei: MA Thesis, Graduate Institute of Sociology, National Taiwan University, 2002) 42.

¹⁸ In 2004, Prof. Chen-Ti Hsue (薛承泰) indicated that more and more mothers were deciding not to take care of their children and to be 'run-away mothers' or 'holiday mothers' instead. The term run-away mothers refers to those who send their children away and seldom see them. Holiday mothers are those working women who send their children to child minders, grand parents or relations and keep their jobs, living with the children only in the holidays. If these children are carelessly looked after, their behavior and development may suffer. If they subsequently cause problems, their mothers, and not their fathers, are the first to be censured. Information taken from: Hui-Juan Huang and Yang Shao-Qiang (黃惠娟·楊少強). "Rapid Increase in Run-Away Parents!" Business Weekly. Vol.862 (31 May 2004 – 6 Jun 2004) 131-134.

however, enhance her reputation; on the contrary, she is discriminated against in her job, and when her children have problems, she suffers self-doubt, and is open to blame by others. For these reasons, many Taiwanese mothers prefer to give up their employment, or to find a job with low pay and no potential for high achievement which simultaneously allows them to meet their family commitments.¹⁹

It is similar in the field of Taiwanese art. In the book, History of (Contemporary) Taiwan Women Artists, Victoria Lu often mentions that because they are mothers many outstanding Taiwanese women give up their creative lives or view their art only as an amusement for their leisure time. The famous Taiwanese art critic, Hsiang-Chun Chen (陳香君), indicated that art collectors and galleries frequently rejected women artists' work because they presupposed their art and future would be limited by marriage and motherhood.²⁰

B. Artistic characteristics which are inappropriate to conventional motherhood

Due to economic policies and priorities in Taiwan, except for a few artists who make a livelihood selling their artworks by catering for consumer tastes, most have unstable incomes or lose money through their art. Da-Quang Wu referred to this in 1998: "Male artists are still 'cold-shouldered' and belong to an 'underprivileged' group in the current political environment in Taiwan, let alone women artists."²¹ The famous professional woman artist, Mali Wu, pointed out in an interview that with the absence of a support system for artists, many, in order to pursue their art without reference to market forces, took part-time jobs, such as teaching, translating books, and writing articles... to support their art. She said, "Because I am single and don't have too many material desires, this unsteady work and income allow me to live. However, for a mother who needs to take care of her children, it would be a big problem."²² From the above, it is easy to understand that a mother artist finds it much harder than any other working mother to obtain

¹⁹ Hsu 41.

²⁰ Elsa Hsiang-Chun Chen (陳香君). "Reviewing the Concept of Feminism in Contemporary Taiwanese Art." Artist. No.303. (Aug 2000) 444.

²¹ Da-Quang Wu (吳大光). "Women, EQ, Art." Modern Art. Vol. 77 (Apr 1998) 22.

²² Mali Wu. Personal interview. 15 Dec. 2002.

help from family members in dealing with housework and childcare. She cannot use the argument that time spent on her art produces a worthwhile contribution to the family income. Once overworked, the importance of being an artist is easily put aside by family and self because of the comparison between the low economic remuneration from creating art and the natural vocation of motherhood. Overall, their actual lives and the art market do not allow mother artists to sustain their creative work. The concept of being a virtuous woman and the mission of taking care of the family, make them treat their professional careers as an amusement for their leisure time and after the children have grown.

The inharmonious characteristics of artist and mother impact on the potential for women to sustain their professions during motherhood. For example, the characteristics of emphasising the self and the rebel in an artist conflict with the combined expectations of being a selfless and silent mother. Rollo May deemed artists intensive conscious human beings with insurgent capacity, concerned only with hearing and expressing the vision through their own being. In his view, regardless of existing limitations, they express their encounter with the world through new forms and symbols.²³ As Linda Nochlin said, “she (a woman artist) must in any case have a good strong streak of rebellion in her to make her way in the world of art at all.”²⁴ The characteristics of a mother, however, are expected to be the opposite. Jacques Derrida said, “The mother is the faceless, unfigurable figure of a *figurante*. She creates a place for all the figures by losing herself in the background.”²⁵

Compared with Western countries, the Taiwanese culture pays more attention to groups than the individual. Therefore, the role of mother, defined as selfless, is assigned a higher mission; to take care of the group (family) without concern for herself. Society uses the strong power of the group to urge a mother to give up her individual specificity and limits her identity in the family so that she devotes herself silently through selfless love. However, over a long period of suppression and self-sacrifice, feelings of ‘inferiority’ and ‘resentment’ emerge which are seen as

²³ May 22, 26, 32, 54.

²⁴ Nochlin 62.

²⁵ The quotation is from Jacques Derrida. “All Ears: Nietzsche’s Otobiography” and translated by Jo Anna Isaak in her book. Jo Anna Isaak, Feminism & Contemporary Art (London: Routledge, 1996)139.

the unchangeable fate of the Taiwanese mother. The Taiwanese patriarchal hierarchy of 'man master; women subordination' and the expectation that a mother will be selfless make her assume an attitude of inferiority, whilst she makes other members of the family feel esteemed and cherished. The resentment is a kind of nervous emotion which comes from a Taiwanese mother's treatment of her closest family members. Mother is considered as always willing to sacrifice for others; however, deep down she harbours a strong feeling that she does too much for the others and feels that they could reciprocate. When the object of her attention fails to conform to her expectations, the feeling of resentment combines with low self-achievement. Inferiority and resentment are seen as the fate of a woman in Taiwan.²⁶ Perhaps Taiwanese women artists understand that the power of the individual cannot resist the restrictions of motherhood imposed by society. Therefore, they decide to restrain their rebellion or express it in the rejection of marriage or giving birth.

In her book, Without Child, Laurie Lisle agreed with Adrienne Rich and indicated that if a mother wanted to continue her artistic profession, the priority was to have "uninterrupted hours and mental freedom".²⁷ She also thought that "disciplined self-expression demands the intense focusing of energy"; but that a mother's imagination and energy were undervalued by the tedious and annoying work of looking after children and all day housework.²⁸ Therefore, if a mother is not lucky enough to live in a rich family or to have a family member to do part of the housework for her, time for herself is rare and fragmented. Put simply, no time and no self are the most direct and tangible experiences of mother artists.

Taken all together, if Taiwanese women artists want to sustain their creative identity during motherhood, they need to face the general delight of motherhood with a strong expectation of producing a male heir for their husband's family, and of being overloaded with work in both domestic and public spheres; moreover, they need to overcome the difficulty of discrimination against them emanating from the

²⁶ De-Hui Yu (余德慧). The Canon of Chinese Parents: Cohesion and Intimacy (Taipei: Teacher Chang, 1987) 9-10.

²⁷ Laurie Lisle. Without Child: Challenging the Stigma of Childlessness (New York: Routledge, 1999) 203.

²⁸ Lisle 201-202.

art market, and the fact of having a low and unstable income. Without immediate economic benefit for family and society, the support from family and government becomes almost impossible. Therefore, the only thing a Taiwanese mother artist seems able to do to sustain her creative identity is to depend on her own strong will and rebellious attitude to combat the weight of motherhood.

2.2.2 Accepting or evading motherhood: the fate of women artists in Taiwan

In the following I analyse the way in which Taiwanese women artists have dealt with the conflict between motherhood and the arts since 1927 when the first professional woman artist, Chin Chen, was recognised formally in the Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition. The research in this section is based on representative Taiwanese women painters and photographers, selected from the first historical book of Taiwan women artists written by Victoria Lu in 2002.

A. Accepting motherhood

One group of Taiwanese women artists have accepted the traditional role of motherhood as a priority, but have also chosen to deal with the relationship between motherhood and their creativity. Most women artists fall into this group. Due to changes in society, and the new consciousness of women in Taiwan in recent times, they have tended to gradually shed the limitations of traditional motherhood and sought to find different ways to sustain their creative identity.

Since the Japanese colonial period, some Taiwanese women have received a formal education. A few of these students had the chance to learn about art and to express their knowledge in paintings which were of comparable value to men's. However, given the discipline surrounding women's virtue from the Chinese culture and domination by the Japanese government playing the roles of patriarch, coloniser and capitalist, once a woman artist married, she was expected by the family to be a virtuous mother and an obedient helper to her husband. This meant her identity as a professional woman artist was withdrawn. Through historical artistic records of the Japanese colonial period in Taiwan, with the exception of Chin Chen (1907-1998), all the other 23 women artists, Heng-Chou Chou (周紅綢,

1914-1979), Ha-Jen Huang (黃華仁, not known), A-Ching Lin (林阿琴, 1915-), Tzao-Tzao Huang (黃早早, 1915-1999) and others, could not escape the fate of becoming mothers, and gave up their professional identities.²⁹

Although this situation has improved under government by the Republic of China (1945 to the present), most women artists still tend to give up their profession, or to become 'leisure artists', to compromise with motherhood, and to improve the sense of beauty within the family. However, there are a few women who strive to continue their identity. The following describes three methods used by women artists who have tried to sustain their profession though still considering their motherhood an important job in their lives.

The first approach is to teach in the formal education system; teaching art and joining the artistic community with a stable income to protect their identity as artists. Ching-Ying Ho (何清吟, 1934- , oil painting), Chen-Hsiang Kwo (郭禎祥, 1935- , gouache painting), Fu-Mei Lin (林芙美, 1941- , photograph), Chiu-Chin Chen (陳秋瑾, 1956- , water colour), and Hsiu-Cheng Liang (梁秀中, 1959- , ink painting) are all representative artists. The volume of their artworks is limited due to the pressures of motherhood, housework, teaching and research. This kind of woman artist needs to wait almost until retirement, or when their children become adults, for an opportunity to concentrate on creating art. Ching-Ying Ho is a typical example. In our interview, she mentioned that when she retired in 1998, she announced to her family, "I have completed the most important part of motherhood and teaching, in order to caring for you and others with all my heart; now it is my turn to enjoy life and to paint at last".³⁰ Women who regain their creative identity as artists after completing the most important part of the mission of motherhood are called 'late-bloomer' artists.³¹

The second type of women artists have artists for husbands who, being similarly involved, understand the artistic working style and the value of creating art. In this

²⁹ In the Japanese colonial period, there were 24 women artists recorded in history and 21 in total selected for the official exhibitions: the Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition and the Palace Fine Arts Exhibition. Lu 48.

³⁰ Ching-Ying Ho. Personal interview. 14 Dec. 2005.

³¹ 'Late-blossom' artist is '晚秀型'藝術家 in Chinese. Lu 80.

way, they are better supported by their husbands who, besides encouraging them to continue with their work, are often willing to employ a servant to share the housework if the husband feels finances allow. However, they still feel that a wife needs to devote herself to motherhood. Shu-Tz Shan (單淑子, 1922- , oil painting, husband Chen-Yen Wu 吳承硯), Fang Luo (羅芳, 1937- , ink painting, husband, I-Cheng Sheng 沈以正), Dan-bei Lyang (梁丹貝, 1943- , ink painting, husband Kun-Pei Lee 李琨培), Chin-Hsiu Lee (李錦繡, 1953-2003, acrylic, husband Bu-Ching Huang 黃步青), and Chun-Ru Lin (林純如, 1946- , mixed media, husband Fu-Keng Chien 簡福錚) are representative of this group. In the case of Chin-Hsiu Lee, when she and her artist boyfriend planned to marry, her teacher Do-Ching Hi (席德進) opposed this strongly in order to avoid her talent being lost in the role of wife and mother. Due to this opposition, she had the opportunity to create art during her marriage because of her husband's promise to the teacher. However, she still needed to spend much of her time and energy in housework, childcare, making money through a part-time teaching job and helping her husband to set up his installations. For a long time, she did not have a dedicated space for producing artworks at home, because it was full of the materials for her husband's installation.³² Although she was treated more fairly and at last had her own studio, her health had suffered because of long-term fatigue and depression, and three years later she died. Another female artist Fang Luo was envied by others because she was supported by her husband, but still commented in her catalogue that it was hard to escape from the traditional duties of a mother.³³

The third type of woman artist decides for herself how to arrange her motherhood and to break the limitations on her creativity. Representative artists are Chin Chen (陳進, 1907-1998, gouache painting), Pei-Chun Lin (林珮淳, 1959- , mixed media), and Juin Shieh (謝鴻均, 1961- , oil painting). Disregarding the opposition of her husband, Pei-Chun Lin went to Australia to complete a practice based Doctor of Art qualification, looking after her son by herself. Even now, she struggles with the overlapping pressures of teaching, creating art and motherhood through careful

³² Su-Feng Wang (王素峰). "To Move the Bamboo Stool: Looking at the Art of Chin-Hsiu Lee." Moving the Bamboo Stool: The Memorial Exhibition of Chin-Hsiu Lee (Taipei: Taipei Fine Art Museum, 2005).

³³ Fang Luo (羅芳). "Group Exhibition of Women Artists in 2001: the Brilliant Expression of Women (I am not only the best of the group of women)." Prolong and Change: The Catalogue of Fang Luo's Ink Paintings (Taipei: Foundation of the Pacific Ocean, 2001) 142.

time-management and without sufficient rest. Defying the gossip of others, both Chin Chen and Juin Shieh used the strategy of late marriage and late childbirth to begin the experience of motherhood after their status as artists and income were assured.³⁴ Contrary to tradition, Shieh wished to give birth to a daughter, in an attempt to realise her plan of 'living again'. She said, "I want to live again by myself to be a girl through the growth of my daughter!"³⁵ Fortunately, she had a daughter and used her maternal viewpoint to reconstruct the experience of women through art and research. From these three cases, we perceive the improvement in Taiwan; however, compared to their husbands, who play a passive domestic role, these super mother artists still need to take charge of the housework and childcare by making special arrangements or by paying for outside help.

B. Evading motherhood

The term evading motherhood refers to the ways in which a group of independent women artists have prevented motherhood from destroying their creative identity. Whether active or passive, all of them chose not to marry, to divorce, not to give birth or to give up the right of guardianship in order to consciously escape the limitations of motherhood. After the 1980s, increasing numbers of feminists and women artists who had completed their higher education abroad came back to Taiwan and focused their energies on political and art activities.³⁶ Their intention to evade marriage or motherhood to sustain their independence influenced many young women. Recently, this approach has grown in popularity amongst young women artists. They include Mei-Yi Lee (李美儀, 1946- , photography), Hsin-Wan Chen (陳幸婉, 1951-2004, mixed media), Bao-Has Hsiue (薛保瑕, 1956- , oil painting), Ming-Huei Yan (嚴明惠, 1956- , oil painting), Mei-Lin Chang (張美陵, 1956- , photography), Mali Wu (吳瑪俐, 1957- , mixed media), and Shu-Chi Hou (侯淑姿, 1962- , photography).

³⁴ At the age of 40, Chin Chen married Chen-Chiung Hsiao, who supported her in making art and giving birth to a son when she was 44. Juin Shieh got married at 35 and gave birth to a daughter at 40. She named her daughter Hao (好), which means 'good'. 好 can take part as the two letters '女' and '子' and mean 'woman' in Chinese. She wanted to point out that 'women are good', directly through the name. From: Juin Shieh. Personal interview. 7 Dec. 2005.

³⁵ Juin Shieh. Personal interview. 7 Dec. 2005.

³⁶ Victoria Lu. "The Rise of Feminist Awareness and the Feminist Art Movement in Taiwan." *N.paradoxa: International Feminist Art Journal*. 16 July 2002. <<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/n.paradoxa/lu.htm>>

In the world of Taiwanese art, there is still another way to evade motherhood. Some women artists avoid mentioning of motherhood or do not admit to being mothers in public. In Taiwan, the combination of art and mother seems to imply a kind of leisure art done in 'mother's classroom'. Therefore, if an artist emphasises her role as a mother her development in art will be obstructed because she will be considered a dependent, unprofessional, conservative or banal person. The attitude of evading motherhood is similar to Hsin-Wan Chen's denial of the female gender which she felt limited her art. She said, "The best way is to forget I am a woman, then continue to create art."³⁷ However, purposely taking away the specific experience of women seems an indirect acceptance of the conventional concepts which belittle women. In fact, before 2000, with the exception of Chin Chen, no particular Taiwanese women artists spent a long time looking at this issue of motherhood in their art over a long period. This suggests that the attitude of evading motherhood exists more or less in Taiwanese women artists' minds.

2.2.3 Summary

This section has analysed the reasons why Taiwanese mother artists find it hard to sustain the first aspect of creative identity, artistic profession, during motherhood. It has done this by looking at the elements of 'institutions and education' explored by Linda Nochlin in her essay 'Why have there been no great women artists?' Moreover, it has investigated the ways in which those mother artists have dealt with the conflict between motherhood and creating art.

The essential difficulty in sustaining the artistic profession was explored first; that Taiwanese artists need to compromise on the traditional expectations of a mother to give birth to a male to carry on their husband's bloodline. In addition, the ideology of the male favourite combined with the close biological relationship of mother and child during pregnancy and breast-feeding make the conventional concept of 'Men in charge outside and Women inside' increasingly ingrained. Therefore, those working

³⁷ Bao-Has Hsiue (薛保瑕). "A Study of the Creativity and Importance of Contemporary Female Abstract Paintings in Taiwan." The Theses of to Review and to Forecast the Education of Art in Taiwan in these Fifteen Years. Ed. Chen-Hua Wang (王正華) (Taipei: The Department of Fine Art, The National Taiwan Normal University, 1999) 250.

women, including mother artists, who also try to be good mothers are easily trapped and suffer the plight of overwork on both sides. On the other hand, the characteristics of unstable income and the absence of support systems for mothers and artists in Taiwanese society make it harder for artists to sustain their identity during motherhood.

Furthermore, faced with the difficulty of being a mother and an artist at the same time, this section concludes that there are two main fates for Taiwanese women artists dealing with the conflict: accepting or evading motherhood. With respect to the acceptance of motherhood, Taiwanese women artists have gradually moved away from giving up their profession absolutely, towards an independent struggle with the conflict of motherhood and creating art. However, due to absentee fathers, most of these mother artists still struggle alone against the pressures of overwork. On the other hand, increasing numbers of young women artists maintain their profession and evade motherhood through divorce, rejecting marriage or refusing to give birth. Some mother artists even purposely hide their identity as mothers to prevent their artistic profession from being belittled.

In summary, the conventional expectations of motherhood still deprive mother artists of time, space, energy, freedom of the mind and reputation. Both in public and in the domestic sphere, these expectations are a threat to female Taiwanese artists who wish to sustain their artistic profession, which is the first aspect of creative identity, during motherhood.

2.3.3 Freeing motherhood from stereotype

It is clear that there are only a few serious artworks on motherhood which do not conform to the stereotype imposed by Taiwanese patriarchy. Following Chin Chen's (陳進; officially recognised in 1927 as the first woman artist) three gouache paintings which were selected in the first year of the Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition, and the Western feminist art introduced in the 1990s, more and more Taiwanese female artists appeared and began to express their particular experience, as women against the oppression of patriarchal culture. However, the collective concern of women for the subject of motherhood was not strong enough to cause a noticeable breakthrough like the issue of female sexuality in art. In the following, I focus on the artworks of motherhood by mother artists to examine how these few, but very important, artists used their personal experience to finally realise creativity in the art of motherhood within the Taiwanese culture.

A. Revealing the torment in sacrificial motherhood

Compared with male artists, who utilised bliss or silence to interpret the selfless mother devoted to her natural vocation, mother artists tended to abandon such as sweet appearance and to implicitly reveal the torment in sacrificial motherhood. Some mother artists have even sublimated their suffering to the power of a deity in their paintings.

Chin Chen (陳進, 1907-1998), the first woman artist to be addressed with respect, was referred to as “the most dazzling extraordinary flower” in Taiwanese art; she was also the first mother artist in Taiwan to deal with the theme of motherhood in painting over a number of years.⁶⁵ Her work, Baby (1950; Fig 2.3.27), was painted when Chin Chen was 43, in the year her first child was born. Although it is not a self-portrait, she incorporated her mental state into the painting, creating a different depiction of the conventional Taiwanese representation of motherhood to that which was common at the time. The title, and the eye directions of mother and daughter's gaze highlight the fact that the protagonist is the baby; they make it manifestly obvious that this is an artist and mother who is paying complete

⁶⁵ Victoria Lu. History of (Contemporary) Taiwan Women Artists 1945-2002 (Taipei: Artist, 2002) 49.

attention to the infant. However, the mother's depressed expression and stiff, unnatural shoulders, indicate that her feelings about caring for the newborn baby and being a competent mother – which are traditionally defined as selfless – are alien to her. This expression of the sensitivity and unhappiness of the experience of motherhood had never before been so clearly depicted in Taiwanese fine art. Important research about Chin Chen has not previously recognised this important but subtle breakthrough.⁶⁶ Most researchers like Lin-Ching Tien (田麗卿) simply praise her for using “the personal viewpoint of being a wife and mother” to record the virtue of a mother's love.⁶⁷



Fig 2.3.27 Chin Chen, Baby (嬰兒), 1950. Gouache on silk, 55×48 cm.

Perhaps it was hard to pursue their talents when an artist became a mother, or maybe the mother artist did not want her independent and creative appearance to be damaged by revealing her dual identity. Whatever the reason, for some period of time no Taiwanese mother artists followed pioneering Chin Chen in recording their experience of motherhood. Then, in 2000, because of some particular MA fine art courses began to offer elementary or high schools art teachers to pursue

⁶⁶ No official research anthologies, books or magazines have mentioned this innovation. For example: National Museum of History (國立歷史博物館). An Anthology on Chen Chin's Art (Taipei: NMH, 1997). You-Chun Tau (陶幼春). “Insisting on Controlling the Life of Art by Herself.” The Century Women: The First in Taiwan (Taipei: Wheat Field, 1999). Guang-Nan Huang (黃光男). “Leisure and Quite Thought: the Art of Chin Chen.” Artist. Vol 330 (Aug 2003) 142-149.

⁶⁷ Lin-Ching Tien (田麗卿). Maiden · Epoch · Chin Chen (Taipei: Leo, 1998 (1994)) 82, 85, 98.

further education, and the Textile Playing Workshop led by artist Mali Wu provided local women in Taipei to discover and share their self and womanhood/motherhood through art;⁶⁸ a group of students who were also mothers with or without the professional ability to create art, who began to develop the same concepts as Chin Chen, and to expose their personal experience of motherhood through their art practice with encouragement from feminist ideas. Most of these women unfolded the torment of the self during motherhood in the context of the overlapping work of motherhood, housework, teaching, taking courses, creating art and writing theses.

Jin-Yue Huang (黃靖月) uses the lily to symbolise contemporary Taiwanese women possessed of personality, morality, wisdom and independence. In the painting, A Mother's Worth is Measured by that of Her Son (2002; Fig 2.3.28), she illustrated the difficult position of a married woman who has no children or gives birth to only one female, and is consequently seen as defective or is denied all her contribution in the family.⁶⁹ She, as a one-daughter mother, painted the prostrate lilies suffused in a golden light which is central to the picture, surrounded by traditional toys, a rice sieve and a steelyard. These symbolise boys, chastity and management of the household, implying her own fragile condition as a contemporary woman still limited by the conventional expectations of motherhood. Smash (2003; Fig 2.3.29) depicts the laceration of her heart when slandered as a bad mother, unable to provide her husband's family with either a healthy or male child because her daughter was born with an unusual disease for which she would need injections for the rest of her life. A black cross fissure damaging a picture of elegant lilies expresses that her hope of being a confident and independent mother was devastating. These paintings and the question she asked in her thesis, "Should the original spirit of women be destroyed completely by these unfair attitudes?" have outlined the true experience of some Taiwanese mothers who still struggle with the plight of motherhood today.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Mali Wu (吳瑪俐). "The Revelation of Textile Playing." Art & Collection: Contemporary Art. Vol. 146 (Feb 2004): 146-149.

⁶⁹ Jin-Yue Huang (黃靖月). A Study on Painting Creation of Female Imagery (Taipei: MA Thesis, Graduate Institute of Visual Arts, Taipei Municipal Teacher's College, 2003) 60-61.

⁷⁰ Huang 75.



(母以子貴), 2002. Ink and acrylic on paper, 70x69 cm.

Fig 2.3.29 (Right) Jin-Yue Huang (黃靖月), Smash (粉碎), 2003. Ink on paper, 70x69 cm.



Fig 2.3.30 (Left) Yuan-Shu Hsiang (向元淑), Looking at the Unreal Paradise (張望虛幻的美麗天堂), 2003. Oil on canvas, 112x145 cm.

Fig 2.3.31 (Right) Yuan-Shu Hsiang (向元淑), This Is Our Song (這是一首我們的歌), 2003. Oil on canvas, 291x162 cm.

In Looking at the Unreal Paradise (2003; Fig 2.3.30), Yuan-Shu Hsiang's (向元淑) depiction of a nude pregnant woman sitting powerlessly, facing a distant place, in low spirits, and not showing her face, is an interpretation of a mother-to-be who wants to take hold of her life like a bird flying freely in the sky.⁷¹ However, when a woman is told she is pregnant, freedom becomes an unreal paradise, too far off to reach given the expectations and responsibilities of motherhood. Hsiang expressed the inferior situation of Taiwanese mothers who were still suppressed by the myth of natural vocation and found it hard to escape the conventional fate of women in This Is Our Song (2003; Fig 2.3.31).⁷² In this painting, no matter that the

⁷¹ Yuan-Shu Hsiang (向元淑). Disillusion and Qualitative Change: a Study of Imagination and Images of the Pregnant Body (Taipei: MA Thesis, Fine Art, National Taiwan Normal University, 2003) 61.

⁷² Hsiang 67.

mother having suffered in childbirth, is breast feeding and bows her head in thought. She is covered, or hidden, by a red duvet decorated with a traditional Chinese pattern. The fact that she is hiding is symbolic of the unrecognised pressure and solitary worry that Taiwanese mothers suffer, despite the praises of mother-love and sacrifice.



Fig 2.3.32 (Left) Chin Chen (陳進). Stories of Buddha's Life No. 3 (釋迦行誼圖之三), 1965-67. Gouache on silk, 87×97 cm.

Fig 2.3.33 (Right) Su-Hui Chang (張淑慧). A Contemporary Woman of a Thousand Arms and Eyes (千手千眼現代女性), 2004. Gouache on silk, 73x53 cm.

In addition to expressing the torment of sacrificed motherhood, Chin Chen and Su-Hui Chang (張淑慧) sublimated these sacrifices to the power of the goddess through the concept of practising Buddhism. In the painting Stories of Buddha's Life No. 3 (1965-67; Fig 2.3.32), Chin Chen illustrates her personal experience of having a son through the medium of Buddhist style paintings, which normally express a high level of Indian deification.⁷³ She relinquished the conventional rules of Buddhist painting and instead painted the interior of a home with Taiwanese furniture, portraying the close relationship between mother and child and thereby the theme of closeness in human life. Her written record of this work stresses how this series of paintings allowed her to regain her health and helped her to accept the shift in life from splendid to ordinary.⁷⁴ In my opinion, she unconsciously denied the fact that sacrifice was the natural vocation of a mother

⁷³ Chin-Hsien Lee (李欽賢). "Modern Buddhistical Painting: Stories of Buddha's Life of Chen Chin, also Relating the Silk Road and Hirayamalkuo." An Anthology on Chen Chin's Art (Taipei: National Museum of History, 1997) 92-93. Ying-Ying Chien (簡瑛瑛). The Ritual of Daughters: The Expression of Women's Spirituality and Literature/Art (Taipei: Fembooks, 2000) 6.

⁷⁴ Lin-Ching Tien 112.

and interpreted it as an acquired practice through the representation of Buddha's mother. Therefore, a mother's love is cultivated through the visualisation of the God story, delivered to the people from the private sphere of the home and extending to the public sphere of the temple.

In A Contemporary Woman of a Thousand Arms and Eyes (2004; Fig 2.3.33), Su-Hui Chang used the philanthropic figure of Bodhisattva of a Thousand Arms and Eyes – who liberates torment in the world of mortals by giving a thousand alms – to depict contemporary Taiwanese mothers, using the same method in their family. Chang pointed out that contemporary women have more freedom than previously; however, if they decide to give birth and continue to work, they will be more overworked than previous generations because, as dictated by the traditional concepts of motherhood and family, they need to bear responsibility for housework and childcare with little help from their husbands.⁷⁵ With the pressures of childcare, housework, teaching, advanced studies and managing finances, Su-Hui Chang, in an artistic representation, compares the discomfort of working alone in overloaded motherhood to the concept of the goddess giving alms. These two artists unfasten the myth of natural vocation by treating sacrifice as similar to the acquired cultivation of practicing Buddhists. They also, through these examples, reveal, in public, the issue of motherhood.

B. Celebrating pregnancy and birth through the inner experience of motherhood

With the encouragement of a series of feminists art movements, a number of women artists began to explore the particular experiences of women's minds and bodies: Ming-Huei Yan (嚴明惠) was the first feminist artist to promote the concept of women awakening in art in the early 1990s; in 1997 a series of books about Western and native feminist art was translated and published, and the well-known international artist, Judy Chicago, came to Taiwan, joining the private feminist art exhibition and a symposium entitled Lord of the Rim: In Herself / For Herself (盆邊主人；自在自為); then, in 1998, the first official exhibition of women's art in Taiwan,

⁷⁵ Shu-Hui Chang (張淑慧). Women's Love and Care: Chang, Shu-Hui's Women Art Creation (Taipei: MA Thesis, Fine Art, National Taiwan Normal University, 2004) 73.

Mind and Spirit (意象與美學), was opened at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.⁷⁶ Most used metaphor to deal with the conflict between the representation of women's bodies and conservative Taiwanese culture. From an examination of the artworks on the subject of pregnancy and birth, they tended to combine the mother's body with the originality of all life forms by using plants to symbolise human birth. Representing the mother's body in metaphor, rather than literally, these women artists ingeniously kept away from the conventional approach of treating the female body as an object of sexual desire, and separated their works from those of male artists who used animals to express their view that the love of the mother was ordinary and universal. In the belief that the mother's body is the origin of life, they expressed their affirmation and praise of the creation of life and art by women; through their artworks and through the power and energy of the womb within their bodies.



Fig 2.3.34 Chwen-Ru Lin (林純如), Pregnancy (孕育), 1993. Mixed media, 193x200x10 cm.

From her personal experience of motherhood and observation of nature, Chwen-Ru Lin (林純如, 1964-) identified the characteristic of growth and expansion from the roots of plants to express the maternal power of multiplying endlessly in Pregnancy (1993; Fig 2.3.34). In the statement accompanying this

⁷⁶ Victoria Lu (陸蓉之). History of (Contemporary) Taiwan Women Artists 1945-2002 (Taipei: Artist, 2002) 192. Ying-Ying Chien (簡瑛瑛). The Ritual of Daughters: The Expression of Women's Spirituality and Literature/Art (Taipei: Fembooks, 2000) 86. Chian-Hui Kao (高千惠). "Her-story: The Contemporary Research Space for Women's Art." Artist. Vol. 328 (Sept. 2002) 463-464.

artwork, she mentions, "The period of the strongest vitality should not be seen easily because it is hidden during the time of pregnancy."⁷⁷ Using strong roots spreading over dark, wet soil, she symbolises a mother, suffering in an inferior position, but still persisting in the promotion of vitality through her capability to create life. Both Mali Wu (吳瑪俐) and feminist Qian-Lin Su (蘇芊玲) felt that this work departed from the usual patriarchal discourse which praises pregnancy and birth as blissful and sweet without concern for any negative impact on a mother or her body.⁷⁸ In other words, fear and wounding from the inner experience of pregnancy and birth were revealed, opening up another possible means of expression.

Compared with the artworks Delivery (1995; Fig 2.3.35) and Pregnancy and Birth (1997; Fig 2.3.36) made by Shu-Lan Mo (莫淑蘭) and Wen-Chen Nao (饒文貞), had no experience of pregnancy and childbirth, praise the vitality of reproduction in soft, light colours, Other MA fine art student mothers developed works with gloomy, oppressive atmospheres, similar to those of Chwen-Ru Lin's work, which unfold complicated feelings of combined fear, worry, gentleness and pride emanating from their inner experience of pregnancy and birth.⁷⁹ Shu-Hwa Lai (賴淑華), for example, uses a black background and concentric circles in The Praise of Mother (2001; Fig 2.3.37) to signify maternal adoration and the strong power produced by the pain and struggle of childbirth.⁸⁰ In Pregnancy 3 (2005; Fig 2.3.38) and Pregnancy 5 (2005; Fig 3.3.39), Yu-Mei Chang (張玉玫) depicted the chaos at the beginning of life through the experience of the intense connection between life and death in her womb.⁸¹ She expressed the maternal power to continuously create life from her pregnant body to regain solemn respect for a life which was disappearing gradually in Taiwanese society but still existed in the human heart.

⁷⁷ Chwen-Ru Lin (林純如). "Exhibition Introduction: The Imagination of Line and Shape in the Art of Chwen-Ru Lin." Center for Arts, Yuan Ze University. 26 Apr. 2002.

<http://www.yzu.edu.tw/yzu/art/chinese/center/exposition/2002-0426/new_page15-4.htm >

⁷⁸ Mali Wu (吳瑪俐). "The Mystery of a Hole: Exploring Women's Art from Images, Materials and Bodies." Ed. Pei-Chun Lin. Women/Art/Discourse (Taipei: Fembooks, 1998) 209.

⁷⁹ Shu-Lan Mo (莫淑蘭) uses her imagination to consider the handing down of maternal power through pregnancy and birth in Delivery. In Pregnancy and Birth, Wen-Chen Nao (饒文貞) expressed the dreamland of maternal adoration with soft vitality through maternal bodily imagination.

⁸⁰ Shu-Hwa Lai (賴淑華). The Origin of Life: The Research of Pictorial Signs and Creation (Taipei: MA Thesis, Graduate Institute of Visual Arts, Taipei Municipal Teacher's College, 2002) 48-52.

⁸¹ Yu-Mei Chang (張玉玫). Silver Cord Anticipation: Hides Densely Strange Space in Life (Taiwan: MA Thesis, Fine Art and Craft Education, National Hsinchu University of Education, 2006) 36, 55-56.



Fig 2.3.35 (Left) Shu-Lan Mo (莫淑蘭), Delivery (相互傳遞), 1995. Oil on canvas.

Fig 2.3.36 (Right) Wen-Chen Nao (饒文貞), Pregnancy and Birth (孕生圖), 1997. Gouache on silk, 47.5x47.5 cm x (16).



Fig 2.3.37 (Left) Shu-Hwa Lai (賴淑華), The Praise of Mother (母親頌), 2001. Coloured ink on paper, 69x137 cm.

Fig 2.3.38 (Middle) Yu-Mei Chang (張玉玫), Pregnancy 3 (孕育3), 2005. Oil on canvas, 120x162 cm.

Fig 2.3.39 (Right) Yu-Mei Chang (張玉玫), Pregnancy 5 (孕育5), 2005. Oil on canvas, 120x162 cm.

C. Announcing the subjective personality of a mother through representation of the nude maternal body

Whether in the East or West, the female body is conventionally either treated as a passive object or as an object of desire. Lynda Nead highlights the universal phenomena that, “The female body is constantly subjected to the judgmental gaze. Whether it be the gaze of the medic who defines the body as healthy or diseased, or the connoisseur who defined it as beautiful or ugly, the female body is caught in a perpetual cycle of judgement and categorization.”⁸²

⁸² Lynda Nead. The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality (London: Routledge, 1992) 81.

Compared with a group of Western feminist artists who, in the 1970s, fought to regain the right to interpret the female body outside patriarchal culture under the banner “Our bodies; our own”, the first Taiwanese feminist artist, Ming-Huei Yan (嚴明惠), who appeared and struggled alone in 1990, was lonely.⁸³ Owing to the Chinese cultural environment which emphasises female chastity and avoids representing the body, the Taiwanese female body is much more restricted in terms of both ‘judgmental gaze’ and conventional definition. For most Taiwanese women artists of that period, attempts to regain the right to interpret the body and to directly represent the female form were not easily accepted; but, they began to open a window for female artists to develop a new sexual identity in their art. The revolution, in terms of mother and motherhood, is still in its early stages and very few women artists have directly represented the mother’s body in recent times.



Fig 2.3.40 Ming-Huei Yan (嚴明惠), Father Mother Son (父 母 子), 1991. Oil painting.

Ming-Huei Yan (嚴明惠, 1956-) was one of the first Taiwanese feminist artists, and also the first to use representation of the nude female body to reveal in public her personal sexual desires, serious marriage problems and motherhood.⁸⁴ In the 1990s, her candid and intrepid methods of expression and movement shook and

⁸³ Richard C. Kagan. “Texture of Reality and Dreams.” Women in the New Taiwan: Gender Roles and Gender Consciousness in a Changing Society. Eds. Catherine Farris, Anru Lee and Murray A. Rubinstein (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004) 314.

⁸⁴ Lu 182.

awakened female consciousness in Taiwanese art. Her painting Father Mother Son (1991; Fig 2.3.40) broke the stereotype of “authoritative father and lovely mother” through the use of violent, painful visualisations. This painting represented her pain and resentment, reflecting her as a divorced woman trying hard to fight her ex-husband fairly for the guardianship of her son within the Taiwanese patriarchal system.⁸⁵ On the left of the diptych, she used the myth of Oedipus, the scene of a son killing his father, to express the relationship between father and son, cruelly fighting one another in a patriarchal society. On the right of the diptych, she represented the pain of being legally put asunder, although the relationship between mother and child are genuine and original, which she demonstrates by presenting them in a naked embrace. She has explained that the naked representation was a record of helping her son to take a bath.⁸⁶ However, through the strong, open, squatting and naked legs of the mother, she implies her persistent belief that ownership of the child belongs to the mother who used her body to create him.

The approach of critiquing and undermining the dignity of fatherhood through violent representation and personal experience was not acceptable to Taiwanese patriarchal society. Therefore, Ming-Huei Yan’s breakthrough was not given the positive response it deserved; on the contrary, she was labelled “a frustrated divorced feminist shrew”.⁸⁷ After suffering many malicious critiques and slander, a miserable marriage and a fight with her ex-husband for the guardianship of her son, she decided in 1995 to withdraw from the realm of fine art, to remain unmarried and to devote herself to Buddhism and motherhood.⁸⁸ In recent years, scholars of feminist art in Taiwan have begun to recognise her contribution and her influence on a younger generation. Even today, there are no Taiwanese women artists like Yan who are prepared to state directly that the rights of the mother are deprived by patriarchal society and to speak out about the harsh, critical representation of the body or the issue of motherhood.

⁸⁵ Mali Wu. Personal interview. 15 Dec. 2002.

⁸⁶ Juin Shieh. Personal interview. 7 Dec 2005.

⁸⁷ “A frustrated divorced feminist shrew” (叫囂女性主義的失意婦人). Yi-Zen Hou (侯宜人). “Has the Hidden Sound been Heard? The Talk of Art and Life with Ming-Huei Yan.” The Art of Ming-Huei Yan Ed. Ming-Hui Yan (Taipei: Taipei Ho-K International Art, 1995) 4.

⁸⁸ Elsa Hsiang-Chun Chen (陳香君). “Ming-Huei Yan: The Birth/Sound of Bodhisattva and a Taiwanese Feminist Artist.” Art & Collection: Contemporary Art. Vol.125 (Feb 2003) 50.



Fig 2.3.41 Ching-Ying Ho (何清吟), The Natural Vocation (天職), 1997. Mixed media, 120×120 cm.



Fig 2.3.42 Ching-Ying Ho (何清吟), Original Love (原愛), 1997. Mixed media, 116.5×91 cm. Taipei Fine Arts Museum collection.

Ching-Ying Ho (何清吟, 1934-) is representative of the “late-bloomer” artists who teach art until their children have grown.⁸⁹ Fully expecting to be a virtuous woman with the obedient, silent and self-sacrificial characteristics inherited from both the earlier Japanese colonial period and Taiwanese culture, Ching-Ying Ho willingly stopped creating art in order to be a good wife, a kind mother and a conscientious teacher. When her children had grown, she retired from the position of college professor and, in her old age, allowed herself to regain her identity as a painter in her old age. She said, “I have completed the most important part of motherhood and teaching, caring for others; now it is my turn to enjoy my life for myself, to paint at last.”⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Lu 80-84.

⁹⁰ Ching-Ying Ho. Personal interview. 14 Dec. 2005.

While creating a series of paintings about motherhood, which included The Natural Vocation (1997; Fig 2.3.41) and Original Love (1997; Fig 2.3.42), she determinedly gave up the soft, sweet style she used to have, and began instead to express herself through the flowery, moist, hot, primitive atmosphere of native Taiwan. She underlined her bodily experience of original love, from the inside to the outside of the maternal body, by combining original and aboriginal elements from art: the sculpture of Venus of Willendorf, the totem of Taiwanese indigenous people and the agonised mother's posture from Käthe Kollwitz's painting Woman with Dead Child (Fig 1.4.3). Although the statement of her artworks obeys the patriarchal ideology that motherhood is women's unshakable duty, she presented unconsciously a strong maternal identification with the creative power that comes from the forceful and primitive maternal body as well as from the creature being formed inside the belly. Moreover, the sharp, coarse texture created by scraping and rubbing in the maternal bodies in these paintings revealed the pain and sacrifice of the mother. Extracting these elements of original love and sometimes pain, she displayed the traditional love of a mother and recorded a Mother-Earth-like experience. These motherhood visualisations are inspired from a traditional experience of motherhood and break stereotypes in their own specific way.

Juin Shieh (謝鴻均, 1961-), as another pioneering Taiwanese woman artist, declared her maternal intentions and concentrated seriously for a number of years on producing a number of paintings about motherhood; also sustaining an artistic profession, as an active painter and an art professor, during motherhood.⁹¹ Juin Shieh began her paintings about motherhood in 2002 when she became pregnant at the age of 40. Having assured herself that giving birth would not interfere with her painting, she planned to become pregnant with the support of her "new-good-man" husband who respected her artistic identity. In addition, with a stable income and with the help of her mother, parents-in-law and a servant, she had enough time to do two jobs and to look after her newborn baby well. Paintings she produced between 2002 and 2006 were inspired by her personal experience of pregnancy and motherhood as well as the theory of "chora" and "female

⁹¹ Mali Wu. Personal interview. 15 Dec. 2002. Juin Shieh. Personal interview. 7 Dec 2005.

genealogy'. For Juin Shieh, chora is a womb-like space, where she and her daughter met unexpectedly through their bodily experience. She agreed with Julia Kristeva's views on chora; that it is full of ambiguity, chaos, mystery and excitement – also a kind of threat for the symbolic system of the masculine world based on reason, stability, continuity and logic.⁹² Her series of paintings, including the examples Chora 15 (2002; Fig 2.3.43) and Chora 39 (2003; Fig 2.3.44), use a semi-realistic style that alludes to parts of the body with obvious muscles, showing several strong lines floating in an indefinite space.



Fig 2.3.43 (Left) Juin Shieh (謝鴻均), Chora 15 (陰性空間 15), 2002. Mixed media, 78×108 cm.
Fig 2.3.44 (Right) Juin Shieh (謝鴻均), Chora 39 (陰性空間 39), 2003. Oil on canvas, 173×175 cm.

In Chora 15, two strong legs squat symmetrically and two hands touch the feet in a dark and bloody atmosphere. Without any of the stereotypical soft colour and texture depicting pregnancy, this maternal space represents birth through the vagina from the inside to the outside of the body. However, she placed a sharp yellow tape-measure in the middle of the painting to split the space and to symbolise the fact that she is aware and frightened of the patriarchal power which is ambitious to control and damage this organic and disorganised space. Chora 39 is a self-portrait of Juin Shieh produced in the year her daughter was one year old. She depicted the crisis of chora while facing oppression from the patriarchal system. The coffin-like square containing muscle-like lines in the upper-left corner

⁹² Juin Shieh (謝鴻均). "Floating in the 'Chora': A Remark on Pregnancy." Journal of National Hsin Chu Teachers College. Vol.18 (Jun. 2004) 431-436.

signifies that she was still struggling with the construction of the self, established when she was a little girl and aware of the lack of love from her parents because of their duty and expectation to produce a son.⁹³ In the bottom-right, an organic figure shape within a square implies that the fluid and chaotic maternal space maintained through her daughter began to disappear as the child grew.

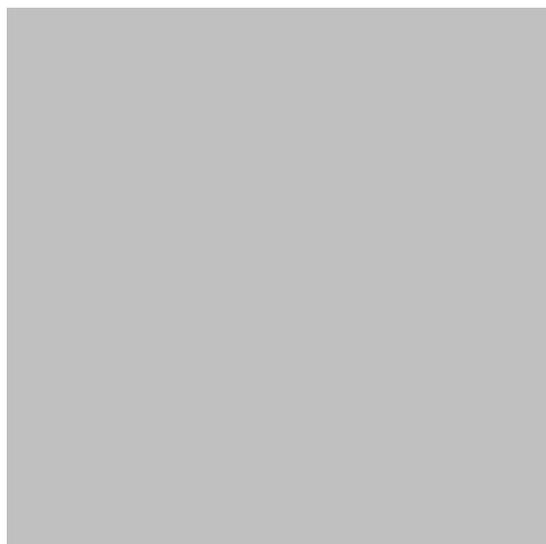


Fig 2.3.45 Juin Shieh (謝鴻均), The Nightmare of Oedipus No. 3 (伊底帕斯的夢魘), 2004. Oil on canvas, 173×175 cm.

Juin Shieh started to read children's books to her daughter when she was two years old. However, she found that most stories were fixed in an immobile patriarchal framework, such that 'a man is strong; a woman is delicate' or 'a man is master; a woman is subordinate', gradually damaging the free and flexible maternal space between herself and her child.⁹⁴ She therefore tried to create visual stories in her painting from a maternal viewpoint, to build up a system of 'female genealogy'.⁹⁵ In The Nightmare of Oedipus No. 3 (2004; Fig 2.3.45), she used organic body-like figures floating in a maternal space on the left-hand side to undermine and replace the stable, cold and architectural-like patriarchal system on the right.

⁹³ Juin Shieh. Personal interview. 7 Dec 2005.

⁹⁴ Juin Shieh. Personal interview. 7 Dec 2005.

⁹⁵ Juin Shieh (謝鴻均). "At the Beginning of Antiquity, We Met Unexpectedly: Visiting the Female Genealogy in Greek Mythology with My Daughter." Arts Center of National Chiao Tung University. 19 Oct. 2005. <http://gallery.nctu.edu.tw/0507_shieh/page/02.pdf>

From her initial motivation, “I want to live again by myself to be a girl through the growth of my daughter”, to the representation of maternal space and the creation of visual stories, Juin Shieh discovered motherhood in an innovative way.⁹⁶ Her candid effort to interweave motherhood and art has proved to be a wonderful example for Taiwanese women artists, empowering them to sustain the self and creativity during motherhood.

To summarise, three creative ways of breaking the stereotypical representation of motherhood by ten Taiwanese mother artists has been examined with regard to the third aspect of creative identity; creativity in the artwork of motherhood. Over half a century, these mother artists have created diverse representations of motherhood in their art by; revealing implicitly the torment in the sacrificial experience of motherhood, celebrating pregnancy and birth through the inner maternal body by metaphorical expression, and reflecting the subjective personality of a mother through direct representation of the nude maternal body. From implicit to explicit, from conservative to progressive, from occasional to systematic, they have more and more efficiently interrogated the conventional representation of motherhood and enlarged on many possibilities for interpreting this theme through their personal experience. They actively present a new perspective for mothers by interpreting themselves, instead of being interpreted passively or being written off, as in previous times. Because they have bravely expressed their personal experience of motherhood through their artwork with a new concept and form, they have undermined the stereotype and established a new cultural image for the mother in Taiwan; moreover, they have proved the possibility of sustaining the creative identity of the artist through the coexistence of motherhood, self and the artistic profession.

2.3.4 Summary

Owing to the lack of research into art and motherhood the main contribution of this section is to suggest an initial classification for Taiwanese artworks of motherhood, from stereotype to creativity. It also affirms and proves the contribution of the few Taiwanese mother artists who have sustained their creative identities by examining

⁹⁶ Juin Shieh. Personal interview. 7 Dec 2005.

their artistic profession, the interaction between motherhood and creating art, and artworks of motherhood.

The beginning of this section, commented on the paucity of professional Taiwanese mother artists, but the reasons for this have been explored focussing on the Taiwanese cultural expectation of a virtuous mother within a special political background. Three main points are made; it is not appropriate simply to gaze at a mother in admiration; 'mother' refers to more than the individual; and the valueless position of the mother in art. These points provide a theme which demonstrates how society and visual artists have defined the mother as a selfless, chaste, ordinary and silent figure. Both policy forbidding artists to represent mothers and motherhood, and the traditional concept of the mother, have clearly obstructed the development of creativity in Taiwanese art related to the subject.

In the analysis, the stereotypical codes for depicting motherhood in Taiwanese art can be classified in four ways: motherhood as a natural vocation, the selfless and hardworking mother, the blissful mother with her children, and the dignified elder mother. This classification reveals that recent artworks of motherhood have been created in opposition to the third aspect of creative identity: creativity in the artworks of motherhood. A special phenomenon of Taiwanese art has been identified and is worthy of note. Most artists, whether male or female, interpret motherhood from the viewpoint of son or daughter, so their desire of attract the mother's love turns them into supporters of the traditional concept of the virtuous mother and of predominant male superiority. For this reason, mothers are often treated with indifference because of their passivity, silence and selflessness, and without any particular personal characteristics or connection to any form of creativity.

Finally, ten women selected as representative artists were discussed and prove that there are, or were, a small number of mother artists with a strong female consciousness who began to break the impasse of sustaining creative identity during motherhood through their artworks. From their personal experience of motherhood, they have used three strategies – revealing the torment in sacrificial motherhood, celebrating pregnancy and birth through the inner experience of motherhood, and announcing the subjective personality of a mother through representing the nude

maternal body – to redefine the predicament of the depiction of stereotypical motherhood in art.

From the conventional interpretation of a traditional role, to diverse interpretations based on their own viewpoints as mothers, these mother artists have not only asserted their existence, but have challenged the limitations on the mother in Taiwanese culture. In both their lives and their artworks, they have struggled bravely, breaking the definition of motherhood through their own creativity.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the artworks of motherhood in Taiwan. The reasons why there are so few examples, the stereotypical style, and the ways in which Taiwanese mother artists have broken the limitations of motherhood through their creativity, have been explored against the particular cultural background in Taiwan.

Below is a list of the overall conclusions of this investigation which provide a clear analysis of how Taiwanese artists, from 1927 to the present, have sustained their creative identity during motherhood.

1. The number of Taiwanese women artists maintaining the first aspect of creative identity – their artistic profession – has been continually increasing. However, even now, they need to compromise and make sacrifices at various levels because of the conventional expectations of motherhood. Historically, Taiwanese women artists have dealt with the conflict between motherhood and creating art by giving up or suspending their artistic professions, but in more recent times, increasing numbers have continued to produce art through the strategies of late marriage and late childbirth, by returning to the artistic profession at a later stage in their lives, or by enduring the heavy workload implicit in the dual roles of

motherhood and a public working life. Pioneers Chin Chen, the later blossoming Ching-Ying Ho, the controversial Ming-Huei Yan, and Juin Shieh with her strong maternal awareness, have all challenged the limitations of motherhood. In comparison with their husbands, however, the conventional expectations of motherhood still deprive women of the time, space, will and energy to produce art.

2. In recent years, Taiwanese women artists have begun to develop further aspects of their creative identity during motherhood – the interaction between motherhood and creating art. Although Chin Chen is the earliest example, the representative figure who demonstrates the best positive interaction is Juin Shieh. From her plan to ‘live again as a woman’, through giving birth to a daughter, to the visual project of establishing a female genealogy through telling children’s stories to her daughter, she applied the creative characteristics of an artist to the transformation between motherhood and the creation of art.
3. With regard to creativity in the artwork of motherhood, some mother artists have revised the stereotypical representations in Taiwanese art through their personal experience. Whether their strategy is to reveal the torment in sacrificial motherhood, celebrate pregnancy and birth through the inner experience of motherhood, or to announce the subjective personality of the mother by representing the nude maternal body, all are in an initial state of new identity. Therefore, examining the third aspect of creative identity, the issue of motherhood is still an uncultivated area waiting for development, and it will take artists with creative consciousness to solve this long-term predicament.

In the following chapter, I use the research as important background knowledge for developing the conceptual framework of my visual strategies for sustaining creative identity during motherhood.

2.3 From stereotype to creativity: the art of motherhood in Taiwan

This section explores the creativity in Taiwanese artworks on the subject of motherhood (the third aspect of creative identity) through the work of representative artists. Kathryn Woodward's view that "Representation as a culture establishes individual and collective identity" is relevant, as is Rollo May's, that in any great artworks "we have a reflection of human beings in that period of history".³⁸ This section examines not only the third aspect of creative identity, but also the interaction between motherhood and the creation of artworks (the second aspect of creative identity) by revealing the cultural limitations of the Taiwanese mother.

To emphasise the importance of self-sacrifice in motherhood, which is seen as a natural vocation, Taiwanese society advocates the ideas of filial piety and of being a good mother. However, the real experience of motherhood is easily ignored. In Taiwanese art, without the culture of worshipping the Virgin Mary or the Western popularity of portraits, few artworks exist on the theme of mother or motherhood and those that do were treated with suspicion. In the following, I seek to identify why so few artworks depicted motherhood or mother in the orthodox art of Taiwan; moreover, I analyse the stereotypical codes employed in these works. In so doing, the limitations on creativity coming from the expectations of mother and motherhood in Taiwanese culture are revealed. Finally, I select ten Taiwanese mother artists and their works to examine how, over the past fifty years, they have used their experience of motherhood to sustain their creative identity and have broken the stereotype for so long dominated by male artists in Taiwan.

³⁸ Kathryn Woodward. Identity and Difference (London: SAGE, 2002 (1997)) 14. Rollo May. The Courage to Create (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994(1975)) 52.

2.3.1 The few artworks of motherhood in Taiwan

As Adrienne Rich expressed, “All human life on the planet is born of woman”.³⁹ It could be said that half of the population have the potential to be mothers and all men and women have shared the experience of motherhood from the very beginning of their lives; but why was this important experience concealed in art history, especially in Taiwan? The most powerful answer is provided through the research of feminist art: men have dominated art and the concept of facing the real world, and this has oppressed the diverse possibilities of creating the art of motherhood through the perspective of a mother and the real experience of motherhood.⁴⁰

I have found that the problem of scanty research into the representation of motherhood in Taiwan is reflected in academic investigation. The main source of debate on the artworks of Taiwanese motherhood was a small number of essays that explored Western equivalents, Taiwanese women artists, primitive elderly artists or female folk arts.⁴¹ To date, no researcher has published a formal and thorough examination of the real and oppressed experience of motherhood in the art of Taiwan. The following discusses five elements of the research into the question, “why are there so few artworks on the subject of motherhood in Taiwan?”

A. The dearth of mother artists

As disclosed in the discussion of the previous section, there are still few mother artists in Taiwan and only a small number of them create artworks on the issue of motherhood. Given, then, that there is little opportunity to deal with the theme and that there is a tradition of ignoring mothers and motherhood in visual art, the subject is still unimportant in Taiwanese art.

³⁹ Adrienne Rich. Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (London: Virago, 1997 (1977)) 11.

⁴⁰ Judy Chicago. Through the Flower (Taipei: Yuan-Liou, 1997 (1975)) 160. Hilary Robinson. “The Body of the Mother: Paradoxes and Absences.” Mothers. Ed. Angela Kingston (Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 1991) 7-8.

⁴¹ For example: Pei-Chun Lin. “Women, Art and Society: Exploring the Female Artistic Language Which Destroys the Patriarchal Culture through the ‘Post-Partum Document’ by Mary Kelly.” Women/Art/Discourse (Taipei: Fembooks, 1998) 211-223. Chi-Lin Hsu (許綺玲). “Photographic Practice, Family, Women: Thinking the Role and Establishing the Appearance.” The Journey of Female Mind/Spirit. Ed. Ying-Ying Chien (Taipei: Fembooks, 2003) 401-426. Jui-Ch’i Liu (劉瑞琪). “Maternal Fetishism in Sally Mann’s Photographs of Her Children.” Taida Journal of Art History. Vol.17 (Sept. 2004) 191-226.

B. A mother should not be gazed upon

From the viewpoint of Taiwanese society and inherited from Chinese culture, a mother is the property of the patriarchal family. She should be limited to the domestic sphere to ensure that she has performed the duty of giving birth to a male, and to take care of the whole family in a loyal and chaste manner. Therefore, in moral terms, it is not appropriate for her to go out and be seen in public, unless she is of low class.⁴² In the Song dynasty, when royal painters portrayed a queen, she had to use special make up and decoration on her face. Besides increasing her wealth and position, this was intended to conceal part of her face in order to avert the inappropriate gaze that would destroy her virtue as the mother of all China.

In contemporary Taiwan, most people still adhere to concepts of Chinese culture and believe that if a mother pays too much attention to her appearance and becomes an object to be seen, she ruins her virtue as a mother and will not be able to complete the duty of taking care of her children. Therefore, for a mother to sit as a model, to be gazed at by a male artist, and subsequently to be appreciated by an audience, seems almost immoral.

C. Mother as a generic term, without reference to the individual

During the Japanese colonial period, the new wave of Western style painting departed from the mainstream tradition of Chinese literature painting.⁴³ Portrait painting became popular, but it was very hard for artists to portray a mother without expressing her individual personality. To prevent damage to the reputations of mothers as a whole most artists avoided the theme or used symbolism or metaphor to depict these women without reference to their individuality.

⁴² Traditionally, a moral woman would not be seen in public and would not go beyond the inner chambers of her house. Only the lower classes, including servants, three types of nun and six kinds of old women, were exempt from this rule. The three types of nun were (三姑) Buddhist nuns, Taoist nuns and female fortune tellers. The six kinds of old women (六婆) were brokers, match-makers, spirit mediums, women who prayed in exchange for money, herbalists and midwives.

⁴³ Most Chinese literature paintings are painted landscapes, flowers or birds, but not portraits.

Motherhood is a necessary part of the identity of any normal woman in the traditional patriarchal society of Taiwan. Mothers were asked not to have personal desires and to devote themselves to the family silently and without attracting public attention. In the early 20th century, most still had no self-identity; they did not even necessarily have a formal name. After marriage, they were referred to as their husbands' wife, instead of by the name used in their birth family. Moreover, after death, these mothers who had completed the duty of giving birth to carry on their husband's bloodline, were allowed to be recorded in the genealogy only in the form 'Surname Chen' or 'Surname Lin'; that is, using their birth family's surname.⁴⁴ The sacrifice of mothers was seen as an essential element in the establishment of a stable society; however, it did not specifically point to any individual's contribution. Today, society still thinks of them en masse, emphasising the facts that mother-love is important and that they are the greatest people in the world. This, it is hoped, persuades them to be good, selfless mothers, passing on education, music and literature to their offspring.⁴⁵ In the visual arts, especially in portraiture, it is hard for artists to present a mother's appearance without depicting her individual personality. Therefore, she is an unattractive subject for Taiwanese visual artists.

D. The valueless position of the mother in art

Mothers are ordinary people, present in almost every family in Taiwan. Before Western painting was introduced,⁴⁶ the ordinary mother was not regarded as a suitable subject for depiction in Chinese painting, especially literature painting, which is particular about refinement, the poetic, and highly spiritual concepts, and does not draw directly from life or nature.⁴⁷ The subject matter of mother or

⁴⁴ De-Hui Yu. The Canon of Chinese Parents: Cohesion and Intimacy (Taipei: Teacher Chang, 1987) 186-187.

⁴⁵ There are numerous Taiwanese songs and writings in praise of mothers. For example: All educated Taiwanese could recite the poem The Praise of the Loving Mother (慈母頌) and sing the song Mother, You are Really Great (母親您真偉大).

⁴⁶ The concept of Western painting was first introduced to Taiwan by Japanese colonizers. In 1907, the influential fine art teacher Ishikawa Kinichio (石川欽一郎 1871-1945) began to teach watercolour and to introduce Western style painting.

⁴⁷ In the Song Dynasty (960-1125) the concept of literature painting began to influence Chinese painting. Landscape became the mainstream genre. Scholars used such art to represent their understanding of philosophy. The aim of painting is not to represent the appearance of an object, but to express poetic qualities and aspects of the immortal spirit from the inner heart. Hsun Chiang (蔣勳). The Deep Thought of Beauty (Taipei: Leo, 1993 (1986)) 89. Michael Sullivan. The Arts of China (Taipei: South Sky, 1985) 187, 244-246.

motherhood could, therefore, rarely be represented in the canon of Taiwanese art and existed only in practical folk arts such as embroidery, paper-cut, new year prints for prayers for male offspring, and decorative drawings on tea pots, all of which reinforced the importance of mothers educating their sons.

The popularity of photography still did not increase the opportunity for representing mothers in art, but only in family photographs. For most early professional photographers, picturing a mother was merely a service to the family and did not involve any particularly artistic approach. Against the aesthetics of pursuing beauty, compared to pretty and fashionable young women, the ordinary and conventional mother became extremely unattractive as a subject for photographers. From 1970 to 1980, when documentary photography was in vogue, almost all professional photographers departed from the limitations of capturing beauty and began to photograph people in underprivileged groups from the viewpoint of human concern.⁴⁸ Mothers, however, who were always part of an underprivileged group, still attracted little attention, because these photographers explored the dark side of life, 'hunting the extraordinary' as photographic critic, Mei-Lin Chang (張美陵) put it.⁴⁹ In short, the concept of 'hunting the extraordinary' meant that the mother again missed out on the opportunity to be of interest and was rejected as an outsider in art.

E. Politics forbade artists to represent the subject matter of mothers or motherhood

Martial law (1947-1987) and the policy of reviving Chinese culture (after the 1960s) had restricted the possibilities for representation in Taiwan.⁵⁰ During this period, a number of artists were killed unexpectedly or threatened because their artworks pointed out the government's faults, revealed social disaster or attacked the traditional virtue of Chinese culture. Taiwanese photography historian Jia-Bao Wu

⁴⁸ Jia-Bao Wu (吳嘉寶). "A Short History of Taiwan Photography." Three Photographic Perspectives—Hong Kong, Mainland China, Taiwan. Eds. Wong Wo Bik and Sinsee Ho (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 1994) 9.

⁴⁹ Mei-Ling Chang (張美陵). "Inside/Outside, Self/Other." T. photo vol. 7 (Taipei, 1997) 65.

⁵⁰ Between 1966 and 1976, the government in Mainland China carried out the Cultural Revolution and made every effort to destroy conventions in Chinese culture. At the same time, the government in Taiwan employed a strategy of reviving Chinese culture, as a form of confrontation. Taiwan Historia ed. The Education History of Republic of China (Taipei: TH, 1990) 116-167.

(吳嘉寶) mentioned that in the severe control of the mass media by government, even photography in art was only 'allowed' for very limited subjects.⁵¹ Under the pressure of policy, no artists or photographers wanted to break the conventions with regard to the representation of mothers in public or ruining a mother's virtue. Therefore, it was very easy for artists to abandon their desires to explore and express different aspects of mother and motherhood.

In summary, through analysing these five elements of the few Taiwanese artworks of motherhood, we understand that the visual culture, the expectation of motherhood, and policy dominated by men, directly suppress the real and diverse experience of motherhood. Moreover, the fact that there are so few women artists proves that Taiwanese mothers are still in an underprivileged group and motherhood is, for them, indicates the same fate as for those powerless mothers hiding silently in their domestic corners. No wonder increasing numbers of young Taiwanese women, especially artists, choose not to become mothers, and to avoid their almost equal status with men in public being destroyed in the domestic environment by the patriarchal system.

2.3.2 The stereotype of motherhood in Taiwanese art

Taiwanese artworks of motherhood are few and exist on the fringe. Before 2005, except for a catalogue about the paintings depicting his wife and son during early motherhood by male artist Bing-Shyi Shin (施並錫), an exhibition and an essay about 'Chora' (a maternal space) by woman artist Juin Shieh (謝鴻均), and an MA thesis about the art of pregnancy by a female student, Yuan-Shu Hsiang (向元淑), there are only a small number of artworks on motherhood to be found in a handful of catalogues and exhibitions.⁵²

⁵¹ Jia-Bao Wu 26

⁵² Bing-Shyi Shin (施並錫). The Birth and Growth of Life: The Catalogue of the Series of Mother and Son 1984~1988 (Taipei: Grass Root, 1997). Juin Shieh (謝鴻均). "Floating in the 'Chora': A Remark on Pregnancy." Journal of National Hsin Chu Teachers College. Vol.18 (Jun. 2004) 413-436. Yuan-Shu Hsiang (向元淑). Disillusion and Qualitative Change: a Study of Imagination and Images of the Pregnant Body (Taipei: MA Thesis, Fine Art, National Taiwan Normal University, 2003).

The artworks discussed in the following are selected from the data of two main museum collections, the national level fine art exhibitions, artists' catalogues, and relevant research papers in Taiwan, plus suggestions from experts such as Mali Wu (吳瑪俐), Chen-Ming Su (蘇振明), and Juin Shieh. Using the method of image research, the codes for representing motherhood used by Taiwanese artists will be revealed and discussed. The lack of creativity in artworks on motherhood will be examined in relation to specific Taiwanese culture.

A. Motherhood as a natural vocation

This unit reviews those artworks which only express the most important concept of motherhood, the natural vocation of the mother, from the viewpoint of Taiwanese patriarchal anticipation.

To express the need for, and touch of, our human mothers, Taiwanese artists most often depicted mother animals caring for their offspring. These kinds of artworks, using animals instead of human beings, have a strong position in Taiwanese art. These artists consolidated the concept of motherhood as a natural vocation in Chinese culture by simplifying and proving that the mother's love was inborn and natural in all biospheres. With respect to the embrace or to breastfeeding, which happen in the domestic sphere, using the bodies of animals to replace those of human's, the artists avoided undermining the mother's virtue and the aesthetic perceptions of Chinese painting, but managed to emphasise that mother-love, for humans and animals alike, exists and is natural. These were the kind of works most often used in textbooks and propaganda on filial piety.

The Chinese painting, Water Buffaloes (1927; Fig 2.3.1), painted by Yu-Shan Lin (林玉山) was selected in the first year of the Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition during the Japanese colonial period.⁵³ It is the first artwork of motherhood approved by the authorities of art in Taiwan. Most researchers have only concentrated on exploring the award as a historical event and as the identity of a Taiwanese native art style. However, the inner motive of expressing the mother's love through water buffaloes or the relevant research about motherhood are seldom considered. Besides

⁵³ There were only three Taiwanese artists selected for this exhibition.

national identity, I consider that the combination of mother's-love and animals are appropriated and legitimised by this approval of the two patriarchal cultures of Taiwan and Japan.



Fig 2.3.1 Yu-Shan Lin (林玉山), Water Buffaloes (水牛), 1927. Ink on paper.

After fifty years later, Yu-Shan Lin (林玉山) transferred the plain and implicit style in Water Buffaloes to a more emotional expression in the personified monkeys in Affection (1980; Fig 2.3.2). The later artist, Chi-Hsin Lin (林智信), departed from the implicit convention and represented the movement of sucking milk through obvious and direct depiction of goat's teats in his print Mother's Deep Love (1992; Fig 2.3.3). In the artworks, The Light of Affectionate Love (2001; Fig 2.3.4) and The Love of Mother (2003; Fig 2.3.5), both Shih-Chiang Chao (趙世傳) and Tzun-Hsiung Chiang (江村雄) revealed mother birds feeding their babies with unconscious self-assurance and broke the convention of showing a mother's head bowed in a humble but protective gesture to her children. However, these transformations represent only minor changes in the wider improvement of women's status in the last eighty years. Most Taiwanese artists still adhere to conservative traditions, promoting their artworks of the concept of motherhood as a natural vocation, without desire to transcend it through the real experience of human motherhood.



Fig 2.3.2 (Left) Yu-Shan Lin (林玉山), Affection (親情), 1980. Colour ink on paper, 45×69 cm, Private Collection.

Fig 2.3.3 (Right) Chi-Hsin Lin (林智信), Mother's Deep Love (牴犢情深) 1992. Print.



Fig 2.3.4 (Left) Shih-Chiang Chao (趙世傳), The Light of Affectionate Love (慈光) 2001. Gouache painting. Second prize, gouache painting, 56th Province Fine Arts Exhibition.

Fig 2.3.5 (Right) Tzun-Hsiung Chiang (江村雄), The Love of Mother (母愛), 2003. Colour Photograph. Collection: Chinese Literature Department, Hwa-Fan University.

Having finished his studies in the USA, Bing-Shyi Shin (施並錫) returned to Taiwan and completed a series of paintings of his wife in pregnancy, giving birth and in early motherhood over a period of four years in the 1980s. At that time, Life Drawing became a required course in all Fine Art Departments in Taiwan; he possessed a reasonable background and was able to show his initiative in representing her wife's body directly instead of in the conventional way, through animals. In the painting Having (1984; Fig 2.3.6), he interpreted pregnancy as a woman receiving a sweet bestowal. Immersed in this bliss, he and his wife seemed to fall in love and welcomed a dream-like happiness for the future. The painting

has a kind of besotted appearance, expressed through large pupils of his wife's eyes. In another painting, The Memory of My Son's Mother (1984~1986; Fig 2.3.7), he boldly broke Taiwanese conventions and expressed maternal love through the scene of nude human bodies in pregnancy and breastfeeding. This method of abandoning the metaphor of animals and using the mother's body, together with bright colour to depict the natural vocation of motherhood caught the exhibition panels' eyes and won for him the first Shi-De Chin Painting Award (席德進繪畫大獎) in 1987. Professor Je-Hsiung Wang (王哲雄) commented, "Bing-Shyi Shin uses gorgeous colour to praise reproduction and the continuity of human life...a mother looks at her new born baby suckling in her arms. This is the greatest love in the world and it fills the whole painting."⁵⁴



Fig 2.3.6 Bing-Shyi Shin (施並錫), Having (懷有), 1984. Oil painting, 53×45.5 cm.

Fig 2.3.7 Bing-Shyi Shin, The Memory of My Son's Mother (蓼蓼者莪), 1984-1986. Oil painting, 130×97 cm.

However, this more radical expression imprisons a mother tightly in the strait-jacket of natural vocation under a sweet coating. For me, as a woman who has experienced pregnancy, the besotted expression in the mother's eyes in Having, is similar to the viewpoint of a boy watching girls playing a role-model game and totally ignores the complicated feelings of struggle, worry and happiness

⁵⁴ Bing-Shyi Shin (施並錫). The Birth and Growth of Life: The Catalogue of the Series of Mother and Son 1984~1988 (Taipei: Grass Root, 1997) 14.

introduced by the new foetus. By directing the viewer's gaze at the female body in The Memory of My Son's Mother, the painter shows the pregnant nude body by unnaturally lifting the cloth to reveal soft pink nipples. The inexperienced mother was represented as having an instinct to easily feed her baby, and the breast was unnaturally spotless and white. In more recent years, some Taiwanese painters and photographers have followed Bing-Shyi Shin's approach to the interpretation of mother and motherhood. They include Chin-Hung Lin's (林宏信) Expectation (2001; Fig 2.3.8), Cheng-Che Lee's (李政哲) The Treasure in Hands (2001; Fig 2.3.9) and Sheng Lin's (林聲) Pregnancy (2005; Fig 2.3.10). The male interpretation not only glosses over motherhood, but also continues to suppress pregnant women by presenting them as docile objects. Without deep thought, these soft and pure pregnant bodies and the unconditional mother-love depicted by the male artist cause the actual experience of motherhood to remain silent within the painting. In 2003, Chiung-Li, Wang (王瓊麗) pointed out that "Most paintings about pregnancy made by male artists are only concerned with the depiction of the exterior of the pregnant body through the viewpoint of appreciation of, and fascination with their biological change".⁵⁵



Fig 2.3.8 (Left) Chin-Hung Lin (林宏信), Expectation (期望), 2001. Oil painting. Second prize, oil painting, 56th Province Fine Arts Exhibition.

Fig 2.3.9 (Middle) Cheng-Che Lee(李政哲), Treasure in the Hands (掌中寶), 2001. Oil painting. The superior selection, oil painting, 56th Province Fine Arts Exhibition.

Fig 2.3.10 (Right) Sheng Lin (林聲), Pregnancy (懷孕), 2005. Black & white photograph.

⁵⁵ Chiung-Li, Wang (王瓊麗). "Yuan-Shu Hsiang 'Disillusion and Qualitative Change': The Critique of the Exhibition of Imagination and Images of the Pregnant Body." Artist. Vol. 338 (July 2003) 552.

In short, the way in which mothers' bodies were represented did not improve the status of the mother; rather, it bound the mother more tightly to her unprivileged status through the myth of natural vocation and the convention of the male gazing at a female nude.

B. A selfless and hardworking mother

The second stereotype is to represent the selfless countryside mother working hard. This subject allowed artists with strong native loyalty to present motherhood. The catalogues, if they published this kind of work, mainly mentioned that these artists depicted and praised the selfless virtue of mothers through silent devotion and sacrifice to their labour in the domestic arena. In my opinion, however, representing a mother in hardship provides a symbol which resonates in the Taiwanese mind with the original homeland; a homeland which has endured the impact of the dramatic political and economic change brought by various colonial governments. Taiwan and its people are the origin of our lives, are never afraid of hardship, and work persistently and silently to take care of and bless her children forever.⁵⁶

Hsiao-Yeh (小野), a Taiwanese 'local realistic literary' man, considered that there were two main new waves of local realism in art and literature, and that these were in search of self-identity. The first began in the 1920s, during the Japanese colonial period, and the second in the 1970s, under the KMT government which led to the recognition of the Republic of China.⁵⁷ Rui-Lin Hong (洪瑞麟), a painter, was a pioneer to give up the sweet and popular impressionistic approach, and used the local realistic style to expressing his inner pity and concern for his homeland. His most important series of paintings, named Miners, startled the field of art and literature in Taiwan. In this series, The Mother (1936; Fig 2.3.11), is an interpretation of a silent mother breast-feeding her child in a dark room, continuing to bear children during hardship. The mother provides an inner comfort and sense of original identity for those Taiwanese who lost their national identity when given up by China (Ching Dynasty) to suppression under Japanese colonisation. In the

⁵⁶ For Taiwanese, the different colonial governments include Portugal, Holland and Japan.

⁵⁷ Ching-Chi Chang (張清志). "The Symposium of 'Recalling the Time': Tracing the Literature and Art in the 1970s." Art & Collection. 1 Feb 2006.
<<http://www.artouch.com/story.aspx?id=2006020955792812>

1970s, during the second wave of local realism, Chen-Ming Su (蘇振明) produced a series of paintings in a more realistic style, and developed the research field of 'primitive' art in order to differentiate his personal identity from KMT government instruction.⁵⁸ His homeland and elderly mother are two important subjects which allowed him to construct his identity as a Taiwanese person. In the sketch Thread in the Hand of the Loving Mother (1970; Fig 2.3.12), Chen-Ming Su represents his mother sitting on the floor sewing clothes, insisting on taking care of her children even in her old age. It demonstrates his attachment to his mother and the local culture, both of which were aspects previously ignored by mainstream culture.



Fig 2.3.11 Rui-Lin Hong (洪瑞麟), The Mother (慈幃), 1936. Watercolour.



Fig 2.3.12 Chen-Ming Su (蘇振明), Thread in the Hand of the Loving Mother (慈母手中線), 1970. Sketch. Private collection.

⁵⁸ Chen-Ming Su (蘇振明). Personal interview. 9 Dec 2005.

However, these two and the following six artworks, A Mother and Her Daughter in a Busy Season for the Farmer (1963; Fig 2.3.13), The Old Days of Chiu-Fen (c.1965; Fig 3.3.14), Drying Fish (1994; Fig 2.3.15), Three Generations (1996; Fig 2.3.16), Working (c.2000; Fig 2.3.17) and Warm Love (c.2004; Fig 2.3.18), all praise the virtue of mothers who sacrifice themselves to take care of the family and children from the single viewpoint of a beneficent mother's love. These artists use the visual methods of unclear facial expressions, respectfully and silently lowered heads or a view of the mother's back, to represent women who do not belong to the privileged groups of creativity or civilisation, but symbolise labour in the countryside. The related characteristics of silence, being on the outside and altruism, in these representations suggest that the artists have limited and oppressed the concept of 'mother' in the conventional and inferior status, in order to obtain a sense of security and to perpetuate the myth of a mother never giving up her children even in hardship. The concept of sacrifice indicates that these figures do not have any potential for creativity and their only function is to provide a comforting human heart.



Fig 2.3.13 (Left) Chen-Long Shieh (謝震隆), A Mother and Her Daughter in a Busy Season for the Farmer (農忙期的母女), 1963. Black & white photograph. Taipei Fine Arts Museum Collection.

Fig 2.3.14 (Right) Sun-Hsi Chen (鄭桑溪), The Old Days of Chiu-Fen (九份往事), c.1965. Black & white photograph.



Fig 2.3.15 (Left) Hsiao-De Cheng (曾孝德), Shining on Fish (曬魚), 1994. Oil painting.

Fig 2.3.16 (Right) Mei-Hui Chen (陳美惠), Three Generations (祖孫三代), 1996. Oil painting.



Fig 2.3.17 (Left) Hau-Hsuan Luo (羅昊軒), Working (代工), c.2000. Oil painting. Selected in the 55th National Fine Arts Exhibition.

Fig 2.3.18 (Right) Chuan-Cheng Chen (鄭全成), Warm Love (溫情), c.2004. Black & white photograph. Selected in the 59th National Fine Arts Exhibition.

C. A blissful mother with her children

The third stereotype is the representation of blissful motherhood in a rich and Western style family environment. It sublimates the real and complicated experience of motherhood to a simplification of love or beauty. In Woman (1933; Fig 2.3.19), the painter, Hsiue-Fung Chou (周雪峰) caught the moment when a fashionable mother applies her make-up, as her daughter eats, and plays with a monkey in their luxurious home. In a time when most Taiwanese people lived in poverty and hardship, the artist offered an enjoyable visual way for the audience to experience the most comfortable motherhood in Taiwan. Some people, however, defending conventional virtues, began to feel that motherhood faced a crisis. The history researcher Juan-Ying Yen pointed out that in this painting the mother's

Shanghai hairstyle, the daughter's suit and round Western hat, and the expensive chaise longue expressed "the atmosphere of pleasure and degeneration of motherhood in the metropolis".⁵⁹



Fig 2.3.19 (Left) Hsiue-Fung Chou (周雪峰), Woman (婦女圖), 1933. Gouache painting.

Fig 2.3.20 (Right) Mei-Chu Lee (李梅樹), Soft Breeze (和風), 1938. Oil on canvas.

In Soft Breeze (1938; Fig 2.3.20), Mei-Chu Lee (李梅樹) applied the recreational atmosphere in Manet Édouard's The Picnic (Déjeuner sur L'herbe) and Western-style angel-like children to depict the ideal family daily life which was clearly impossible at that time in Taiwan. In the painting, except for the man who apparently has the capacity to think individually, the mothers and children were interpreted as the main objects. It seems symbolic that the scene of mothers and children is an imaginative vision created by a man. The pleasure of dream-like motherhood is expressed most directly in Spring (1953; Fig 2.3.21) created by De-Lai Ho (何德來). It seems to indicate that children, having a mother to take care of them, are living in a Western heaven. Today, there are still paintings such as Ming-De Chiang's (江明德) Afternoon (2003; Fig 2.3.22) that express a very sweet and close interrelationship between mother and child in a Western mode within a well-off home background. I suggest that these artists have found motherhood in Taiwan hard and in some way lacking; therefore, they have adopted a blissful and pleasurable dream, taken from the Western style, in order to enjoy the warmest part of mother-love as experienced in childhood.

⁵⁹ Juan-Ying Yen (顏娟英). "The Images of Taiwanese Fine Art and the Cultural Interpretation: The Redefinition of Women." Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica. 15 Feb 2005. <<http://saturn.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/~yency/theme03/F-theme3.htm>>

These artworks, considered in the crisis of maternal degeneration, represent a level of true feeling for the concept of motherhood. However, the actual crisis is not that the artists damaged the virtue of motherhood, but that they repeated and simplified blissful motherhood on a superficial level without observation. There are still many kinds of pleasure in motherhood which have not been researched and depicted, and it is not appropriate to interpret them all as the children's story ends: "They lived happily ever after".



Fig 2.3.21 (Left) De-Lai Ho (何德來), Spring (春), 1953. Printing. Taipei Fine Arts Museum Collection.

Fig 2.3.22 (Right) Ming-De Chiang (江明德), Afternoon (午后), 2003. Watercolour. Selected in the 58th National Fine Arts Exhibition.

D. The dignified elder mother

"A daughter-in-law who suffers will one day become a mother-in-law". This saying explains the accomplishment of traditional mothers who dutifully bear sons, serve the whole family, and are rewarded with high status within the family in their old age, at which point their daughters-in-law replace them.⁶⁰ The Chinese proverb which parallels this is, 'after suffering comes happiness' in Chinese. A Taiwanese woman's status changes after she marries into a traditional family. At first she is a daughter-in-law and an inferior mother and years of bitterness may follow; then she becomes a mother-in-law herself and attains the sweetness of privileged status through replacement by her son's wife.⁶¹ In the painting The First Grandson (1938; Fig 2.3.23), Shi-Chiao Li (李石樵) illustrated the time when his old mother

⁶⁰ A daughter-in-law who suffers will one day become a mother-in-law. (媳婦熬成婆).

⁶¹ Chun-An Jien (簡春安). "The Difficult Problem in a Thousand Years: the Relationship between Mother-in-law and Daughter-in-law." Cosmic Light. 2 Nov. 2006. <<http://www.cosmiccare.org/spirit/Include/Past/Share-13.asp>>

became a dignified mother-in-law. The painter revealed the traditional relationships between the women of his family at the celebration of his first grandson's birth. To the right of the painting, there is a young mother holding a baby. She displays inferior body language, bowing her head and body to respectfully receive instructions from her mother-in-law. The elderly mother sitting in the centre looks directly at the audience and seems to announce that after a long-time suffering she has finally acquired authority and power, at least in the family.

Comparing The First Grandson, with Mother (1948; Fig 2.3.24), by the same artist but painted ten years later, and My Loving Mother (1994; Fig 2.3.25) by Jen-Fang Wu (吳仁芳), it is easy to see that after half a century the code for representing the elder mother is still part of the model of mother's virtue and filial piety. Both artists have depicted their mothers, looking solemn-faced to demonstrate her dignity, attired in clothing which serves as an indicator of her virtue, and in a seated position to imply that she needs to be taken care of by her offspring. However, this unchangeable representation of the elder mother as a dignified person seems to suppress and ignore other contributions from her diverse experience which have accumulated over a long period of time. This stereotype has the dual function of admonishing offspring to observe filial piety, and of instructing today's young women to endure their suffering in motherhood and pursue the greatest accomplishment for a woman: being a dignified elder mother who will one day be respected by all her children.



Fig 2.3.23 Shi-Chiao Li (李石樵), The First Grandson (初孫), 1938. Oil painting.



Fig 2.3.24 (Left) Shi-Chiao Li (李石樵), Mother (母親像), 1948. Oil painting.

Fig 2.3.25 (Right) Jen-Fang Wu (吳仁芳), My Loving Mother (慈母), 1992. Oil painting, 116.5×91 cm. Private collection.

In recent years, images of Taiwanese mothers have begun to casually appear in the sensational and controversial contemporary art of Taiwan. However, most of these artworks, which fortuitously use images of mothers, only outwardly break the conventional representation for the purpose of other issues with little concern for the issue of motherhood itself. For example, a new type of Taiwanese artist, Chieh-Jen Chen, used straight photography to represent a heavily pregnant woman in one of his series of photographic works, The Twelve Karmas under the City, exploring the 'virtual future' in 2000 (Fig 2.3.26). He continued the style of cruelty seen in his previous famous artwork Lingchi (picturing brutal punishment in the Ching Dynasty) to draw people's attention through the use of intense and frightening images to provoke a reflection on the relationship between image and power.⁶² During an interview, he explained that he had borrowed the dream of the model and her maternal body to express his own imagined thoughts about doom and the religious concept of transmigration in Tibet.⁶³ In this shocking and monstrous image, there is a naked and bareheaded pregnant woman who plays the role of a blind person in a morbid setting, surrounded by a number of corpses in a gloomy subway in Taipei.⁶⁴

⁶² Heui-Hua Cheng (鄭慧華). "The History of Being Photographed: An Interview with Chen Chieh-Jen about Lingchi - Echoes of a Historical Photograph." Art & Collection: Contemporary Art. Vol.129 (June 2003): 196-201.

⁶³ Zhi-Ming Lin (林志明). "Memoire, Histoire, Genealogie, Introduction a l'art de Chen Chieh-Jen." Art News. Vol. 42 (Apr. 2001): 70-71. Heui-Hua Cheng. "Existing with Imagination and Persistence: A Dialogue with Chen Chieh-Jen." Modern Art. Vol. 112 (Feb. 2004): 22-33.

⁶⁴ Jui-Chung Yao (姚瑞中). Installation Art in Taiwan since 1991-2001. (Taipei: Ecus Publishing, 2004) 293.

With no intention of discussing motherhood, his work sharply breaks the taboo of representing the maternal body by chance. From the viewpoint of artistic form, this rebellious and anti-traditional approach may work as a reference for artists who devote themselves to the art of motherhood; however, the photograph does not directly connect with the creativity of motherhood from the perspective of artistic content. Instead of concentrating on exploring the particular maternal anxiety about the vulnerability of a life, this artist adopts the stereotypical concept of a mother who is humble but can endure hardships, to strengthen the power of the indictment and to express his imagination of complete destruction of the world. Therefore, these kinds of artworks only accidentally involve the figure of a Taiwanese mother in a shocking way. They are not the artworks of motherhood discussed in this thesis.



Fig 2.3.26 Chieh-Jen Chen (陳界仁), The Twelve Karmas under the City: Rebirth II (十二因緣: 生II), 2000. Cibachrome, 218x270 cm.

From the above discussion, artworks on motherhood can be analysed in terms of four stereotypes: motherhood as a natural vocation; the selfless and hardworking mother; the blissful mother with her children; and the dignified elder mother. In summary, these four types show that most male and some female artists from the viewpoint of a son or daughter to occupy the mother's love or, from the patriarchal standpoint, to support the traditional virtue of a mother in the long-standing male view

of Taiwanese art. Mothers were unified into observed silent objects without many personal emotions in artworks of motherhood. The myth of motherhood in Chinese culture was not lost on those artists who devoted themselves to creativity; on the contrary, their works clearly reveal that motherhood is an unshakeable duty for a woman. No matter what the content or form, these stereotypical representations have caused an estrangement between motherhood and creativity. Therefore, by examining the viewpoint of the third aspect of creative identity, creativity in the artworks of motherhood, most Taiwanese works in this field tend to move in the opposite direction to creativity.

Chapter 3 Visual Strategies for Sustaining Creative Identity during Motherhood

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Before Strategies

3.3 The strategy of self-representation

- 3.3.1 What self-representation means
- 3.3.2 The discourse on photographic gaze in self-representation
- 3.3.3 The modes and intentions of self-representation during motherhood
 - A. Sustaining the self through the evidence of being present in motherhood
 - B. Grasping the right to interpret self and to break the stereotype
 - C. Breaking the conventional stigmatisation of the mother's body through the self-body image
- 3.3.4 Summary

3.4 The strategy of the family photograph

- 3.4.1 The transition of the mother's appearance in family photographs
- 3.4.2 Rediscovering motherhood by utilising family photographs in art
 - A. Using family photographs as a visual source to examine the self during motherhood
 - B. Undermining the subject/object in photography through the intimate relationship between mother and child
 - C. Unfolding the experience of motherhood by sharing family albums
- 3.4.3 Summary

3.5 The strategy of time sequencing

- 3.5.1 The impact of time in motherhood
 - A. Losing the right to control time
 - B. The gap in biological time between mother and child
 - C. Having insufficient time
- 3.5.2 Responses to time in creating the art of motherhood
 - A. Time frozen during suffering
 - B. Time in order, from seconds, to months, to years
 - C. Random time sequence generated by collected memories
- 3.5.3 Summary

3.6 Conclusion

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on exploring the main conceptual frameworks of the thesis, which are based on my practical work during motherhood and are developed from the chief research question: How do I as a woman artist use visual strategies to sustain my creative identity under the burden of Taiwanese motherhood? I apply the thoughts of Adrienne Rich which distinguish motherhood into 'institution' and 'experience'.¹ By perceiving the strong power of institution superimposed on the mother, I adopt the idea of the experience of motherhood as a creative resource which can be employed through my own artistic practice to free myself from the stereotype of motherhood.²

The chapter looks at three visual strategies which developed out of my practice as key concepts: self-representation, family photographs and time sequencing. In the following, they are explored and interwoven with my works to challenge the gender orthodoxy and stereotyping in paintings and photographs.

3.2 Before strategies: the autobiography of my motherhood³

This autobiography of motherhood is selected and re-arranged from my diary between 2002 and 2005. It is an important background for me to analyse a systematic visual strategy for this thesis; moreover, it expresses my insistent attitude of trying to change a crisis as a favourable turn. Through my candid experience, this section has illustrated some main problems that a Taiwanese mother artist encountered and reacted before finding out a precise strategy for sustaining the

¹ Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (London: Virago, 1997(1977)) 13.

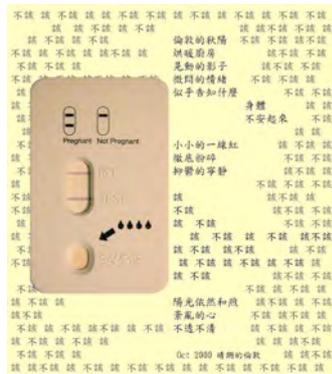
² The idea of the experience of motherhood as a resource of creativity is developed from the book: Of woman Born 13,39, 40, 280.

³ This autobiography is translated and composed from several selected texts from Hsiao-Ching Wang's Diary 2000-2005. All attached pictures are chosen from Hsiao-Ching Wang's Visual Diary.

creative identity. The transformation from rejecting, experiencing, searching, identifying to creating motherhood with the motion of pain and joy embody that an artist could apply her characteristics of creativity to challenge the actual and conventional predicament of motherhood.

12 Oct 2000

*The autumn sun sifts through the window
 Illuminating the floor in the kitchen
 It warms up the wiggling shadows
 Heating up my agitated and disturbed body
 There seems to be a sign
 Telling me something I don't want to hear and accept*

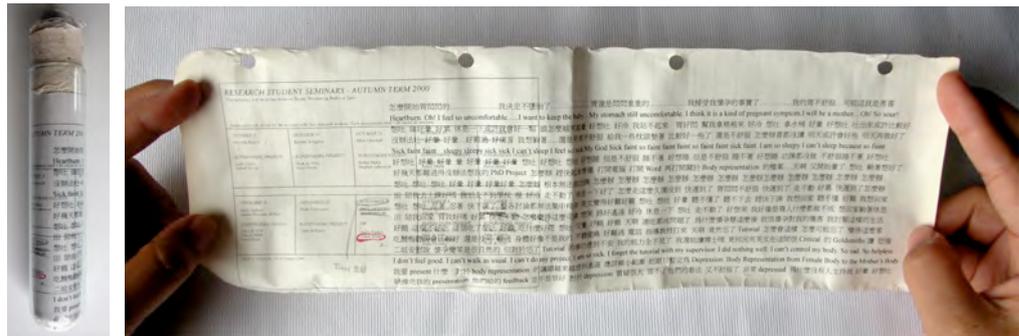


*The tiny pink line (on a pregnancy test kit) suddenly comes up
 Like the first thunder crashing in the whole gloomy sky
 Breaking through the heavy air
 I Should?
 I should not?
 Should I? I should? Shouldn't I?
 Shouldn't I? I should? Shouldn't I?
 I Should?
 Shouldn't I?
 I should not? I should not? I should? Shouldn't I?
 Should I? I should?
 Shouldn't I? I should?*

*Even though the sunshine is still calm and warm
 My vision is blurred
 My heart tangled
 My mind disturbed*

27 Nov 2000

My stomach is getting upset. What happened?... I decided to keep the baby...Still having a stomach upset... I face the reality of pregnancy...I felt sick at the stomach. Maybe it's because of morning sickness... Heartburn. Oh! I feel so uncomfortable. I want to keep the baby... I still have a stomach upset. I think it is morning sickness. I will be a mother... Oh! So sour! I feel sick. I feel so dizzy. I feel so tired. Perhaps I'll feel better after taking a rest. Why do I feel dizzier and dizzier? I feel so sick. It's so



cold. I can't stand. My stomach is upset. Give me a duvet. It's so cold. I feel sick. Give me the bucket. I feel so dizzy. I feel so sick. Maybe I'll feel better if I can throw up. No, I can't manage it. I feel so dizzy. I feel so dizzy...I feel so uncomfortable. I'm suffering so much. I want to lie down...I'm still feeling unwell. Give me some pillows...I need more support at my neck. I feel slightly better now, but still quite uncomfortable. What should I do? I haven't studied yet. Maybe I'll recover tomorrow. I'd better leave it for tomorrow. Sick faint faint sleepy sleepy sick sick I can't sleep I feel so sick My God. Sick faint so faint faint faint so faint faint sick faint. I am so sleepy, I can't sleep because I'm so faint, I feel so sick. I feel so dizzy. I feel sick. I feel so sick. I feel sick. I feel so sleepy, but I can't sleep because I'm unwell. I feel so sleepy, and I haven't done any assignment. I'm uncomfortable, and I can't sleep. I feel so sick. I can't really think of my PhD project, because I've been unwell for a few days in a row. What should I do? I need to get up to prepare for the tutorial. I turn on my computer. Then I open the word processor. Finally I open the file on Body Representation.... Oh my God, the dizziness is creeping back. I feel sick. I'd better lie down and then keep thinking. I feel sick. I feel sick. I feel sick. I feel so dizzy. I feel so dizzy. I feel so dizzy. I feel so dizzy. What should I do? I can hardly do any homework. What should I do? Tien, could you accompany me to the university? I doubt if I can walk there. Oh, it's so cold. I can't walk any longer. Shall we take a break? Why did it take so long to get here? I'm going to be late. My stomach is feeling upset again. I'm going to be late. I can't walk any longer. I feel so tired. I'm going

to be late. What should I do? I feel sick. I feel sick. Hang on. Hang on. We are going to have a break. I can't concentrate more on the discussions at all. The English spoken in the class became too difficult to understand. I feel sick. I feel sick. I feel so dizzy. I don't understand any bit of it. I don't want to hear any more English. Why haven't we had a break yet? I want to go home. I don't want to hear any more English. It's so difficult. I want to go home. Tien, take me home. Can you carry me on your back? I feel so tired. I can't walk anymore. What made me so pitiful? I feel like crying. The way home has become incredibly long. It's so cold. Let's take a rest. I feel sick. I can't walk anymore. I feel like crying. I feel so unworthy, because I can't do anything now. I want to go home and lie down. I feel so hungry. This tastes awful. That turned my stomach. I feel so hungry. What should I eat? I feel sick. I feel dizzy again. I feel so hungry. I feel so hungry. Oh my God, why am I having problems with eating as well? Why am I suffering so much because of pregnancy? I hate the harm it has done to me. I hate living like this. I was told that eating some pickled plums may ease nausea. But it didn't work. I feel so sad and uncomfortable. It feels that my body no longer belongs to me. I have no control over it. I feel so uncomfortable. My supervisor phoned. Oh my goodness, how could I forget my tutorial appointment? How did that happen? How could I forget it? I have become so stupid... My sister consoled me by saying that it's common to become forgetful and less intelligent during pregnancy. But I'm still quite anxious about having missed the tutorial. I've lost almost all my intellectual ability. Will I still be able to study for a PhD, in a foreign language, with a bunch of disapproving academics at Goldsmiths? How sad! I don't feel good. I can't walk as usual. I can't do my project. I am so sick. I forgot the tutorial with my supervisor. I am good at nothing. I can't control my body. So sad. So helpless. What will I present? The topic of body representation is becoming more and more distant from me. I should narrow down my topic. I put forward a tentative title for my thesis as 'Depression: Body Representation from Female to the Mother's Body'. I struggled painfully through my presentation. The feedback I received from the committee was negative and disheartening. They had serious reservations about the term 'depression'. I can't do anything about their opinions. I feel unwell again, and I am extremely depressed. Why did nobody approve of my project? I feel so dizzy. I feel so sick.

11 Oct 2001

Today, I at last have time to take a break. I rewrite a short piece of prose on my memories and feelings about my tummy before going into labour.



During the good old days in my teens, I jokingly referred to my waist as 'curvy flabby flesh'. The pink lace dress rejected me gently, just because my waist burst it. I took my revenge by refusing to buy anything soft and feminine from that day forward.

Days went by as I sailed from my adolescence into adulthood, and then the magical hormones cast a secret spell on my body. The long skirts I abandoned in some distant past suddenly fit easily, turning the tomboy within me into a lady. My new body awaited a new stage of life.

Facing the mirror, I placed a pillow on my tummy, my hand on my back. I imagined my belly expanding during pregnancy, stuffed with a soft and fluffy mass - what a sweet dream! Then I took out the pillow, still facing the mirror, my hands on my hips this time. I felt so good, and such a relief to have my curved waistline back.

Even though I suffered from severe morning sickness, my waistline didn't change at all during the first three months of pregnancy. On my tummy was the coconut-scented lotion I rubbed in as a precaution and a defence against the attack of stretch marks.

I flew from the gloomy UK back to Taiwan to prepare for childbirth. My heart was warmed by the rising temperature. My homeland and my family nurtured me with so much love, lulling me into a good night's sleep. When I woke up in the morning, however, I fell into a state of panic on seeing the burst of pink stretch marks spreading across my protruding belly - they seemed to have come from nowhere overnight. The lotion didn't work. It must be the excess heat, binge eating, and the growing baby that made my skin too vulnerable to ward off the stretch marks. I was agonized by the fact that my pregnancy had left permanent love bites on my body.

My belly expanded as the baby grew, vibrating with his every movement. I had never imagined that the skin, full of stretch marks, could have so many faces. Like a strong and energetic gopher, the baby was becoming impatient, and wanted to rush out of his humid and suffocating cave. He poked me in the womb with his feet, causing a penetrating pain. Sympathising with his confinement, I touched my belly gently,

wanting to comfort him. Eventually he seemed to hear my inner voice, and responded by ceasing to kick and withdrawing slowly. The pain stopped. Somehow I was overwhelmed by the feeling of being connected with my baby.

The baby placed a huge burden on me, like a giant and heavy rock. The induction had been performed three days in a row with no success. The decision to perform a Caesarean section was confirmed - will it be the end of my suffering, or just the beginning?

19 Jun 2001

The lower half of my body was anaesthetized. Fully conscious, but without any feeling of pain, I lay on a cold surgical table. There was a cotton cloth hanging between my eyes and my belly. I couldn't see or feel the surgery team operating on me, but I was able to hear them. Suddenly I felt my belly become lighter. Simultaneously, my doctor exclaimed "Oh! How big the baby is", indicating to her team that the decision to make me wait so long had been an erroneous one. Then, a gentle crying, like that of a kitten, was audible. Without the help of my glasses, I could see a blurred but living baby in front of my eyes. However, they rapidly took it away and I immediately felt aloof and alien. It was as if all these significant occurrences were not a part of my own story. As my whole body was anaesthetized into a state of unconsciousness I doubted whether I would come back to the world to see this stranger.

"I am still alive!" It is hard to believe, now I have woken up, that I am a mother. It is as if I am still in a dream.

29 Jun 2001

The humid summer, my sweating body, his urgent crying...

This little hot being nestled against my chest because of the maternal smell from my own body; but we simultaneously reject each other because we are sticky and inexperienced.

Sweat and milk are gushing out together as I am crying.

Dealing with the milk becomes the focus of my life.

When we are in good health,

maintaining a moist heat, massaging, wiping, breast-feeding, cleaning and putting on disposable breast pads,

I complete the whole process every three hours throughout the day and night.

*Then when baby becomes very jaundiced,
preparing warm water, making-up milk powder in a baby's bottle, bottle feeding,
cleaning and sterilizing the bottle.
Additionally, maintaining a moist heat, massaging, wiping, expressing milk, storing it
in the freezer, cleaning and putting on disposable breast pads,
I complete the whole process every three hours throughout the day and night.*

*My hands are almost working almost all day.
As soon as I finish feeding and cleaning, the next round of work urges me to do it all
again.
My heart and hands begin to fear feeding my baby.*

16 Sep 2001

*My little baby is a cute angel, but also an afflictive devil.
I am so angry with him for using a loud miserable wail to disturb my life and emotions.
However, his innocent and naïve smile gives me powerful feelings of happiness and
satisfaction.*

4 Dec 2001

*Tong's skin is extremely bad. For a long time I have worked very hard to deal with it,
trying many kinds of remedies, but there is still no improvement. I am very upset and
anguished.
My mother-in-law said that the thing she dreaded had happened and that the bad gene
for over-sensitive skin had certainly been inherited by her grandson.
She was sorry for my son and me because we would need to face this torture for a long
time to come.*

20 Nov 2002

*Could it be said that I have suffered serious symptoms during pregnancy, a Caesarean,
insomnia, spinal twist, spinal cord compression, and many common colds because I am
useless? Or, because I have still not worked hard?... Why do I involuntarily strive again
and again for my child but suffer repeated setbacks?... My son has a poor appetite, is
not growing strongly enough, often loses courage, learns slowly, easily becomes angry...
Why are all of these things hard for me to stand and face? ... Is it because that they are
all my fault?*

One feminist Taiwanese mother, Ms Cian-Ling Su (蘇芊玲) argued that “Every time a father does a good thing for his children and it adds to his score. However, the score of a mother is deducted from a perfect score. As long as she can not reach the standard of being a good mother, she becomes a defect.” Although this concept could encourage a father by improving his attitudes away from tradition towards a new way of thinking, it is not fair for mothers!... Why can I not casually and completely lay down the burden of parenthood once in a while as my husband does? Why do I unconsciously make such excessive demands of myself requiring that I achieve the unreasonable standard of being a good mother, as many other Taiwanese mothers do? Why, despite the voice of the rebel in my inner heart, which often warns me, do I still timidly imprison myself in the myth of motherhood, silently providing selfless love? Why have I become such a person? I love my dear son as well as I love my family. But, how can I do this?

16 Jan 2003

I am very angry! Really extremely angry!

But, who will want to listen to these complaints about the boring, vexed and unhappy trifles of my family and motherhood?

If I say anything, I think people will treat my complaint as a puff of wind passing their ears, or as a joke to laugh at.

“Domestic shame should not be made public.”

I can't let my child, my family and myself be laughed at by others.

I really don't want to slander my family; moreover, I can't announce that I am a selfish and incompetent mother.

I feel that I can not trust anybody.

But,

I am still very angry and feel wronged.

3 Feb 2003

There is a super sweet picture of mother and child again. It is warm but not so real...

Could it be said that my motherhood was recorded and stored only by taking a part of the whole? Where is my suffering? Where is my gloominess? All of the negatives were stealthily ignored or hidden by myself... It is not what I want! However, can I take off the hypocritical mask and face another side of the truth?

21 Feb 2003

Busy! Busy! Busy!

This little creature makes me too busy to complete my research and artworks well. How can I make time to concentrate on managing my negative emotions under the pressure of tedious housework and constant problems from my growing son?

Hu-huh! I know if I persist this turmoil of emotions, it will only make life worse!

In the event of an emergency or tense emotional moment during motherhood, the only thing I can do is to deal with it. It is impossible to have the time and energy to think about how best to record or represent it, let alone to execute it in text or images. It is only when I rethink the situation after it has settled for a period that a negative event or feeling can be expressed and shared with a level of rational control. I have discovered that to represent and to share one's personal hurdles, but at the same time ensure that they do not hurt the self is extremely difficult!

Furthermore, a smile or a kiss from my son, or a significant occurrence which symbolise his growth immediately puts my volition to record my pain as a mother into the far distance. For me, this sweet power is stronger than the love between man and woman.

I really want to leave out no detail about my feelings of motherhood; however, recording the unhappy things is much harder than recording the happy ones...

My God! I can't write. He is crying now.

30 Apr 2003

After my son broke his leg because I had cleaned the kitchen floor, I was depressed, constantly annoyed with myself, and did not let him out of my sight for several weeks... then I suddenly realized that treating myself as a guilty person was no good for anyone; besides, cleaning the floor for hygiene reasons was not wrong. Actually, the 'wrong' lay in the fact that I had not realized that the dirty floor would be more slippery after cleaning and that my son failed to heed my instruction not to run in the kitchen... Now that, the injury had occurred, why should I not make use of this opportunity to calmly face up to the accident with my child?

My son has a plaster cast to fix and protect his broken leg 24 hours a day, and that is what I cannot do. Therefore, why should I ask myself to be an omnipotent mother, protecting my child in person at all times? During motherhood, there are many difficulties. I think that I can also have a right to search a suitable 'plaster cast' for

supporting myself. I really do not need to use my vulnerable heart to show off my ability.

Today, I told with my sister, without a shred of doubt, “negative occurrences should not only serve as a byword for failure. It should be a particular experience and worth to share, discuss and learn to each other...” I think I have found a general release from the Taiwanese cultural stereotype. Now, I truly feel that I do not need or want to be the top marks mother that other people expect. I must feel comfortable when admitting that sometimes I am a vulnerable mother, but sometimes I am a sturdy one.

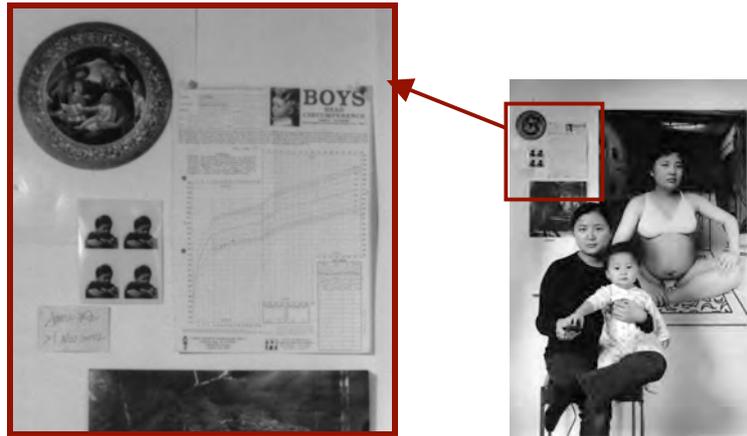
24 May 2003



(Layer 3)

I am very happy today. Finally, I can raise my head and stick out my chest to record a great improvement - I can frankly face the distressing experience of my son's injury in Layer 3 of my artworks, The Mother as a Creator.

For me, the tripod, which allows me to take a picture when I have only one free hand to press the shutter, is like the plaster cast holding my son's leg. It symbolises an important turning point. Using the tripod to help me with my artwork announces that I am no longer caught up in the chase to be an omnipotent mother. At the moment I pressed the shutter, I found I had admitted my vulnerability, and that of my child, and unexpectedly took a big stride forward in my artwork. Different from previous layers, I stopped hiding negative experiences in the background. For example, in the left-hand corner of the background of Layer 2, I leave a clue, in the form of some personal documents, which leaks my worry and confusion about the size of my child's head.



(Layer 2)

8 Dec 2003

Chilly winter is the best season in which to recall; tidying up these pictures and the diary that I have accumulated over a long period. At the same time, when I review them with a tear and a smile, I suddenly want to create a kind of special box to collect and preserve all these complex and heartfelt experiences of motherhood.

12 Jan 2005

Six months ago I began to select some important pictures, texts, and poems from my autobiography, diary, and visual diary to store in my artwork, Mother's Box, and to quote in my thesis. Today, I have finished the typesetting and translation into English of the parts I want people to see. My supervisor strongly supports my decision to translate only some of them. He considers that I am the best person to decide how much to show to others. Nakedly exposing pain or the private inner heart in public for others to criticize needs to take a great deal of courage. Furthermore, this form of exposure leaves the self open both to attack and to hurt. He kindly asked me to be clear, as an artist, about the difference between representing the complete truth, and self-representation. Happily, he agrees with me that it is acceptable to hide some private feeling in my artworks, or just even to withhold them. I have more confidence to insist that I am the master of my own artworks. How much to express, and by which kinds of media or language, are all controlled by myself.

2 Sep 2005

Artists' artworks express all the things they want to say. Sometimes, it is hard to ask them to use precise words to explain the complicated feelings in their artworks, especially for some negative experience that they do not wish to share openly.

These days, because I insist on demonstrating my Mother's box in person to my audience, I create many opportunities to talk with them face to face. This is like opening a family album to share with others, producing feelings of delicacy, warmth and safety, and is to me a very feminine approach. All the detail and fragments of explanation disappear in the fluidity of the dialogue. The only thing we leave with each other is a kind of rich feeling. It is not like the fixed and one-way communication of black pen and writing paper. It brings my audience, my artworks and me close together. I suppose that only through this kind of ideal communication, based on intimacy and trust, can some detail or hidden story behind the artworks be revealed candidly and naturally.

3.3 The strategy of self-representation

The first visual strategy is self-representation which develops out of the crucial experience of the loss of self during pregnancy and early motherhood. The definition of creativity in Chapter 1 indicates that the sense of self is very important for artists who wish to sustain their creative identity. Subject to the long-term oppression of being seen as ‘the other’ or ‘the second sex’ in patriarchal society, some women artists have applied the strategy of self-representation to explore the self and the female identity. In Taiwan, however, using self-representation to challenge the stereotypical social image of the selfless mother is still a new strategy. Since 2000 there have been only a small number of professional woman artists, including Juin Shieh and myself, who have begun to continuously use this strategy to create and exhibit our artworks on motherhood, and to defy the long-standing stereotype.⁴

This section first explores the term ‘self-representation’ and the discourse on photographic gaze in it. It then analyses the main methods and meanings of self-representation used in my series of artworks to sustain creative identity during motherhood. It does this by exploring relevant artworks by Western women artists and also looks at the particular background of motherhood in Taiwanese culture.

3.3.1 What self-representation means

Self-portraiture/self-portrayal means “a portrait of oneself”.⁵ It is a kind of genre in art and The Oxford Companion to Art indicated that “in all times it has had to serve two ends: an artist is always his own cheapest model and, further, his own likeness is an ideal means of self-immortalisation, a kind of monument which he sets up to himself.”⁶ Ignoring here the official explanations for hiding women artists away, self-portraits are not innocent reflections of artists seeing themselves in the mirror.

⁴ I began to use the strategy of self-representation in artworks on motherhood in 2000, and Juin Shieh has used the approach since 2002. We have demonstrated the issue of motherhood in art in this way for several years and will continue to do so in the future.

⁵ Oxford University Press. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 1067.

⁶ Harold Osborne. Ed. The Oxford Companion to Art (London: BCA, 1991(Oxford 1970)) 1057.

Throughout time, artists have pictured their likenesses from such points of view as, “this is what I look like”, to the more complicated “this is what I believe in”.⁷

In recent years, the notion of self-representation has been deliberately used broadly and actively to represent the self in the genre of self-portraiture. As Whitney Chadwick, Katy Kline and Helaine Posner indicated in 1998, “the term now encompasses a wide range of practices through which contemporary artists are enacting personal and sexual identity and situating themselves in relation to social and cultural frameworks.”⁸ Moreover, self-representation is similar to autobiography in literature. The Personal Narratives Group considered it highly important that authors should subjectively provide their readers with a significant way of understanding the world through their personal experience.⁹ Self-representation does not deny the importance of truth, and is unlike the scientific ideal of proving the truth. In other words, self-representation is the way to interpret the truth of self from the attitude of “paying careful attention to the context that shapes (one’s) creation and to the world views that inform (it)”.¹⁰

There are two reasons for using the terminology of self-representation instead of self-portraiture in this project. Firstly, I consider that self-portraiture implies the conventional viewpoint and genre determined by men in art. Some Western women artists use the term self-representation to emphasise the fact that their artworks depart from the constraints conventionally placed on women by the male definition, and also to assert that they have established their own identities, personal experiences of being women, creative thought and art creation. Secondly, I attempt to affirm that my practices explore and question the personal identities of mother and artist in the context of Taiwanese culture, and that they try to break the boundaries of the conventional representation of selfless motherhood.

⁷ France Borzello. Seeing Ourselves: Women’s Self-portraits (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998) 17.

⁸ Whitney Chadwick, Katy Kline, and Helaine Posner. “Foreword.” Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-representation. Ed. Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998) (Foreword 4-5).

⁹ Personal Narratives Group. “Truths.” Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989) 261.

¹⁰ Personal Narratives Group 261.

3.3.2 The discourse on photographic gaze in self-representation

This section defines and explores the issue of photographic gaze as a further means of analysis of the modes of self-representation in motherhood in my artworks. The discourse on photographic gaze has had an influence over the structuring of self-representation, self-identity and subjectivity throughout my artistic practice. It has also helped me to establish the concept of creative identity for this thesis.

There is some debate about the theory of gaze in the contemporary discourse. Early works from the 1970s and 1980s, however, such as those of John Berger, Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes and Victor Burgin, have considered the basic concept and lent some weight to discussions on the subject. Roland Barthes considered that a photograph could be analysed in terms of three roles: the 'operator' (the photographer), the 'object' (the person or thing being photographed), and the 'spectator' (a person who glances through collections of photographs).¹¹ Within the processes of seeing and being seen, three kinds of gaze can be generalised in photographic portraits: 'photographic seeing' by the operator; the gaze of the spectator; and the gaze of the person being portrayed in the photograph. Even though a photograph is a kind of mechanical representation, because they involve people, these gazes can not present a state of neutrality. In other words, the gazes in photography establish a specific structure of power between the three positions. John Pultz indicated that from the camera to photographic objects, from spectators to photographs, the whole process of photography produces a privileged and particular subjective position which allows the spectator to freely gaze on an object or scene in a photograph, and then to assess its value.¹² Victor Burgin also said,

“The signifying system of photography, like that of classical painting, at once depicted a scene and the gaze of the spectator, an object and a viewing subject... Whatever the object depicted, the manner of its depiction accords with laws of geometric projection which imply a unique 'point of view'. It is the

¹¹ Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. (London: Vintage. 2000 (1980)) 9.

¹² John Pultz. *Photography and the Body* (Taipei: Yuan-Liou, 1997 (1995)) 9.

position of point-of-view, occupied in fact by the camera, which is bestowed upon the spectator...”¹³

In brief, ‘photographic seeing’ embodies the actions and viewpoint of the operator who sees objects through an ‘appareilphoto’ which imitates the function of the human eye.¹⁴ The ‘gaze’ of the spectator is the action of a viewer seeing a photographic object; it bestows the privilege of remaining aloof from the object, to peek at, to possess and to evaluate it. Thus, due to its way of seeing and the results of its gaze, photography makes it possible for humans to understand more about things; moreover, it changes the behaviour of seeing. It encourages people ‘to see in order to see’ and ‘to gaze in order to possess’. Victor Burgin goes on to conclude that the photograph, like the fetish, is the result of a look.¹⁵ To recapitulate briefly, both the operator and the spectator develop a power of seeing under whose gaze the object loses the state of subjectivity.

Critiques on photographic gaze can also be found in feminist discourses. In his book Ways of Seeing, which discusses traditional drawings and publicity images, John Berger comments that the ideal spectator is traditionally a man who controls the representation of women. He simplified this seeing behaviour and indicated that “Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.”¹⁶ It could be said that a strong relationship of unequal power exists between men and women because of the convention that women are always in the role of being seen. Liz Wells also characterised “men as possessing the gaze.”¹⁷ Generally, men hold the active right to ‘see’ women and in so doing to appropriate them. Therefore, photographic seeing and the gaze of the spectator represent a specific kind of gaze which is mainly controlled by men within a permanent patriarchal culture

¹³ Victor Burgin. "Looking at Photographs." Thinking Photography (London: Macmillan Press, 1982) 146

¹⁴ Dr. Hsu, Chi-Lin found that the word ‘appareilphoto’ in France (which means optical artificial eye in English) was used to refer to the camera and its characteristics of seeing and strengthening eyesight. Chi-Lin Hsu (許綺玲). Sugar Coating and a Mummy (Taipei: Aesthetics Bookstore, 2001) 76.

¹⁵ Victor Burgin, “Photography, Fantasy, Function.” Thinking Photography. (London: Macmillan Press, 1982) 189-190.

¹⁶ John Berger. Ways of Seeing (Taipei: Ming Wen, 1991 (1972)) 41.

¹⁷ Liz Wells. “Photography and the Human Body.” Photography: A Critical Introduction. 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2001 (2000)) 226.



Fig 3.3.1 Alfred Hitchcock, Rear Window (selected image from the film), 1954.



Fig 3.3.2 (Left) Jo Spence/Terry Dennett, Marked Up for Amputation, 1982. Colour photograph.

Fig 3.3.3 (Right) Barbara Kruger, Untitled (Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face), 1981.

Laura Mulvey's essay on film studies, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, also refers to the 'male gaze'. In her view, "Hollywood cinema offered images geared toward male viewing pleasure, which she read within certain psychoanalytic paradigms including scopophilia and voyeurism".¹⁸ Lisa Tickner similarly held the

¹⁸ Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright. Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 76. In psychoanalysis, the term 'scopophilia' refers to pleasure in looking. Voyeurism is pleasure in looking, while not being seen.

opinion that “the man... is everywhere in representation in his own interest ...”¹⁹ Alfred Hitchcock’s Rear Window (Fig 3.3.1) is an example which demonstrates Mulvey’s concept.



Fig 3.3.4 Guerrilla Girls, Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? (updated), 2005. Guerrilla Girls did a recount on September 1, 2004. They were sure things had improved; however, only 3% of the artists in the Modern and Contemporary sections were women (5% in 1989), and 83% of the nudes were female (85% in 1989). They declared, “Guess we can't put our masks away yet!”

In the contemporary era, however, the discourse on gaze has changed due to undermine the early theories on sexual difference proposed by psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan - the binary categories of male and female. The male gaze has been appropriated into different gender issues - female, lesbian, gay and transgender. Therefore, “Contemporary visual culture involves not only a highly complex array of images and spectators but also of gazes”.²⁰ The gendered viewing relations are not always fixed; a female can be in the position as the viewer’s relationship with the photograph. Therefore, the gaze can also take various forms, and is not only about its male manifestation. These complex gaze issues in contemporary society deconstruct the affirmative binary opposition of male versus female and looker versus looked upon. Moreover, within modern day feminist practices, the strategies of gaze can be non-objectifying and respectful. It can also more powerful for the object of the gaze to look or stare back at the spectator - the

¹⁹ Lisa Tickner. “Sexuality and /in Representation: Five British Artists.” Difference. Ed. Kate Linker (London: ICA, 1985) 19-30.

²⁰ Sturken and Cartwright 87. The book discusses various forms of gaze in contemporary advertisements.

gazer. In photographic practice, for example, Jo Spence's gaze in the work Marked Up for Amputation (Fig 3.3.2) confirms to the viewer that what they see in the photograph is her cancerous breast, and that this is not a conventional beauty. Barbara Kruger's work Untitled (Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face) (Fig 3.3.3) satirises the male gaze, whilst Guerrilla Girls' work, Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? (Fig 3.3.4) radically uses a gorilla mask to protest against the objectification of females and to disturb the male gaze.

In my photographic practices, I adopted the strategy of self-representation to break these conventional modes of gazing at women. I actively led the process of portraying myself, as I played the roles of both operator and model. This meant that I, as the photographic 'subject' in front of the camera, had the power to control the gaze of the operator and to greatly reduce the fate of women who are treated merely as passive objects, to be seen. Conventionally, at the moment a portrait is taken, a model is exploited in this first gaze by the operator; then after becoming a photograph, the model is exploited again by the second gaze of the spectators. However, if we use self-portrait, the exploitation does not take place in the first time gaze. Therefore, in my artworks of motherhood, I took the photographs to reinforce my viewpoint on my own treatment. In so doing, I also grasp the right to subjectivity in the role of photographic 'object', and as a woman.

In addition, my photographic self-representation pushes the gaze to a level of non-seeing experience. It is a kind of detached and spiritual self-identity. Instead of seeking the help of a mirror or some other medium, or the eyes of another person to view my appearance at the moment of portraying myself, I concentrated more on pursuing my inner self by musing in front of the camera. This is different from narcissism where one mainly gazes at one's reflection. In other words, I attempted to photograph the state of my spirit rather than my appearance. In this way, I felt that I could break away from the conventional limitations of being gazed at by the operator.

Another aspect of gaze has to do with the spectators. In my early works on The Mother as a Creator (Fig 3.3.5), I often utilized the technique of 'frontality'.²¹ This was to reduce the possibility that my subjectivity would be weakened because I was

²¹ Susan Sontag. On Photography (New York: Picador, 1990 (1973)) 38.

in a position of being seen. Sontag indicated, "In the normal rhetoric of photographic portrait, facing the camera signifies solemnity, frankness, the disclosure of the subject's essence."²² Whether the model faces the camera with a direct smile to invite the spectator into his/her world, or keeps a close watch on the spectator, if they use active seeing as a technique this implies that their aim is to force the viewer to come into the image and to enter into dialogue. As Pultz says, through this kind of meeting in the same line of vision between model and spectator, the former affirms the subjectivity of the latter.²³



Fig 3.3.5 Hsiao-Ching Wang. Two selected images of The Mother as a Creator, 2001-2003.

In conclusion, during the whole photographic process, I have adopted the approach of portraying and gazing at myself to maintain my subjectivity and self-identity as well as to collapse the conventional rule whereby men gaze and women are to be gazed at. Moreover, I have used the contemporary photographic theories of gaze to interpret my personal concept of creation and to set a basic discourse for my artworks.

²² Sontag 37-38.

²³ Pultz 52.

3.3.3 Modes and intentions of self-representation during motherhood

In this section, I explore the three modes of self-representation used to sustain creative identity in the artworks I created during motherhood. They are: sustaining the self through the evidence of being present in motherhood; grasping the right to interpret self and to break the stereotype; and breaking the conventional stigmatisation of the mother's body through the self-body image. The sense of self, in this visual strategy for my artworks, will be emphasised and explored through examination of relevant artworks by Western mother artists (including Donna Ferrato, Charley Toorop, Dorothea Tanning, Frida Kahlo, Mary Kelly, Karen Ingham, Cillian Melling and Monica Sjöö) and of the specific Taiwanese cultural background to motherhood. The section also considers the position of self-loss during motherhood, the right to interpret motherhood (which is normally controlled by men), and the taboos surrounding presentation of the maternal body.

A. Sustaining the self through the evidence of being present in motherhood

Although opportunities for education and work have tended towards equality in Taiwan, mothers are still expected to accomplish the selfless, conventional mission of the natural vocation of motherhood assigned in a patriarchal society. The myth of being a dutiful mother, providing a male child to carry on the bloodline of the husband's family, serving the parents-in-law and caring for the family, still exists today deep in the hearts of young Taiwanese women. Though a few Taiwanese men do join in with parenthood and housework, and a mother can maintain a level of achievement working in the public sphere, the guilty feeling of not being a 'good' mother often pushes them to make further sacrifices to deal with conventional motherhood and work.

During my pregnancy, I experienced the uncomfortable, inferior situation of a mother losing herself in domesticity due to a combination of unceasing symptoms of pregnancy and the conventional expectations of motherhood. Moreover, when I searched for something which would resonate with my own experience, and was considering the difficulties of sustaining my creative identity as a Taiwanese artist during motherhood, this gloomy experience of self-loss was not to be found in

Taiwanese art. From this extreme loneliness in both art and motherhood, I was aware that this kind of negative experience, hidden in the domestic sphere, needed to be brought out into the open; made public, using structured techniques. It was no longer acceptable merely to complain privately to a small group of sympathetic women. Therefore, I tried to use my self-images as evidence of being present at the scene of motherhood to extend the concept of the self-portrait:

Self portrait - “assumes the role of self as a pictorial signature”.²⁴



Fig 3.3.6 (Above) Hsiao-Ching Wang, the detail of Depressed Pregnancy, 2000. Colour photograph.

Fig 3.3.7 (Below) Hsiao-Ching Wang, Depressed Pregnancy, 2000. 7 colour photographs.

In Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy (Fig 3.3.6 and 3.3.7), I recorded myself present at the scene of motherhood to prove that the predicament of self-loss truly existed. In other words, the works provide two forms of testimony. Firstly, they portray the bitterness of my lonely motherhood, and secondly, in examining the photographs, the audience (including myself) observes the act of a mother’s self disappearing into the family. The concept “seeing is believing” is played out and proved.

²⁴ Oxford University Press. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 1058.



Fig 3.3.8 Hsiao-Ching Wang, I Sign; I Exist, 2001. 9 colour photographs.



Fig 3.3.9 (Left) Jan Van Eyck, Arnolfini and His Wife, 1434. National Gallery, London. The picture is a witness self-portrait. Arnolfini asked for the picture to be painted as a record of his marriage; at the time there was no such thing as a marriage certificate.

Fig 3.3.10 (Two images on the right) Detail of signature and mirror from Jan Van Eyck's Arnolfini and His Wife. In the reflection in the mirror there are two people facing the wedding couple. One is the artist, Jan Van Eyck, with a palette in his hand. The other is his assistant.

In Artwork 2: I Sign; I Exist (Fig 3.3.8), I used a similar method to that in Arnolfini and His Wife (Fig 3.3.9) to enhance the power of evidence through actively representing the self at the scene of the event. In the painting, Jan Van Eyck is a

witness at the wedding and appears in the reflection in the mirror. The words “Jan van Eyck was here in 1434” appear above the mirror on the wall to emphasise the evidence of being present at the scene²⁵ (see Fig 3.3.10). With regard to using signatures as evidence, instead of signing the ‘surface’ of a corner of the painting, as most artists would to announce their copyright, Van Eyck signed by ‘entering’ the painting and fusing with the wedding to stress the important status of being a witness. In the images I Sign; I Exist, I actively and confidently write my name and the date on my pregnant belly. This breaking of a traditional mould goes beyond Jan Van Eyck’s signature in the painting and adopts a more self-determined posture. These images, which record the action of me signing my belly, also prove and witness the fact that my body is concentrating on creating a new life, much like an artist creating works of art.



Fig 3.3.11 Donna Ferrato, The Juggler. Self-Portrait with Fanny and Philip in Paris, 1986. Black & white photograph.

In art history, a number of artworks have used self-images as evidence of being present at the scene of motherhood. The self-portrait The Juggler (Fig 3.3.11), taken by the American photographer Donna Ferrato, is one of the few examples that express strong self-consciousness and maintains the self by applying the concept of ‘an evidence of being present at the scene’.²⁶ In this photograph, she recorded herself taking the picture to represent the idea of the self, juggling the roles of mother, photographer and partner. She boldly positioned herself in the front and centre of the image, but at the same time hid herself by covering half of

²⁵ Fred Gettings. The Meaning and Magic of Art (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1963) 44-45.

²⁶ The photograph of The Juggler earned the prestigious W. Eugene Smith Award in 1986.

her face with the camera as she focused the lens. In this ambiguous method of emphasising the importance of the self but hiding part of it, the artist skilfully implied that the self was weakening under overlapping roles. Compared with the two family members behind her – the father only concentrating on his work and the daughter uncontrolled jumping about in the room – the mother artist’s behaviour in the photograph represents viewing, and caring for both her family and herself. She shows that the self of a mother is unlike that of a father or a child, both of whom are able to easily sustain the self. To avoid the self disappearing unconsciously she should do her best to exploit the purpose illustrated in the photograph.



Fig 3.3.12 (Above) Hsiao-Ching Wang, the fifth picture of My Son and I at the Same Height, 2003. Colour photograph. The picture is taken at the ancestral shrine at my parents’ home in Taipei (Taiwan). In Chinese culture, an ancestral shrine symbolises the honor of patriarchy and family.

Fig 3.3.13 (Below) Hsiao-Ching Wang, My Son and I at the Same Height, 2001-2005. 9 colour photographs.

Artwork 5: My Son and I at the Same Height (Fig 3.3.12 and 3.3.13) is not like my work Depressed Pregnancy or Farrato’s Juggler, which represent the self in the occasional events of motherhood. It witnesses my son’s and my growth over a

period of time by continuously and purposely recording the progress of our height in different locations in relation to our daily lives. Through this artistic activity, I was able to ensure the existence of the self in motherhood through the process of physical measurement, visually representing the self again and again. Moreover, it undermined the myth of a mother only hiding and sacrificing herself in the domestic sphere and weakened the traditional hierarchy of the Taiwanese family where the status of the eldest son is always higher than that of the mother.²⁷

In summary, self-representational evidence of being present at the scene of motherhood actually helps a mother to sustain her self by actively recording the self within society's strong expectations of motherhood. In my experience, even by using simple sketches and photographs to record motherhood, the self can be sustained more solidly throughout the serious process of experiencing, witnessing and recording motherhood, as well as in reviewing the evidence. It is most important that these evidences provide more opportunities for us to understand the relationship between the self, motherhood and culture under unceasing observation.

B. Grasping the right to interpret self and to break the stereotype

Because there have been few women artists in the history of Taiwan, the right to interpret motherhood in art has been virtually monopolised by male artists. They adopt the viewpoint of a father or son in understanding motherhood and simply depict the mother as a selfless figure to illustrate the patriarchal aim of educating women.

Simone de Beauvoir in her book The Second Sex highlights the concept of 'becoming' to suggest that patriarchal society uses the male viewpoint to construct the meaning of a woman, and treats her as 'other' to deny her 'subjectivity'.²⁸ She said, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."²⁹ This concept is also revealed in the painting Attempting the Impossible (Fig 3.3.14). René Magritte

²⁷ In the patriarchal system in Taiwan, the eldest son possesses the second highest status in the family (lower than the father) and has the task of perpetuating the lineage. His status is much higher than his mother's.

²⁸ Simone de Beauvoir. The Second Sex. Ed. and trans. H. M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984 (1949)) 295.

²⁹ Beauvoir 295.

adopted the myth of Pygmalion, who, as a sculptor, created his ideal woman. In his mind, the sculpture then came to life and the two enjoyed an ideal relationship. He used the artistic power of creativity to represent the subconscious desire of a man to create, control and occupy a woman. He represented himself as an artist creating a nude, beautiful object of a wife, in accordance with the conventional definition that a man is master and a woman is subordinate. In Taiwan, most male artists used similar approaches to making women 'become' figures of selfless mothers, depending on their inflexible viewpoints. The monopolisation of interpretation by men, meant that in Taiwanese art the real, particular and diverse experience of motherhood, belonging to 'the second sex', was ignored.

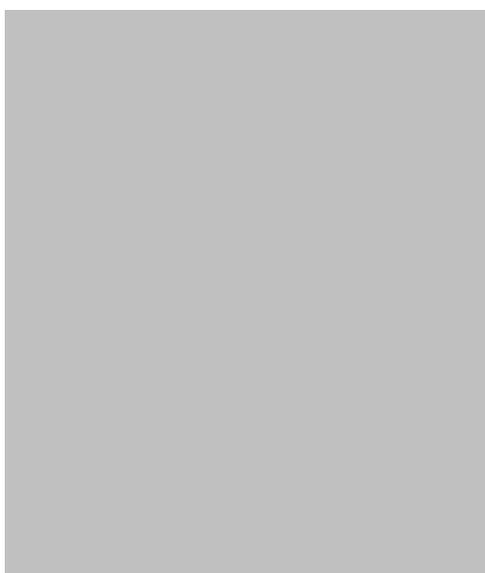


Fig 3.3.14 René Magritte, Attempting the Impossible, 1928.

In the 1970s, Hélène Cixous questioned the concept of 'patriarchal binary thought'; the opposed positions of active=male, passive=female that highlight women's lack of power and oppression by men and the 'one language' which is created by men.³⁰ She proclaims that women must create their own language of difference, a feminine language, to subvert these patriarchal binary schemes as well as to challenge the language of order and established knowledge. She urged women to throw away the system of 'phallogentrism' to engage themselves, through the specific experience of being women, and to explore the enrichment and diversity in

³⁰ Toril Moi. Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Methuen, 1984) 104. Cixous lists the following binary oppositions: Activity/Passivity; Sun/ Moon; Culture/Nature; Day/Night; Father/Mother; Head/Emotions... in the patriarchal value system, the "feminine" side is always seen as the negative, powerless aspect.

women's lives which had been previously hidden. She said, "Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then the immense resource of the unconscious springs forth."³¹

In this project, I adopt a similar concept to Hélène Cixous in the strategy of self-representation. I attempt to regain the right to reclaim motherhood from male artists through representation of my personal experience. In so doing, I may be able to sustain the self and overthrow the stereotypical image of the selfless, oppressed and silent Taiwanese mother. In what follows, I present selected artworks on motherhood by myself and Western mother artists. These illustrate the ways in which we have expressed our diverse experience of being mothers through art, breaking the stereotypical image of the mother by grasping the right to interpret the self during motherhood.

- **Emphasising the right to interpret self**

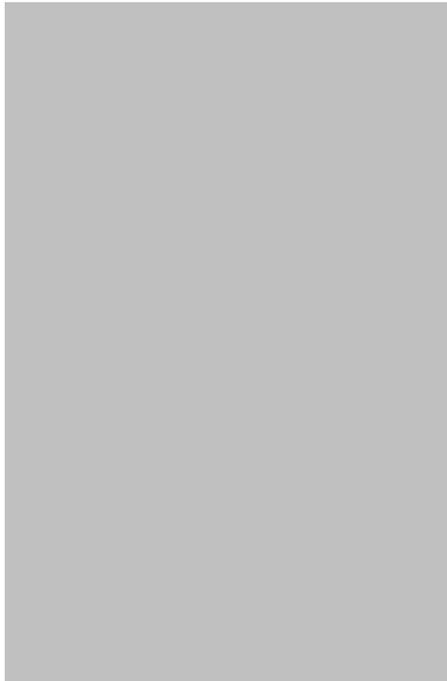


Fig 3.3.15 Charley Toorop, The Three Generations, 1941-50. Oil on canvas. Charley Toorop arranges herself as the pivotal point between two artists, the bust of her father Jan Toorop and her son. She represents herself wielding a brush like a conductor to emphasize her determination to assert her identity as an artist playing the role of mother and daughter.

³¹ Hélène Cixous. "The Laugh of the Medusa." New French Feminisms: An Anthology. Eds. Elaine Marks & Isabelle de Courtivron (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981) 250.

In the self-portrait The Three Generations (Fig 3.3.15) the solemn farcical expression and dominant painting gesture of the Dutch artist Charley Toorop expressed clearly that she grasped the right to interpret herself by her own hand. Marsha Meskimmon considered that the painting was “to confirm her sense of artistic lineage and connection”.³² I feel the artist also made a crucial inner attempt to depict herself as a self-determined artist alongside the expectation of being a mother, full of maternal love, and an obedient daughter. She represented herself as more active than the intimidating male members of her family to reverse the stereotype of the passive, feminine personality of a woman or mother – even though she was aware of perceived pressure from her deceased father and her son, due to her family background.



Fig 3.3.16 (Above) Hsiao-Ching Wang, the third photograph of The Mother as a Creator, 2003. Black & white photograph.

Fig 3.3.17 (Below) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The Mother as a Creator, 2001-2005. 5 black & white photographs.

³² Marsha Meskimmon. The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-portraiture in the Twentieth Century (London: Scarlet Press, 1996) 48.

My Artwork 4: The Mother as a Creator. (Fig 3.3.17), also emphasises a mother's actions taken to recapture the right of representation. For example, in the third image (Fig 3.3.16) of the work, the obvious action of pressing the camera shutter announces that I have the right to interpret myself as a mother and artist. Besides regaining the right to interpret the self (as in Charley Toorop's The Three Generations) I represent the self continuously to combine the meanings of the creativity of an artist, insisting on creating artworks, and of a mother in motherhood. By repeatedly representing and creating the self and the experience of motherhood in artworks, I tried to break the collective description of the stereotypical Taiwanese mother from the viewpoint of creativity.

- **Self-interpretation of painful motherhood**

Besides emphasising the action of grasping the right to interpret the self, as explained above, expressing and sharing the specific and personal experience of motherhood without echoing the collective description is also a method of liberating the limited representation of motherhood. Adrienne Rich indicated, "I believe increasingly that only the willingness to share private and sometimes painful experience can enable women to create a collective description of the world which will be truly ours."³³ No matter what the action or the concept of making artworks through revealing painful experience, it touches directly the feeling of losing the self under the long-term suppression of motherhood. Moreover, the candid expression of suffering (resulting from pressure to comply with the conventional expectations of motherhood) diminishes the blissful myth of a mother's love.

In her self-portrait entitled Maternity (Fig 3.3.18), Dorothea Tanning illustrated a very different motherhood within a hallucinatory, bleak and isolated atmosphere. The art historian Linda Nochlin noted that the artist looked at the old themes of mother and child in a new way and thoroughly undermined the myth of essentialist nature.³⁴ The sad-faced mother holding her child and standing, lonely, between two open doors in a barren desert reveals clearly how she experienced and

³³ Adrienne Rich. Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (London: Virago, 1986 (1977)) 16.

³⁴ Linda Nochlin. Representing Women (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999) 25-26.

imagined the invisible fear of motherhood for women. As Mary Ann Sullivan conjectured, Tanning painted the work in the year when she married Max Ernst and it unearthed her negative attitude towards having children.³⁵ Giving up the clichéd tradition of interpreting blissful maternal love, she, as a potential mother, successfully used her experience of refusing motherhood to manifest the gloomy side of being a mother and to suggest a new possibility of visualising motherhood in art.



Fig 3.3.18 Dorothea Tanning, Maternity, 1946-7. The image on the right is a close-up of that on the left. Oil on canvas. Private collection.

The painting Henry Ford Hospital (Fig 3.3.19) is a self-portrait by Frida Kahlo. She chose an introspective way of speaking out to depict her painful experience of suffering in miscarriage and her deep desire to have a child. She places the suffering of her maternal body in the centre of the image and transfers it from a medical 'object' to a vivid 'subject'.³⁶ The crooked and bloodied body on a cold metal bed, the obvious teardrop on the face, and the hand, holding red umbilical cords connected to six items, exposed the subjectivity of this mother artist through the extreme and candid analysis of her self-introspection.³⁷ This method not only breaks the generalised medical interpretation of treating the patient as a specimen,

³⁵ Mary Ann Sullivan. "Oh What a Difference a Difference Makes: Gender in the Visual Arts." Bluffton University. 10 Aug. 2002. <<http://www.bluffton.edu/homepages/FacStaff/sullivanm/forum/gender.html>>

³⁶ Meskimmon 168-169.

³⁷ Patricia Ticineto Clough. Feminist Thought: Desire, Power, and Academic Discourse (Taipei: Chu Liu, 1997 (1994)) 75.

but also represents her extreme personal sadness at not being able to become a mother.



Fig 3.3.19 Frida Kahlo, Henry Ford Hospital, 1932. Oil on metal, 30.5×38 cm. Collection Dolores Olmedo Foundation, Mexico City. The red umbilical cords connect six items with Frida Kahlo's body. These are the embryo of her baby, a model of the lower part of the female body, a model of a pelvis, a medical machine, a snail and an orchid. These items imply the loss of a baby, her incomplete body (spine and pelvis), ruthless medicine, the slow process of miscarriage, and the love of Diego Rivera. This image represents the painful experience of miscarriage during very early motherhood.

The denial of motherhood, like Dorothea Tanning's, or the desire to be a mother, like Frida Kahlo's, both represent a particular experience of painful motherhood by treating themselves as the subject; moreover they increase the possibility of revealing diverse motherhood in art. In my Artwork1: Depressed Pregnancy (Fig 3.3.20 and 3.3.21), being present at the scene of motherhood (as discussed previously) I also found a way to interpret the painful experience of motherhood. I located the image of my depressed pregnancy within the disordered domestic environment. The confused expression reveals the pain and fear of self-loss coming from symptoms of pregnancy and the oppressive conventional expectations of motherhood in the early stages. My mind was torn into fragments and I felt I was under heavy pressure. Therefore, in my exhibition, I framed this series of images in deep, black frames and installed them at a low level in the corner of a brick wall to connect with my personal weakness and isolated,

pregnant feeling, in a gloomy semi-basement flat (see Fig 4.2.22). In doing this, I attempted to expose the phenomena that the real painful experience of motherhood is always hidden and disguised in Taiwanese society. For me, the aim of sharing the painful images of motherhood is similar to that of Adrienne Rich. She considered that sharing the specific painful experience of womanhood would reveal the voice of women that used to be excluded from the collective description, and would help them to regain power.³⁸

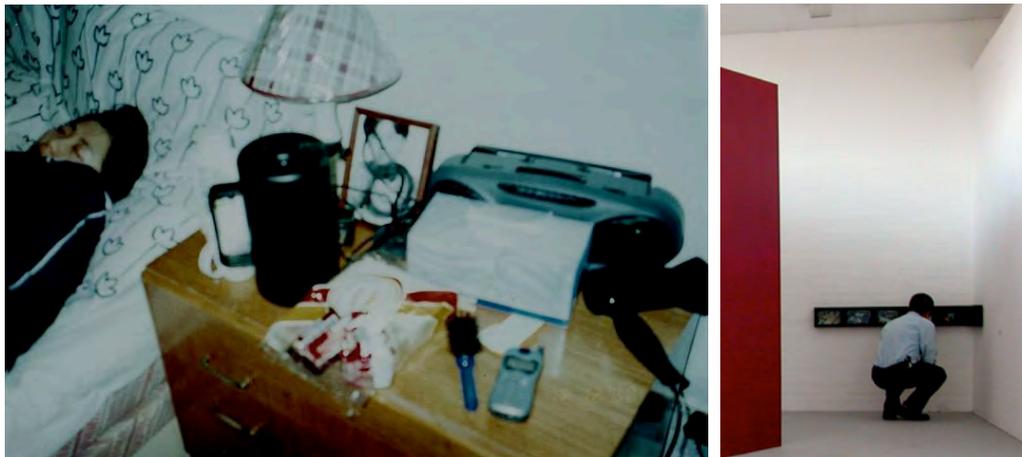


Fig 3.3.20 (Above) Hsiao-Ching Wang, the installation of Depressed Pregnancy in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

Fig 3.3.21 (Below-left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, the detail of Depressed Pregnancy, 2000. Colour photograph.

Fig 3.3.22 (Below-right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, the installation of Depressed Pregnancy, 2005.

- Interpreting the self without using self-images

Post-Partum Document is a series of artworks by Mary Kelly, dated 1974 to 1978. She recorded her son's growth in the form of an autobiographical document. This artwork expresses the complicated experience and confused mind of a mother locked in the isolated role of childbirth and bearing children within a socially defined domestic sphere.³⁹ For example, in Documentation VI: Prewriting

³⁸ Rich 16-17.

³⁹ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock. Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology (London and

Alphabet, Exergue and Diary (Fig 3.3.23), she represented the process of her son learning the alphabet in school and the transformation of her feelings. This document proves that human behaviour, language expression, gender identity, are all related to the environment in which we live or learn; moreover, it clearly reveals the inferior situation of a mother. She wrote, "...the school becomes the site of a struggle for 'possession' of the child; it is a struggle the mother always loses and it is this sense of 'loss' which produces a specific form of subordination for the woman in her capacity as the mother/housewife."⁴⁰ She was determined not to use self-image in the document to avoid the body of a mother being an object to gaze upon. This method has been recognised as a kind of self-portrait by the feminist historian, Frances Borzello. She said, "Since neither of these works hides the maker's identity and since both are concerned with the appearance and feelings of their makers, they can surely be considered self-portraits."⁴¹



Fig 3.3.23 Mary Kelly, Post-Partum Document, Documentation VI: Prewriting Alphabet, Exergue and Diary, 1978, 15 Units, resin and slate, 11×14 ins. (each). Arts Council of Great Britain collection. The image on the left is part of the display in the exhibition. The one on the right shows the detail of Mary Kelly's documentation. On each slate, the upper part is her son's handwriting practice; the middle is the mother's handwriting, recording the child's progress; the lowest is the mother's typed diary, recording her worries and the changes taking place during the time the child went to school.

Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) 163.

⁴⁰ Mary Kelly. Post-Partum Document (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999) 169.

⁴¹ France Borzello. Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self-portraits (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998) 171-172.

In my Artwork 6: Mother's Box (Fig 3.3.24), I applied a similar practice to Mary Kelly's self-representation. Without emphasising or using the image of myself, I tried to store my poems, diaries, photo-diaries and used objects in the cube boxes, each of which had to be opened in a different way. The aim was to express my feelings, observations and introspections during motherhood.



Fig 3.3.24 (Middle) Hsiao-Ching Wang, Artwork 6: Mother's Box in the exhibition. The blue box is the Pregnancy Box; the red box is the Growing Box. (Left) Experiencing the Pregnancy Box during the exhibition. (Right) Exploring the Growing Box with an audience.

In the first container of the Artwork 6, Pregnancy Box, I designed several interior sections and placed six different kinds of document inside it. For example, the section Muffled Murmur (Fig 3.3.25) is one of the documents formed into a number of tubes. There are eight steps of the pregnant murmur diaries, each of them installed differently in eight medical test tubes and sealed by bandage-like stoppers. In this way, I wanted to reveal the negative and oppressive experience of pregnancy that was ignored by male authority at the hospital, the university and so on... with no great concern for my welfare, my feelings were treated as 'murmurs' and regarded as petty and insignificant. Therefore, I tried to promote a willingness to explore, through the action of carefully opening the tubes and reading the texts. The specific maternal experience should be seen as an enriched treasure for understanding the mother.



Fig 3.3.25 Hsiao-Ching Wang, detail of the Pregnancy Box (which is the first box of Artwork 6: Mother's Box). Muffled Murmur is a document in eight tubes. Each tube contains different designs of texts that record the different negative feelings in different steps of pregnancy.

In the second container, Growing Box (Fig 3.3.26), I installed selected parts of my photo diary and some meaningful objects from the early period of my son's growth, which were arranged in specific ways. I attempted to create an adventurous and touchable environment for the audience so that they could imagine my experience of caring for, playing with, learning, and educating my son through the processes of searching, touching, playing and generally tidying up the items in the box. In a similar way to the Pregnancy Box, I provide a viewing activity to stimulate the audience to experience my motherhood in person, through the specific arrangement and installation of the meaningful material items I placed in the boxes, but without reference to self-images. Moreover, by dealing with these items systematically and variously, I attempted to reveal the knowledge and expertise of a mother as a plentiful treasure that is always suppressed or ignored in the

domestic sphere, and to break the stereotype of a mother as an ignorant, inferior, and dependent figure without any connection to creativity.

Mary Kelly's Post-Partum Document and my Mother's Box both directly highlight the importance status of controlling interpretation. By not emphasising self-images, we extend the diversity and possibility of self-portraiture without the interference of the male gaze which conventionally treats mothers and women as objects.



Fig 3.3.26 Hsiao-Ching Wang, detail of the Growing Box (which is the second box of Artwork 6: Mother's Box). There are nine different documents in the box.

C. Breaking the conventional stigmatisation of the mother's body through the self-body image

Through the process of pregnancy, giving birth, and bearing children, the dramatic change in the maternal body and the experience of motherhood transform a woman's inner thinking. However, because of cultural limitations, this important experience of the female body becomes an invisible, private matter and difficult to share frankly in public. Moreover, there is a universal fear of being unable to guarantee that the new life is safe and healthy. The maternal body, which bears the hope of a new life and also the potential for crisis, is regarded as responsible and, in Taiwan, is subject to many superstitions intended to ward off poor health or premature death.⁴² For example, pregnant Taiwanese women are forbidden to use scissors, to attend funerals, to hammer a nail, or to move furniture within the home. If they ignore these prohibitions their baby will have a harelip, develop a serious illness, arrive prematurely or die due to a miscarriage. Subject to these superstitions and responsibilities, the maternal body assumes a mysterious and ugly imagery.⁴³ Such taboos mean that people dare not touch or talk about the body in their daily lives, and do not represent it in the arts. Given the reality of the negative treatment of the mother's body, together with the personal maternal experience of uncomfortable pregnancy symptoms, painful labour, changes in the body and the busy lifestyle of caring for a child, a woman is likely to detest her body, accept her fate, and give up the self; she is then likely to become a selfless mother who conforms to patriarchal expectations. This is why I have attempted to expose the crucial bodily experience of being a mother and have resisted the stigma of the maternal body through art. I have used the self-body image to achieve this, referring to other Western mother artists and my own experience.

Karen Ingham's photograph, Self as Madonna of the '90s (Fig 3.3.27), questions the taboos associated with the 'bad' mother who does not sacrifice everything to maternal responsibility and continues to maintain her job and enjoy her sexual

⁴² Huan-Yue Liu, A-Chao Chen and Chin-Fung Chen (劉還月, 陳阿昭, 陳靜芳). The Etiquette and Customs of Taiwanese People (Taipei: Formosa Folkway, 2003) 216.

⁴³ The custom of confinement care is an obvious example of the ugly imagery of the maternal body in Taiwan. Because of lochia after giving birth, a mother is considered an extremely dirty figure in the month-long recuperation after childbirth. People believe her dirty body will stain and bring bad luck to others, so she must obey the rules and stay at home for one month. Liu 223.

life.⁴⁴ By constructing a contrary image of the Virgin Mary, she represented herself based on her actual experience as a mother from a woman's viewpoint. She treated her body as the subject by aggressively locating herself in the centre of the photograph. The intention to challenge the social demands on a mother of maternity, profession and sexuality are revealed by her wearing of a sexually revealing low-cut T-shirt and feminist ear-rings, as well as the gesture of holding a vibrator and baby's bottle and hanging a camera around her neck.



Fig 3.3.27 (Left) Karen Ingham, Self as Madonna of the '90s, 1996. Black & white photograph.
Fig 3.3.28 (Right) Gillian Melling, Me and My Baby, 1992. Oil on canvas, 122×137 cm. Photo courtesy Nicholas Treadwell Gallery, London.

Using such strong body expression to question the social definition of being a mother is a harsh but very efficient way to challenge oppression. However, a picture like Gillian Melling's Me and My Baby (Fig 3.3.28) is more positive and meaningful. The representation of her pregnant body not only expresses her dissent and breaks the stereotype, but also constructs a new contribution which extends the definition of 'mother' by combining the meaning of creation and procreation with full self-awareness. The confident gesture of the naked body and her proud smile confirm that she is no longer a traditional naked woman, always limited to the role of a passive object to be gazed upon. Through a new way of

⁴⁴ Ulrike Sieglöhr. Focus on the Maternal: Female Subjectivity and Images of Motherhood (London: Scarlet Press, 1998) 1.

seeing the self and the female body, she changed the relationship of passive nude female model and active male artist in the studio to a new definition; one of a woman artist who is active and creative. She has used her active view and representation of her own body to affirm that she is a self-determined woman artist celebrating her pregnant body with all her creative abilities. Briefly, she has created a new positive meaning of being a mother through self-body representation.



Fig 3.3.29 Propaganda and manuals for pregnant women and mothers in Taiwan.

Compared with the West, expressing the mother's body through visual representation violates the morality and the aesthetics of Taiwanese tradition. It is even considered inappropriate to see the mother as an erotic object. Therefore, most photographic representations of mothers in daily Taiwanese life use Western female models or only present part of the maternal body without showing the individual identity. This avoids the danger of humiliating the mother (see Fig 3.3.29). Most Taiwanese still feel, deep down, that the body of a mother is the private property of the family. Undoubtedly, representing body images in the public sphere means reducing the virtuous maternal body in charge of carrying on the bloodline to an object of sexual desire and destroying the image of the moral mother. Therefore, in traditional Taiwanese culture, there are many poems, articles,

boards and monumental gateways which praise the sacrifice of the Taiwanese mother but very few appear in visual media such as paintings and photographs.

From the 1980s, when Western feminist art was introduced by a group of Taiwanese women artists who had studied abroad and then returned, the concept of emphasising women's experience in art began to develop. In recent years, more young women artists have begun to challenge the oppression of women by the Taiwanese patriarchal culture, by representing their own body images in their artworks.⁴⁵ On the theme of the physical body, especially the pregnant body, most Taiwanese women artists including myself, have decided to praise it through metaphor or the abstract to avoid emphasising the individual. For instance, during 1999-2000, I used metaphor to connect the concept of women's creativity and the maternal body through the imagery of conkers (Fig 3.3.30). However, having become a mother, I found that to avoid facing up to the physical maternal body was like having an itch on the inside of one's shoe. The intimate relationship between the self and the maternal bodily experience was being taken apart by bashfulness and guilt with regard to facing the body in Taiwanese culture. In 2000/2001, this disunited embarrassment was revealed strongly and obviously, when I pursued the self whilst undergoing dramatic and uncomfortable bodily changes during my own pregnancy, labour, and confinement. Regardless of fear or depression, only by facing and discovering truthfully the feelings of the maternal body – which used to be suppressed by society – can the self exist strongly and produce power. Marsha Meskimmon said, "To be represented, visually or verbally, is to be seen, to have a voice, to make a claim for recognition and power."⁴⁶ Therefore, representing the self, especially the maternal body (previously misrepresented in Taiwanese patriarchal society) is a political method of gaining the power to reverse the plight of the selfless and silent mother.

⁴⁵ Ming-Huei Yan (嚴明惠), Chia-Rui Qu (曲家瑞), Chin-Yi Lin (林欣怡), and Huei-Ching Hsu (許惠晴), are representative artists who use self-body images to challenge the Taiwanese patriarchal culture. Lu 207-210.

⁴⁶ Meskimmon 154.



Fig 3.3.30 (Upper-right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, Conker No. 4, 1999. Oil & acrylic on canvas. 97x97 cm.

Fig 3.3.31 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, the first photograph (layer) of The Mother as a Creator, Black & white photographic image and oil on canvas, 2001.

Fig 3.3.32 (Lower-right) Monica Sjöo, God Giving Birth, 1969. Oil on canvas. The picture was based on the artist's experience both as a physical mother and her belief in the Cosmic Mother, the creator of all life on earth.

In the first layer of The Mother as a Creator (Fig 3.3.31), I combine ideas on questioning the social definition of a mother (in the same way as Karen Ingham) and redefining it, from the point of view of being depressed in procreation to the status of creativity (as in Gillian Melling's work). Moreover, I used my upside-down writing (which says "My Belly My Baby" and is followed by my signature) from a subjective visual angle to announce the right of the self in creating and possessing both the artwork and the child. Instead of applying the strategies of inviting sexual interest or revealing the sexual desires of the female, which were often used by Taiwanese women artists, I depicted a determined posture with an insistent expression in the eyes to present a dignified pregnant body. These signify approval of the body and the status of mother, and challenge conventional stigmas through the approach of the artist creating the artworks. Because of my personal

experience of being regarded as worthless in the patriarchal medical system and unable to find the affirmation of the maternal body in Taiwanese visual art, I designed a special red, throne-like chair to promote the maternal body. My aim was similar to Monica Sjöö's God Giving Birth (Fig 3.3.32); to interpret a mother as a deity or a creator who creates all human life.⁴⁷ Apart from revealing my background as a painter previously, the way to use a brush to paint actively on the photographic image is in order to emphasise my honest pregnant feeling of being oppressed and ignored: "Why do you still not see and understand that my body is proceeding with a great creation?"⁴⁸



Fig 3.3.33 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Relative Measure No. 1, 2001-2003.

The fact of giving birth to a new life from my body and the intimate relationship between my son and my body in early motherhood made me re-examine and reinterpret the self and body during growth. I tried to represent this change in a series of images. For example in Relative Measure No. 1 (Fig 3.3.33), I use my body as a standard for measuring the process of growth and change between the new life created by my body and myself. In these images, I focused purposely on my belly, adopting a stance inspired by my experience of motherhood, which prevents sexual reverie on the female body by the viewer. Bearing in mind the concepts that the pregnant body is disagreeable to the sight, and that in Taiwanese culture the maternal body cannot be exposed, these photographic artworks, which express the candid and true experience of the maternal body by the self, can be recognised as pioneering in Taiwanese art. In attempting to

⁴⁷ Moira Vincentelli. "Monica Sjöö." Visibly Female, Feminism and Art Today: An Anthology. Ed. Hilary Robinson (London: Camden Press, 1987) 84.

⁴⁸ Hsiao-Ching Wang. Autobiography, 2003 (unpublished).

challenge the taboos, I realised that, whether with respect to motherhood or to creating art, the more I face frankly the body of the self, the more I develop my courage and opportunities to throw away the cultural bindings of being a mother. Moreover, after celebrating the values of creating life through the maternal body instead of being read as a 'carrier', I have more self-confidence to rediscover and develop the ability to create.

3.3.3 Summary

Self-representation is the first visual strategy developed out of the crucial experience of the loss of self during pregnancy and early motherhood. It is not only a new but also an efficient artistic method for dealing with the issue of motherhood in Taiwanese art. In this section, exploration of my artistic practice, together with relevant visual references, has proved that self-representation is a successful strategy for maintaining the creative identity of an artist during motherhood. By representing and asserting the self as a mother artist, the sense of self which is so essential might be maintained as a basic power to resist the social expectations of motherhood that require them to be selfless, silent figures and to sacrifice and hide themselves in the domestic sphere, taking care of the whole family.

This section has defined my position; by selecting the term self-representation instead of self-portrait/self-portraiture, I confront the conventional viewpoint and genre in art, which was determined by male artists and treats women as 'the second sex'. Use of the term self-representation reveals the main aim of this project, which is to establish a self and a creative identity as a mother artist by breaking down the boundaries of the conventional representation of selfless motherhood through the specific personal experience of motherhood and creating artwork within the Taiwanese culture.

There are three main modes and intentions of self-representation, as discussed. The first mode is recording the evidence of being present in motherhood, which allows the self to exist formally in motherhood through the action of making a record, the evidence itself, and reviewing that evidence. Also, it allows a woman to understand

more clearly the situation of being a mother. The second mode is grasping the right to interpret the self and to break the stereotype. This is achieved using three main methods: emphasising the importance of the right to interpret the self; self-interpretation of painful motherhood; and interpreting the self without using self-images. This mode aims to develop the diverse and creative representation of motherhood from the specific viewpoint of a mother artist, by regaining the right to interpret self and motherhood. The third mode is to break the conventional stigmatisation of the mother's body through the self-body image. By revealing the most intimate experiences of the maternal body in bearing a child, the power of creativity is discovered through the connection between creating a new life and works of art.

In conclusion, the process of practicing self-representation allowed me to regain my own self and to depart from the limitations of being defined as 'other' in the traditional definition of motherhood. Moreover, it allowed me to create a new direction for representing a diverse motherhood through particular and personal experience. In other words, it was essential to my finding the confidence to sustain my creative identity during motherhood, and enabled me to move from a state of negative selflessness to one of positive creativity.

3.4 The strategy of the family photograph

The family photograph is the second visual strategy I used to sustain my creative identity during motherhood. I attempted to reveal the importance of a Taiwanese mother, maintaining her self-determination in the domestic sphere, by analysing the transition in her appearance in family photographs. Furthermore, I tried to rediscover motherhood through the application of family photographs in art. This development, which combines motherhood in the domestic sphere and art in public, provided a new maternal visual language based on my practice. I also examine here three aspects of the family photograph – the function of self-censorship, the characteristics of interaction and cooperation, and the concept of sharing a family album – to explain how this strategy helps an artist to sustain her creative identity during motherhood.

3.4.1 The transition of the mother's appearance in family photographs

Photography originally replaced paintings for the very rich, but is now increasingly popular for recording special family events, and portraying individual members at important moments in their lives. Julia Hirsch in her book of Family Photographs indicated that,

A family photograph contains at least two people, though it may contain a score. Physical features are an essential clue to kinship...it plays a large part in the history of ideas which first defined the individual, and then the secular family, as artistic subjects...Family photography is not only an accessory to our deepest longings and regrets; it is also a set of visual rules that shape our experience and our memory.⁴⁹

Using these 'visual rules', the structure of the family and their relationships can be analysed. This section discusses who is of primary or secondary importance in the photograph, and which is the unimportant member who is always invisible. In the

⁴⁹ Julia Hirsch. Family Photographs: Content, Meaning and Effect (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 3,10,13.

following I examine the transition of the mother's appearance in family photographs and reveal the change in status of Taiwanese mothers when photography enters normal family life.

Formality and photographic recommendations dating back to the early 1900s dictated that, due to her low status in the family, the mother should not be visually represented as an individual in Taiwanese family photographs. She was either not present at all, or was to be found only in the background. Before 1940 when photographic equipment was very expensive and professional operating skills were needed, most family photographs were commissioned by a few rich families and were taken at professional photographic studios.⁵⁰ At that time, having family photographs symbolised high position and great wealth. Hsu, Chi-Lin (許綺玲), a scholar of Taiwanese family photography, indicated that family photographs in Taiwan were structured from the viewpoint of a person who was not a member of the family and their purpose was to broadcast the family's reputation to others.⁵¹ In other words, it was a very convenient medium for establishing a reputation through representative images of the whole family, but was controlled by the family itself.

When photography could only be afforded by rich families, there was no opportunity for Taiwanese mothers to visit the studio and become part of family photographs. Their unprivileged status and tradition forbade women from showing their faces in public.⁵² As my aunt commented,

In my childhood, my mother and all four of my sisters had no chance to have family photographs taken; only my father and two brothers went. My father thought taking a picture was expensive and it was a waste to spend money on females.

⁵⁰ Before 1920 there were only a few photographers working in studios in Taiwan. From 1920 to 1945 some amateurs and small groups of photographers appeared. From: Jia-Bao Wu (吳嘉寶). "A Short History of Taiwan Photography." Three Photographic Perspectives—Hong Kong, Mainland China, Taiwan. Ed. Wong Wo Bik and Sinsee Ho (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 1994) 3-4.

⁵¹ Chi-Lin Hsu (許綺玲). "Looking for Our Ancestors through a Broken Mirror?: Rebirth or Diversion of Family Albums in Taiwan." Chung-Wai Literary Monthly. Vol. 29.2 (Jul 2000): 83.

⁵² From an interview about family photographs with my Aunt Ching Wang (汪清) (age: 65). Wang, Ching. Personal interview. 2 Jan. 2003.

The absence of mothers in formal family photographs reveals that only males were considered honourable members of the family. It also shows that a mother, as a very important contributor to the family, was treated unfairly as a nameless, selfless and invisible person. Formal Taiwanese style family photographs, such as the one in the image (Fig 3.4.1), do not appear often, but they were typical of family photographs of the time. This picture shows that the family were relatively well off and flourishing, with members in various generations. Possibly the nameless mother was given her first chance to appear formally because of the photograph's aim, which was to reveal the prosperity of the family. This kind of family photograph at least allowed Taiwanese mothers to visually express her individual appearance and existence.



Fig 3.4.1 This photograph was taken in the early 1900s, New Port, Taiwan, Anonymous.

However, the style of this family photograph follows the typical conventional patriarchal structure. The eldest father sits on an armchair at the centre of his family, representing solemnity in the middle of the picture. The male family members sit or stand on his right side and the female members and children are to the left. In Chinese culture, the right side of the image represents formal superiority and the left side is the opposite. The family member with the highest status is sitting nearest to the father and the one with the lowest is standing furthest away from him. The two young men standing between the patriarch and main door of the house have the honour of carrying on the bloodline of the family.

Although mothers are not always absent in twentieth century photographs, male photographers and important male members of the family still strictly apply the concepts of patriarchy.

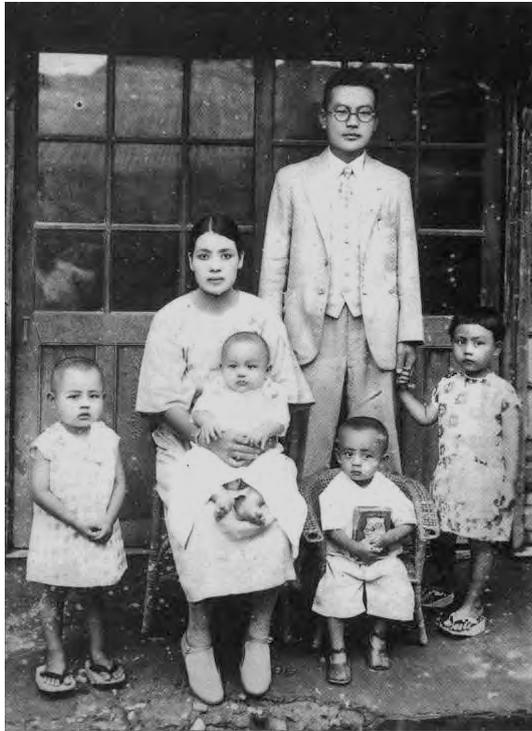


Fig 3.4.2 Po Lin (林波, the father in the image), Lin's Family Photograph, 1941. The formal style of family photography.



Fig 3.4.3 Yin-Chi Lin (林英治, father), Mother Chu-Mei Wang Helps her Son to Take a Bath (母親王淑美幫兒子洗澡), 1971. The candid style of family photography.

In the mid-twentieth century, besides professional photographers, there were a number of wealthy amateurs who treated photography as a hobby in their leisure time.⁵³ Therefore, the style of family photographs began to develop from the formal, produced in a photographic studios, to the more 'candid photography' of the snapshot.⁵⁴ After this, more and more fathers took up photography, and mothers became an object on whom they could practice their photographic skills. In this way, there were growing opportunities for them to become a part of the image. In the formal family photograph taken by Po Lin in 1941 (Fig 3.4.2), the mother's status is improved through her position at the centre; the most important area of the picture, inferior only to the father. The candid family photograph taken by Yin-Chi Lin in 1971 (Fig 3.4.3), clearly presents the mother at the centre, as the most important figure, and has broken the strict rule that in family photographs the father should be represented as the most significant person. Although still an object to be captured and depicted as a selfless figure holding her child, the phenomenon of a mother appearing naturally in front of the camera seems to reveal that her absolute secondary status in Taiwanese families had been lost.

In the 1980s, because of the popularity in Taiwan of compact cameras with auto focus systems and express photo shops, most families frequently used the camera to record their family life. It could be said that family photography, replacing traditional Chinese needlework as a hobby, became for Taiwanese mother, the most accessible visual artistic medium of domestic life. In the past, Chinese needlework was the only kind of visual art encouraged and regarded as suitable for women. Women who were able to embroider exquisite and beautiful patterns, in addition to the basic skills of mending clothes, were respected as virtuous women. Needlework was the most popular artistic activity for women; however, it was only classified as folk art. More recently, with the rapid development of the clothes industry and gender equality, it is no longer necessary for women to learn these skills. The requirement for women to practice needlework no longer exists. Given this situation, with the exception of processing and developing films and enlarging photographs in dark rooms, mothers

⁵³ Before 1970, Taiwan was still an undeveloped country. With a struggling economy, cameras were classified as toys for the young in very rich families. Most families would not allow their children to become interested in photography which was considered a spendthrift's pastime. From Wu 14.

⁵⁴ Julia Hirsch distinguished between family photographs of two main styles: formal and candid. From: Hirsch 15.

have joined in with most activities in family photography and play a crucial role in taking snaps, being photographed, deciding on the size of enlargement, putting family albums in order and choosing the means of display. From their absence in front of the lens to controlling the photograph itself, mothers have developed a closer relationship with the photographic image of themselves than with any other visual art medium. This provides them with a greater opportunity to develop and demonstrate their self-determination.⁵⁵



Fig 3.4.4 Chung-Bin Wang (王振斌, father), The First (一級棒), 2001. The candid style of family photography.

In most Taiwanese family photographs of the last ten years, mothers are still cast in the role of 'the photographed'; however, they are no longer there simply to be captured as passive objects. For example, in the photograph taken by Chung-Bin Wang (Fig 3.4.4), the mother is an active subject, expressing the way she wants to be looked at, with complete self-awareness. Through her gesture and self-confident facial expression, she affirms herself, her daughter and the relationship between them.

⁵⁵ Before 2000, only a few women photographers concentrated their artwork in the area of family photographs. Compared with their male counterparts, these professional photographers who are mothers and whose work includes the family, include Dorothea Lange, Diane Arbus and Sally Mann who tend to pay more attention to the theme of the family and even express it as a fusion of life and art. From: Chi-Lin Hsu (許綺玲). "Photographic Practice, Family, Women: Thinking the Role and Establishing the Appearance." The Journey of Female Mind/Spirit. Ed. Ying-Ying Chien (Taipei: Fambooks, 2003) 401.



Fig 3.4.5 Fish Bear (an anonymous mother), My Child and I, 12 Jun 2006. A self-portrait by a mother, the candid style of family photography.



Fig 3.4.6 Monica Wang, My Son Eric is in His 4th Week – I am tired already Mommy, 24 Jan 2001. A self-portrait by a mother, the candid style of family photography.

In Taiwan, digital cameras have become the most popular gifts for Mother's Day,⁵⁶ which proves that mothers' status has been promoted from passive photographic object to positive image controller. These contemporary mothers have equalled the role of the father by gaining the right to photograph their families. Moreover, some young mothers are not satisfied to be pure photographers and wish to appear themselves, as the main protagonists in their family records. For example, in the picture taken by Fish Bear (Fig 3.4.5), the mother expressed her sweet, close

⁵⁶ It was reported in Cheers Magazine that Taiwanese mothers no longer see only fathers as photographers - playing with their traditional single lens cameras. Women have their own compact digital alternatives, with very simple operations, for photographing whatever concerns them. From: Chen Hong Shi (石振弘). "It Is the Time to let Mothers Enjoy the Digital Life Style!" Cheers Magazine. May 2004. <<http://www.cheers.com.tw/content/046/046044.asp>>.

relationship with her child by photographing her own foot and that of her child touching together. The photograph of Monica Wang (Fig 3.4.6), uses self-portrait to clearly record her excitement at catching her child yawning. These two kinds of self-portrait have broken the boundaries of the conventional representation of mothers in Taiwanese family photographs. However, they are still limited to the stereotype of a mother as a gentle, soft person looking after her child, without emphasising her individuality or personality.

In fact, family photography has become a popular and universal medium for recording family life and, when compared with other kinds of photography, has produced the largest quantity of material.⁵⁷ Since photography was introduced to Taiwan, the involvement of mothers in family photographs has changed; from their complete absence from the picture; to their inclusion as passive objects; to their presence as a subject with a level of self-awareness; to operating the camera themselves; to the use of, and popularisation of photo shops; and finally with regard to the promotion of women's status.

The Taiwanese mother who was deprived of her subjective personality and hidden in the domestic sphere, has regained her individual identity little by little, from the general collective description in family photographs, through the unprecedented transition from object to subject. The conventional image and the traditional hierarchy of a mother in the family, have been undermined. Family photographs are evidence of this transition and provide an efficient way for mothers to sustain the self and to promote their status in the domestic sphere.

3.4.2 Rediscovering motherhood by utilising family photographs in art

In recent years, a group of Asian artists has begun to use family photographs as a political visual strategy for complaining that some domestic issues are always hidden or ignored by society. For example, in the work Standard Family (Fig 3.4.7), Chinese artist Jinsong Wang photographed 200 different one-child families in front of a red

⁵⁷ Chi-Lin Hsu (許綺玲). "Looking for Our Ancestors through a Broken Mirror?: Rebirth or Diversion of Family Albums in Taiwan." *Chung-Wai Literary Monthly*. Vol. 29.2 (Jul 2000): 70.

background and assembled them into an enormous wall-filling photomontage. These imposing family photographs not only examine the standard family in China, but also reveal his serious worries about the impact of the one-child policy on Chinese social structure and development.⁵⁸ Similarly, I tried to utilise family photographs as a visual strategy for exploring and rediscovering Taiwanese motherhood in my artworks.



Fig 3.4.7 Jinsong Wang, Standard Family (detail), 1996. 200 Colour Photographs.

I purposely use the strategy of family photographs in my artworks of motherhood to connect the important Taiwanese cultural background to the close relationship of a mother with family photography that has been discussed in the previous section. As a professional artist, I attempt to further expand the boundaries of representing motherhood. Moreover, I plan to sublimate the daily life of motherhood in art and to represent it in the public sphere to uncover the issue of motherhood that is suppressed in the private or domestic sphere and is generally ignored in public art.

In order to express further the subjective personality of a mother and indicate the limited concept of motherhood in family photographs, I have developed a form of artwork in which family photographs and self-portraits coexist (See Artwork 1:

⁵⁸ Annelie Lütgens. "Of Spiritual Happiness and Material Knowledge: Notes on a Western Appraisal of the New China and its Photography." *The Chinese: Photography and Video from China*. Ed. Susanne Köhler, Annelie Lütgens and Anja Westermann (Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2004) 21.

Depressed Pregnancy, Artwork 3: Relative Measure, Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height and Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator). In the third photograph of Artwork 5 (Fig 3.4.8), I show that a mother can play an active role in interpreting family images. This photograph expresses my inner thoughts, which stem from my experience as a mother artist, that both the artistic profession and motherhood share a similar meaning: continuous creation by an active mind and body.



Fig 3.4.8 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The third photograph of Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator, 2003. Black & white photograph. 80x119 cm.

The following explains three main concepts, developed out of the experience of creating artworks of motherhood using family photographs, which help to sustain creative identity.

A. Using family photographs as a visual source to examine the self during motherhood

In the quiet of the night after a fatiguing and complicated day, I often view alone the still moments of my family life in photographs, or on the screen of my computer.

These family photographs, frozen in the past time, show the strong affection and bliss that exists between my child and myself in an atmosphere which is separate from actual life. All the tension and displeasure caused by my child's crying and noise, and the tedious and annoying housework involved in motherhood which I wanted to escape, become a bitter-sweet background which I can recall again and again through these photographs. The delight of motherhood was heightened by the actuality and reality of family photographs and the replacement within them of original time. I borrowed this fascinating appreciation of viewing family photographs from Roland Barthes', whose term 'the photographic ecstasy' I believe describes it well. In his words, "...obliging the loving and terrified consciousness to return to the very letter of Time: a strictly revulsive movement which reverses the course of the thing, and which I shall call, in conclusion, the photographic *ecstasy*."⁵⁹

The strong maternal feeling of 'ecstasy' coming from this kind of visual representation is key for me in utilising family photographs as a crucial form for my motherhood artworks. Family photographs became my visual diary and an important visual resource for creating my art. The act of recording, recalling and creating these tiny, diverse and changeable personal feelings in myself as a mother, meant that my motherhood was not longer an unworthy weakness eroded by tedious and annoying chores. It became a treasure which let me appreciate again the existence of the self.

Family photographs symbolise the process of life and the love holding together every family member; moreover, they become an important medium for examining the self. These still and lasting images come to represent daily life as a story that family members can easily recognise. They also represent changes in the family, and help to develop a clear self-identity. As Julia Hirsch pointed out in her book, Family Photographs,

It (photography) allows us to see ourselves in a more permanent form than in Narcissus's pool, or in Snow White's mirror; and it enables us to control the

⁵⁹ Roland Barthes. Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography. Trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage. 2000 (1980)) 119.

circulation of our faces in ways never dreamed of in the archetypal stories of self-love and self-awareness.⁶⁰

However, most family photographs display a superficial appearance of happiness and celebration, hiding much of the truth, as well as representing the patriarchal hierarchy of the family. I tried to reduce these blind spots, and to further develop other advantages of family photographs. For example, in Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy (Fig 3.4.9) I express the uncomfortable truth of suffering during my pregnancy, replacing the stereotype of happy family photographs. Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height (Fig 3.4.10) and Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator (Fig 3.4.11) reflect my desire to regain the rights of a mother. In these ways I aim to challenge the patriarchal structure of traditional family photographs.



Fig 3.4.9 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy, and extracts in detail, 2000. Colour photographs.



Fig 3.4.10 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height, 2002-2005. Colour photographs.

⁶⁰ Hirsch 10.



Fig 3.4.11 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator, 2001-2005. Black & white photographs.

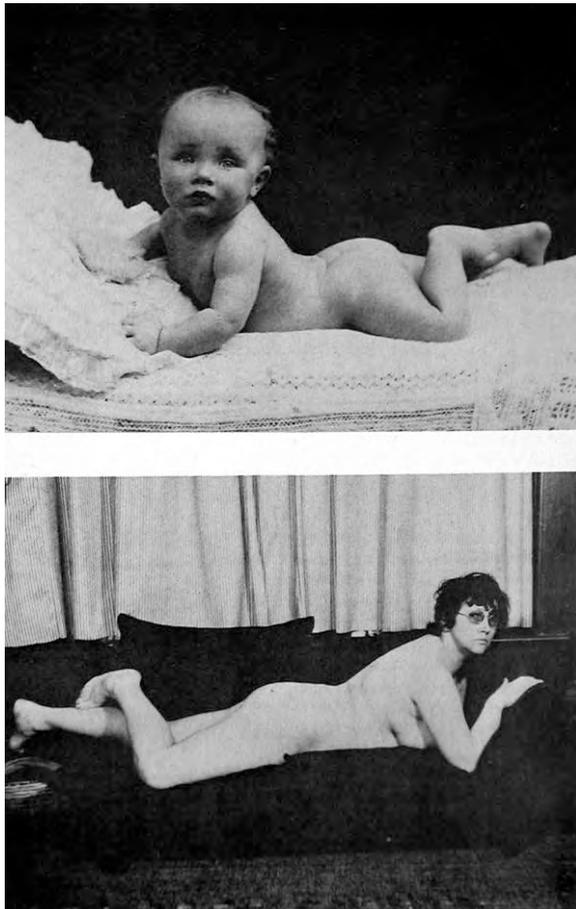


Fig 3.4.12 Jo Spence, As a Baby and 528 Months Later, (taken by high street photographer Woodford, and Jo Spence/Terry Dennett) 1939-1979.

In her exhibition, Beyond the Family Photograph, held at the Hayward Gallery in 1979, Jo Spence also used the family photograph to investigate her own family, her class background, and what it means to be a woman.⁶¹ In one of her works As a Baby and 528 Months Later (Fig 3.4.12), she uses early family photographs to

⁶¹ Jo Spence. Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political Personal and Photographic Autobiography (Seattle: The Real Comet press, 1988 (1986)) 82.

examine and rework her own past as a baby, in an attempt to re-experience and question the way other people viewed her and structured her identity. Comparing the sharp assertion in the eyes of the re-photographed image to the innocent expression in the original baby photograph, she challenges the way she is viewed and the role of being a 'passive' model in a family photograph. She suggested that,

If we can begin to understand the roots of self-censorship (learnt within the domination of the child by family, schooling, peer groups, doctors, the various forms of media and the state), we will be able to trace all the ways in which we watch ourselves and continually block off what we 'really want to say'... Photography – in particular photography – helped me here and I now have an amazing visual map of my psychic and social history.⁶²

Given the lack of pregnant women in Taiwanese family photographs, in Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy (Fig 3.4.9), I tried to combine the passive characteristic of a model and the powerlessness of a pregnant woman. After allowing myself to be photographed, as a pregnant woman in a passive position, I actively displayed these 'unworthy' images of pregnancy in a public exhibition. By revealing myself as a pregnant woman in an unprivileged situation, I questioned the fact that Taiwanese society often disregards the dark side of pregnancy and denies the self. These unhappy, weak, disordered and overlooked images are like a mirror, unequivocally reflecting the truth of a woman losing her self. Through these images I was better able to understand the reality of loss and this urged me to explore the plight of mothers in Taiwanese culture and to be concerned about the conflicting identities of mother and artist.

The first image of Artwork 4 (Fig 3.4.13) was found almost accidentally amongst family photographs. It is a happy snapshot recording the first time my son walked on the low wall around the front yard of our home; however, it shows something which still piques me; my son and I are 'the same height'. Visually, this evoked conflicting feelings rooted in the delightful expectation of growing up during my own childhood, and in the low status of women in the family. In other words, the more I felt happy

⁶² Jo Spence. Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 104-105.

about my growth, the more I felt pain at becoming a woman. When I realised that I was still emotionally concerned about unfair treatment within the family, I began to develop the artwork, My Son and I at the Same Height (Fig 3.4.10). Through the long-term process of recording our images at the same height, I hope, as my son grows, to be able to keep us both aware of the importance of respecting others.



Fig 3.4.13 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The first image of Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height, 24 Aug 2002, in front of our rented home at Hove Park Villas. Colour photograph.

B. Undermining the subject/object in photography through the intimate relationship between family members

Susan Sontag said, “To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power.”⁶³ She also considered the movement of photography as a kind of ‘safari’ and described “the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder.”⁶⁴ During this ‘soft form of murder’, the photographer turns the people or things photographed into symbolic appropriations.

⁶³ Susan Sontag. On Photography (London: Penguin, 1979(1977)). 4.

⁶⁴ Sontag 14-15.

In other words, the photographic safari establishes the relative powers of the photographer and model, fixing, in an unchangeable way, the active subject and the passive object.

Jo Spence indicated that there is an unequal transaction in the relationship between photographer and photographed object. She said, "Unless photography...is reciprocal then there will always be an imbalance of power."⁶⁵ Candid family photography, however, especially the snapshot, unfastens this fixed relationship through the intimate cooperation of family members. For example, "Come on! Take a picture for us. A half-length portrait", is typical of the kind of interchange which takes place in the family when someone wants to be photographed in a particular position and with specific elements in the background. With the help of compact cameras with auto focus systems, the photographer may only be a simple and passive assistant who presses the shutter under orders. Because of this loose relationship between photographer and models in family photography, the role of photographer is no longer restricted to the person who takes the picture by pressing the shutter of the camera. The definition of photographer could be extended to mean a director or architect who mainly directs the teamwork within the project. For example, in Jo Spence's self-portrait projects, she led the collaborated works and let her partners or friends photograph her in order to explore herself within some specific political issue. In a similar way, whether or not I pressed the shutter in my photographic works of motherhood, I always treated myself as a photographer under this newer definition when directing and handling the whole process of photography and creation. From my experience, although the person helping me to press the shutter is not the leader, deciding who should do this job is a crucial point in completing a successful photograph. I found that my husband, who has an ability to understand the role of women/mothers from the point of view of women, was the most suitable person to collaborate with me. Moreover, because of the sense of intimacy, understanding and trust between the three of us, my son and I were able to act naturally in front of the camera as this was still part of the daily life of our family.

⁶⁵ Jo Spence. "Questioning Documentary Practice?" Jo Spence: Beyond the Perfect Image. Photography, Subjectivity, Antagonism. (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2005) 376-383.

The intimate relationship between members of the family means that there are still many ways to cooperate and also many ways of shifting between the role of photographer and photographed. In these images (Fig 3.4.14-3.4.16), taken by Sally Mann, Esther Haase and Donna Ferrato, the subject of the photograph is ambiguous, irrespective of who asked, who received, who declined to have their photograph taken and who was actually in the picture. From the experience of motherhood, I felt this ambiguous characteristic was similar to the relationship between mother and child. Therefore I tried to utilise similarly unfixed power in creating the artworks of motherhood. I did this in order to develop a new visual form and to release the passive mothers' stereotype of conventional representation by cooperatively sharing the power of models and photographers.



Fig 3.4.14 (Left) Sally Mann, Emmet, Jessie, and Virginia, 1987. Black & white photograph.

Fig 3.4.15 (Middle) Esther Haase, Marlene, 2000. Black & white photograph.

Fig 3.4.16 (Right) Donna Ferrato, Fanny Said: "Stop It Mom! Leave Me Alone!!!", 1998. Black & white photograph.

In Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator, by playing the role of photographer and at the same time being photographed, I have broken the conventional fixed relationship between photographic subject and object. Moreover, I used the experience of cooperation between mother and child, to encourage my son to join in with the process of creating our photographs; to develop a new ethos, free from oppression, which fitted the concept of respect for one another. These ideals were realised, for example, through the small action of letting my one-year old son help me to press the extension shutter in the second photograph of Artwork 5 (Fig 3.4.17). In the fifth photograph (Fig 3.4.18) our collaboration was more significant. When my son was four he wanted to be like the cartoon figure Bob the Builder, so we discussed setting up my 2005 exhibition together.



Fig 3.4.17 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The second photograph of Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator, 2002. Black & white photograph.



Fig 3.4.18 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The fifth photograph of Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator, 2005. Black & white photograph.



Fig 3.4.19 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The fifth photograph of Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height, 2004.



Fig 3.4.20 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The seventh photograph of Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height, 2005.

The cooperation between mother and son is utilised more flexibly and casually in Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height. Whether searching for locations or choosing gestures, all processes were executed according to the new photographic concept of cooperation and the non-safari approach. In the fifth photograph of

Artwork 4 (Fig 3.4.19), I captured the, “come on, photograph us!”, look on my son’s face as he held my hand to walk on a low wall, and found a place to stand where we were both the same height. In the seventh photograph (Fig 3.4.20), taken in 2005, which was taken as a memento, my son put his hand on my shoulder and said “Mummy is my best friend” in front of our new home.

Although I am the person who orchestrated the activities in both of these artworks, I believe both the photographer and persons being photographed have important subjective roles due to their cooperation and respect for one another. In losing the fixed power between photographer and photographed, through cooperation, in these artworks I oppose the myth that the mother or female can only be a photographed object to be gazed upon. This approach also questions the prejudice that children are powerless and mothers are omnipotent in motherhood, as indicated by Marianne Hirsch.⁶⁶ Moreover, it breaks the rule that the eldest son has higher power than the mother in Taiwanese culture. Instead of grasping the power of photographers by determining and ‘hunting’ others through photography, a way of co-operation that inspires form the creative experience of mother/child developing a different symbol in the art of motherhood under the idea of creativity.

C. Unfolding the experience of motherhood by sharing family albums

Family photographs broke the tradition that the Taiwanese mother had no individual identity. Family albums go further, allowing the story of mother, which used to be ignored, to be shared between family members, offspring, friends, and even with strangers. However, in most families, the manipulator, behind the scenes and in charge of the work of tidying and editing the family albums, looking after the process from beginning to end, is a wife or mother.⁶⁷ Henri Peretz indicated that, “Traditionally it was the man of the family who took on the role of keeper of its collective memory, while it was primarily women who put together the albums as part of their home-making activities.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Marianne Hirsch. *Family Frames: Photography Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1997) 154-155.

⁶⁷ Claire Grey. “Theories of Relativity.” *Family Snaps: The Meaning of domestic Photograph*. Eds. Jo Soence and Patricia Holland (London: Virago, 1991) 107.

⁶⁸ Henri Peretz. “Facing One’s Own.” *Family: Photographers Photograph Their Families*. Ed. Sophie Spencer-Wood (London: Phaidon, 2005) 6.

In traditional Taiwanese culture, where men have supremacy, justice and rights are defined in the 'public sphere' which is also the male arena; the 'private sphere' specifically refers to domesticity, which is the women's domain.⁶⁹ Generally, the life of a traditional woman was limited to the domestic sphere, but the sharing of family albums opened up a legitimate means for women to advertise and to be proud of their world in the public. Although this way of evoking the voice of women still lacks power, it has blurred the clear and fixed boundary between private and public spheres. Owing to waves in women's self-awareness, those women who held the right to arrange their domestic images have gradually changed the contents of their family albums in the viewpoint of being women. Increasingly, the true lives and experiences of mothers, that used to be disregarded and suppressed in the private sphere, are placed consciously or unconsciously into family albums and are shared publicly with others. Today, many mothers represent their motherhood in their own family albums on the Internet and share and discuss them in the public sphere. This phenomenon means that the issues of motherhood are no longer hidden and that there is more opportunity for them to be deal with fairly.



Fig 3.4.21 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The process of opening and demonstration of the Growing Box. This box is one of the boxes in Artwork 6: Mother's Box, 2001-2005. Mixed media.

In order to promote this communication by mothers from inside to outside and to develop the possibility of exploring creativity in motherhood, I extend the meaning of opening family albums in Artwork 6: Mother's Box (Fig 3.4.21). This work is symbolic of the true experience that motherhood is hidden in a box (private sphere) but can become a shareable treasure when structured, presented and controlled by a

⁶⁹ Yu-Hsiu Liu (劉毓秀). "The Women's Policy: The Structure of Nation and the Institution of Democracy." Taiwan Association of University Professors. Nov 1999. <<http://taup.yam.org.tw/announce/9911/docs/31.html>>

self-conscious mother. I try to communicate publicly the wisdom and creativity inspired by motherhood through the process of opening, verbally introducing, and letting the audience touch the used things and maternal documents that I have collected and created. Motherhood is no longer a private issue limited to the domestic arena, when an audience is involved in the activities of listening to the artist and touching the document and objects in an altar-like box which they can open in a public exhibition.



Fig 3.4.22 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The design and installation of Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood in 2005. Mixed media.

In the exhibition, Picturing Motherhood, I installed a large chrisom structure for Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator (Fig 3.4.22). Not only did I apply the idea of opening family albums to let the audience into the private sphere (inside the structure) to experience the creativity of motherhood, I also combined the metaphor of the maternal body. This large structure, in a semi-open state, is symbolic of a mother struggling painfully, against the limitations of her body and inner fertile creativity, to produce (reproduce) something new from inside to out.

3.4.3 Summary

The close relationship of mothers with family photographs has been explored by analysing the transition of mothers' appearance in family photographs, and the action of making and sharing family albums. The improvement in compact cameras and the rise in women's consciousness have meant that family photography has replaced Chinese needlework and become the most universal visual artistic medium for Taiwanese mothers. In addition, the power hierarchy of family members has gradually changed to a fairer situation for mothers with regard to family photographs.

Emphasising this close relationship of mothers with family photographs against the Taiwanese cultural background, I further explored the possibility of applying the characteristic of family photographs to my art during my own motherhood. My artistic practice identified three important points which helped me to rediscover motherhood and supported my use of family photographs as a strategy for sustaining the creative identity. The first is using family photographs as a visual source to examine the self during motherhood; the second is undermining the subject/object in photography through intimate cooperation of mother and child; and the third is unfolding the experience of motherhood by sharing family albums. All have advantages for artists wishing to sustain their creative identity from the viewpoints of: maintaining the self through examining the self; developing a new form and symbol for artworks of motherhood through cooperation; and sharing family albums rooted in the experience of motherhood.

For me, combining the roles of mother and artist through family photographs was meaningful because it allowed me to pursue both the self and creativity. There has been a transition in the role of mothers from selfless and nameless invisible figures, to passive models, and finally to creative people who actively control their own representation.

3.5 The strategy of time sequencing

The third strategy for sustaining the creative identity of an artist during motherhood is 'time sequencing'. For me, and many mother artists, time is a very tangible and difficult thing to balance between motherhood and profession. This section explores the impact of time in motherhood and my response to it through artistic creativity. By exploring and applying the idea of maternal time in my artwork, I sought to rediscover and develop a new concept of time and new ways to express it, separate from social obligations and expectations.

Three main impacts of time in early motherhood are analysed: losing the right to control time, the gap in biological time between mother and child, and having insufficient time. Having used family photographs to record the growth and change in my son and myself over some time, I found that the negative impacts of time were not always a pressure for mothers and could actually become a source of nourishment, fostering the creativity in my art. It could be said that creating art is like motherhood, which involves long-term growth, step-by-step, alongside one's children. Achievement in both art and motherhood are constructed through the behaviours of persistence and accumulation, and by breaking through the limitations.

Therefore, to express the important concept of maternal time, I used my original work on recording my son's and my growth, but combined it with inspiration taken from contemporary ideas, the keywords for which are: long-term, continuity and accumulation. The strategy of time sequencing is developed and discussed as a response to time in three modes: time frozen during suffering; ordered time, from seconds, to months, to years; and random time sequences from memory. They are all explored, together with my artworks and relevant references, to examine the potential they have for achieving the aim of sustained creative identity during motherhood.

3.5.1 The impact of time in motherhood

From the first days of pregnancy, my relationship with time changed dramatically and, because it was difficult to control, this reduced my creativity. The impacts of losing the right to control time, the gap in biological time between mother and child, and having insufficient time, all tormented me. However, I realised that if the self excluded the conventional concept of the mother, who was seen as an obedient and selfless figure, the dilemma of time could provide an opportunity to foster creativity through the discovery of pure and specific maternal time, separate from social obligations and expectations.

In the early stages, I lacked the confidence to meet the aim of sustaining creative identity by applying maternal time in my artworks; but I knew that if I wanted to break through the limitation of time, I needed to understand and explore how it affected me as a mother. In the following, three main issues of motherhood are explored and analysed.

A. Losing the right to control time

My right to control time was suddenly lost in early motherhood, and the 'self' withered gradually to a lack of identity. After giving birth, I was immediately deprived of my right to control time by my baby and his persistent crying and demands. Being a breast feeder and supplier of all requirements, time was occupied fully by the little creature. Even some very private time, such as taking a shower or going to the toilet, was disturbed or compressed. Without enough quality rest and sleep, my body was too tired to complete the basic 'duty' of being a good mother, not to mention sustaining my artistic profession. Because of the biological binding of maternity, I, as an artist needing more time for myself, could no longer work freely in my art and my hands were handicapped by the baby.⁷⁰ Under the control of the baby, who was sometimes like the sweetest angel and sometimes like an afflicted devil, I started to doubt the possibility of sustaining my creative identity.

⁷⁰ My husband had done his best to join in with the childcare. However, biologically and psychologically, I, as a mother bound by breastfeeding, could not be like him; able to freely move away from parenthood for a while.

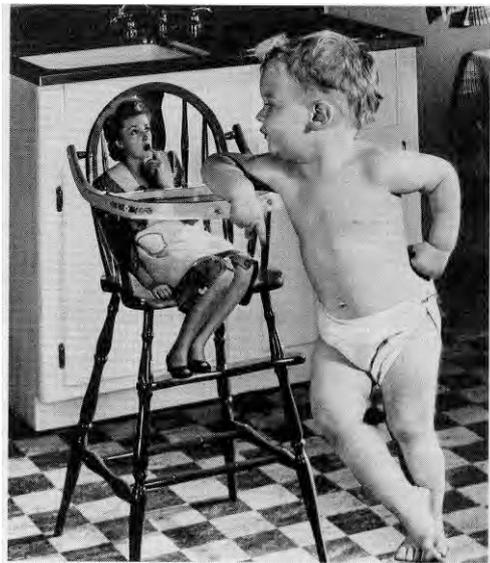


Fig: 3.5.1 Grancel Fitz, 1940s. Keih de Lellis Gallery, New York.

During parenthood, the mother's right to control time is easily destroyed, as shown in the image by Grancel Fitz (Fig 3.5.1). This picture represents the horror of a mother dominated by her child, especially in an isolated nuclear family.⁷¹ In this image, the imposing toddler indicates that he/she is in charge of the shrunken and vulnerable mother's time and space, and that he/she controls this through his/her needs and pleasure. Ute Ehrhardt suggested that the 'withered woman' is a universal phenomenon in the family because she is expected to give up her own time and space for others in the domestic sphere.⁷² Although the biological relationship between mother and child causes this inferiority, I understood that allowing the baby to have the power to dominate its mother is encouraged by society. I agreed with Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey and Meryle Mahrer Kaolan, that the whole of society educates a mother as a subject, instead of as a person, and this is the essential cause of a mother's fate in losing her right to control her own time.⁷³

⁷¹ Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey and Meryle Mahrer Kaolan. Representations of Motherhood (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994) 1.

⁷² Ute Ehrhardt. Gute Mädchen kommen in den Himmel, böse überall hin: Warum Bravsein uns nicht weiterbringt (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2000) S.212.

⁷³ Bassin, Honey and Kaolan 2.

B. The gap in biological time between mother and child

I was used to observing gradual changes in myself every year, two years or five years; but suddenly the dramatic change in my child's growth, counted in days and months during pregnancy and early motherhood, left me with a strong feeling that time was continuously taken up. The speed of his growth and the unceasing change in relationship between mother and child brought me many excitements. Sometimes the fast growth allowed me to forget the annoyance and exhaustion of busy motherhood, but sometimes it created a tension as I awaited orders and adapted to different routines in the child care cycle of exploring, setting up, disorder and putting right. It was not easy to find a break to escape the tension of the irregular timetable, not to mention carrying out the plan to sustain my artistic profession, if I wanted to be a 'good' mother.

With the motivation of recording the growth of my child, I used my photographic profession in motherhood and tried to maintain my vitality in creating art. However, given the speed of my child's growth, the slow progress of my artistic practice unexpectedly frustrated me. Although I have done my best to find time, in the short breaks in motherhood, to deal with the huge quantity of photographs taken during my son's growth and to construct my artworks, the feelings and ideas inspired by constant change urged me to frequently move on to new projects without waiting to finish the ones I had started. Therefore, there are many new and delayed projects waiting to be completed. At that time, the different biological timetables of mother and child disrupted my usual practice in creating art, and destroyed my initial motivation to develop the idea of celebrating and examining the development of my artworks. In this situation, whilst administering to the dramatic changes in, and needs of, my son, my ambition to sustain creative identity during motherhood began to waver.

C. Having insufficient time

Not having enough time is an experience which is typical of Taiwanese working mothers. Having insufficient and fragmented time in motherhood was also the biggest challenge I faced in carrying out my plan to sustain my creative identity. In 1928, Virginia Woolf indicated that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction," to maintain an independent state of economy and

mind.⁷⁴ In my opinion, if a mother wants to create art, in addition to the previous two requirements, she must frequently have a period of sufficient solitary time. Jacqueline Morreau (USA 1929-), who experienced crucial problems as a mother artist, mentioned that “The first need of an artist is solitude”; unfortunately, she had neither enough time nor sufficient opportunity during her motherhood.⁷⁵

Even though my husband shared the responsibilities of parenthood, since we were both PhD students it was still a luxury for me to have a short break without interruption, given my situation in charge of breastfeeding in a nuclear family without a stable income. The almost 24-hour maternal working cycle, servicing the baby as soon as it cried, was a permanent obstruction, preventing me from concentrating on my art and relevant research. Through sheer effort and hard work I did my best to cope, but fragmented, irregular, and insufficient time reduced my ambition and power to see them through. Unfortunately, due to the struggle with time, the gap in biological time between mother and child (previous mentioned), the continuous tension of wishing to do well in motherhood and to create art at the same time, my health, mind and confidence in sustaining a creative identity were seriously harmed.



Fig: 3.5.2 Illustration of a Taiwanese Working Mother in Cheers Magazine, 2004.

The conflict between motherhood and creating art was gradually transformed when my son broke his leg and, on several occasions, I fell ill. I realised that the concept of

⁷⁴ Virginia Woolf. A Room of One's Own (London: Penguin Books, 1945 (1928)) 6.

⁷⁵ Jacqueline Morreau. “The Divided Self.” The Fruits of Labour: Creativity, Self-expression and Motherhood. Ed. Penny Summer (London: Women's Press, 2001) 154.

being chased by time, and finding space from motherhood to make art was influenced by the obstinate Taiwanese expectation of being a 'good' working mother who deals well with both sides silently, and by herself. If she is unable to balance the two, she gives up one side to be a full-time mother.⁷⁶ A report and illustration (Fig: 3.5.2) in Cheers magazine pointed out the contemporary fate of Taiwanese working mothers who were likened to a candle burning at both ends. Fewer and fewer working women dare to give birth.⁷⁷ However, these accidents and illnesses reminded me that motherhood was a job which involved growing with the child; and the development of growth accumulated through my continual examination of every detail as I flexibly faced many uncontrolled events over a long period of time. The achievement of growth is impossible over the short term. In other words, if I persisted in adopting the same inflexible attitude, asking myself to work as in the past, producing artworks over a short period of time, I would undoubtedly be trapped into the plight of the 'good' working mother.

Jo Spence's photograph, Untitled (Fig 3.5.3), moved and enlightened me, prompting me to adopt a new attitude to time, given the conflict of motherhood and creating art. This photograph was taken shortly before her death by her former partner Terry Dennett. It is part of the unfinished Final Project: A Photo and Phototherapeutic Exploration of Life and Death. In this project she includes herself in the images in order to illustrate and help herself to understand the last journey of her life. She also attempts to make a personal, political and public statement by documenting her pain and illness to encourage others to confront their fears in similar situations. In this photograph she provided a description of her constant fight with breast cancer towards the end of her life. She represented herself with a resolute facial expression, her hand actively grasping the extension shutter. Her determination to look life in the face and to maintain her artistic practice until death by accumulating the experience of the whole of her life affected me strongly; it opened a window for me, and encouraged me to address the problem of time during motherhood. I understood that if I extended the period for creating art over my whole lifetime, the pressure owing to

⁷⁶ If a mother can not cope with both motherhood and a career, society tends to expect her to give up her job and to be a full-time mother. In recent years, increasing numbers of working women have escaped motherhood by avoiding giving birth or being 'holiday mothers', letting their children be taken care of by grand-parents, long-term baby-sitters or overseas servants.

⁷⁷ Chi-Fung Lu (盧智芳). "Taiwanese Women Want to Give Birth Less and Less: Working Mothers Can be Happier." Cheers Magazine. May 2004. <<http://www.cheers.com.tw/content/046/046052.asp>>

insufficient time would be reduced. This important change gave me an opportunity to re-appraise the overall situation and to seek out the cooperative relationship between motherhood and art; moreover, it highlighted for me the importance of creating artworks of motherhood during my lifetime. Consequently, I no longer see time as temporary. I can interpret the meaning of detail – during the long-term exertions of motherhood, and with the unperfected experience of being a mother – to generate a new viewpoint and become a meaningful source for the creation of art.



Fig 3.5.3 Terry Dennett, Untitled, 1992. Jo Spence on a 'good day' shortly before her death, photographing visitors to her room at the Marie Curie Hospice, Hampstead.

3.5.2 Responses to time in creating the art of motherhood

From experience and the previous discussion, we know that time is an important issue for mother artists. Therefore, developing a new means of expressing growth, which incorporates the keywords long-term and accumulation, became a meaningful strategy for responding to the impact of time and sustaining creative identity during motherhood. This artistic attempt of responding to time during motherhood reflects Julia Kristeva's idea of reconciling maternal time with 'linear' time in her essay of Women's Time.⁷⁸ She characterises historical time based on the experience of men,

⁷⁸ Julia Kristeva. "Women's Time." The Kristeva Reader. Ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 209-211.

as 'linear' time denoting project, teleology, departure, progression and arrival. Without homogenising the women's experience, she provides conceptualising time such as 'cyclical' time (repetition) and a 'monumental' time (eternity) through the perspective of motherhood and female subjectivity to reveal and emphasise the multiplicity of female expressions and preoccupation.⁷⁹ Similarly, the use of maternal time to free or to balance the conflicts of linear time becomes the aim to develop and explore the visual strategy of time sequencing between actual motherhood and creating art.

Regarding actual artistic life during motherhood, as well as the adjustments of the conventional expectations of motherhood within the family and finding suitable childcare, both Susan Wilson and I found that "using the interstices of time" was a basic skill used by mother artists to deal with the shortage of time. Moreover, PJ Crook discovered a positive benefit of the disadvantage of time during motherhood. She said, "Limited time has made me learn to be decisive, which has benefited my creativity."⁸⁰ In this section, I concentrate on exploring a new form of depicting motherhood in art: time sequencing. This strategy attempts to represent the time of growth between mother and child and it developed out of this specific experience of time during my motherhood. It could be seen as responding to the impact of time and puts the third aspect of creative identity into practice: creativity in the artworks of motherhood.

There are reasons for selecting photography as the main medium for expressing maternal time; it has real possibilities and limitations as a tool for capturing time and for representing 'reality'. Besides the close relationship of mothers with family photographs (which was discussed in Section 3.4: The strategy of the family photograph), the two elements of a photograph highlighted by Susan Sontag are both important reasons.⁸¹ They act as evidence to "tell one what there is" and also

⁷⁹ Kristeva 190-193.

⁸⁰ Susan Wilson (1951-) and PJ Crook (1945-), who are both active painters and mothers, addressed the issue of motherhood by joining the touring exhibition Reclaiming the Madonna: Artists as Mothers originated by the Usher Gallery in Lincoln in 1993. These quotes are from Susan Wilson's "Living a life" and PJ Crook's "Portrait of the Artist Watching Her Children Grow" in the book The Fruits of Labour: Creativity, Self-Expression and Motherhood. Ed. Penny Summer (London: Women's Press, 2001) 134, 200.

⁸¹ Susan Sontag. On Photography (London: Penguin, 1979(1977)) 22-23.

represent “a thin slice of time”.⁸² That is, photographs freezing the truth of past, exposing ‘a token of absence’ for the audience, and a sense of the passage of time. For example, photographer Henri Cartier Bresson makes the best of the concept of ‘the decisive moment’ and brings the photographic function of being a witness for every moment into full play. His outstanding photographs have proved that photography has a strong ability to capture time when compared with other media.⁸³ However, in an ever changing world, the image that a photographer intercepts is like a small sample from the powerful current of time and carries many capricious uncertainties.⁸⁴ In other words, from the beginning, when the photographer frames the scene, to the photograph being interpreted by viewers, the images are actively ‘selected’ from real objects but are not a complete picture of the truth. This so-called truth has been cut from the original and has had its meanings transferred, subject to the intervention and personal opinions of the photographer and the prevailing social values. The viewer might discover inner thoughts or ideologies hidden beneath the image from different points of view, or may even create a new interpretation to explain the image.⁸⁵ Victor Burgin considered that a photograph was not a replica of the truth intended to help people to understand the world but was a production made in a special time and space. It needs to be analysed and criticised. He said, “Photography is one signifying system among others in society which produces the ideological subject in the same movement in which they ‘communicate’ their ostensible contents.”⁸⁶ Thus, it can be seen that it is impossible to make a complete record of reality through photographic machinery which has the ability to retain only a trace of the object which existed. Lin chi-Ming said, “Photography carries a process of de-realizing the truth”, and its results are waiting to be recomposed and re-threaded.⁸⁷ A photograph has a level of tension, and can even contradict the truth; however, over other rival artistic media, it is hard to write off its essential ability to record real things or objects which have an appeal in front of the camera. This

⁸² Sontag 22-23.

⁸³ Quo-Jun Ciu (邱國峻). “Fabricated Reality: The Discussion of Reality in Photography.” Photography and Art: The Academic Essays of Photography (Taipei: Society for Photographic Education of China, 1997) 22.

⁸⁴ Guang-He Chang (章光和). Reproducing the Truth: The Discourse and Practice of Meditating on the System of Post-modernist Photography (Taipei: Garden City, 2000) 60-61.

⁸⁵ Chi-Ming Lin (林志明). “Realistic Photography and Photo-Reportage: Tension between Documentality and Documentness.” Studied Image, Artistic Thought. (Taipei: TFAM, 2007) 18.

⁸⁶ Victor Burgin. “Looking at Photographs” Thinking Photography. (London: Macmillan, 1982) 153.

⁸⁷ Chi-Ming Lin 16.

particular connection with reality gives photographs a remarkable advantage. As Sontag said,

The particular qualities and intentions of photographs tend to be swallowed up in the generalized pathos of time past. Aesthetic distance seems built into the very experience of looking at photographs, if not right away, then certainly with the passage of time. Time eventually positions most photographs, even the most amateurish, at the level of art.⁸⁸

As already mentioned, photography is a suitable medium for expressing time; it also has the powerful characteristic of being able to prove that things change over a period of time. This fits with the concept of photographs as thin slices of time. Kristen Lippincott considered,

Whereas artists and writers have thought for ages to describe the effects of time's passing, it really is only with the invention of photography that we are able to document the most minute external effects of time on man and his environment. Owing to its largely non-selective eye, photography captures the pervasiveness of change in a way the writer or painter, with their more discerning vision, cannot.⁸⁹

Nowadays, new techniques in digital imagery have intervened in traditional photography. Helped by the computer, changing photographic images by montage or fabrication, or even creating virtual ones, is much easier than before when they were produced in a conventional dark room. However, this convenient post-production manipulation makes the sense of reality in photographs highly suspect. I therefore needed to distinguish my artworks of motherhood from fabricated images of this kind. More precisely, in my artwork, I purposely gave up all means of post-production and adopted the original characteristics of photography to prove my son's and my existence, sometime and somewhere through the needle hole of the camera. Furthermore, by assembling and arranging photographs of my son and I taken at different times, I tried to use this characteristic to develop varied visual forms

⁸⁸ Sontag 21.

⁸⁹ Kristen Lippincott. The Story of Time (London: National Maritime Museum, 1999) 228.

expressing change through growth. A time sequence was developed through my artistic practice. The groups of sequential photographs taken purposely during this growth, disclose changes in motherhood and also explore power and creativity by accumulating the evidence of growth.

In the following, the main time sequencing were developed to fit the concept of actively and continuously exploring, recording and accumulating the growth of the child on a long-term basis. They will be analysed as three types of visual language concerned with time, revealing the way in which I used photographs to interpret maternal time in my artworks of motherhood.

A. Time frozen during suffering



Fig 3.5.4 Giuseppe Maria Crespi, Bertoldino Falling into the Fishpond, about 1710. Etching, 14.2x20.3 cm, The British Museum, London.

Time is closely linked with psychological reflection. Psychological time is compressed or extended in different psychological states. During my pregnancy, the symptoms of my condition continually oppressed me and time was at a standstill; tormenting me. The feeling of suffering is similar to that represented in Crespi's drawing Bertoldino Falling into the Fishpond (Fig 3.5.4). The panic

encapsulated in 'the blinking of an eye' was frozen in this drawing. A tension of extending the terrified time is strengthened when audience inevitably wishes for a result.⁹⁰

A way of extending the time of suffering to a state of stillness and endlessness is applied in Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy (Fig 3.5.5). Seven selected photographs record the pain of my early pregnancy, displaying an unceasing time sequence which expresses the unchangeable, depressed situation of being trapped in the domestic sphere. This sequence of chaotic narrative, without any intervals, renders the audience (and myself) immobile, as they struggle to work out the order and to imagine what will happen next.



Fig 3.5.5 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy and close-up of one of the images, 2000. Colour photographs.

B. Time in order, from seconds, to months, to years

With respect to the growth of my child, the intensity of time changes from high to low. The time periods at which growth is checked are measured for infants, in days

⁹⁰ Alexander Sturgis. Telling Time (London: National Gallery, 2000) 38.

or weeks, and for adults, in months or years. The experience of following natural growth in motherhood inspired me to develop the idea of various ‘densities’ of time to visualise a strong sequential sense of growth.

From 1870 onwards, Eadweard Muybridge researched and produced a precise photographic method for pursuing the locomotion of both human and animal bodies over a short time period, counted in minutes or seconds. He rationally displayed these groups of images, one after the other, from left to right, in chronological order, to demonstrate locomotion from the scientific viewpoint. He successfully used his mastery of still photography to break a movement into phases and to study and analyse the detail through a series of images.⁹¹ In his photographs of Woman and Child (Fig 3.5.6), for example, the viewer may easily observe, in detail, the locomotion of a nude child giving a flower to his semi-nude mother, in a sequential narrative from left to right.

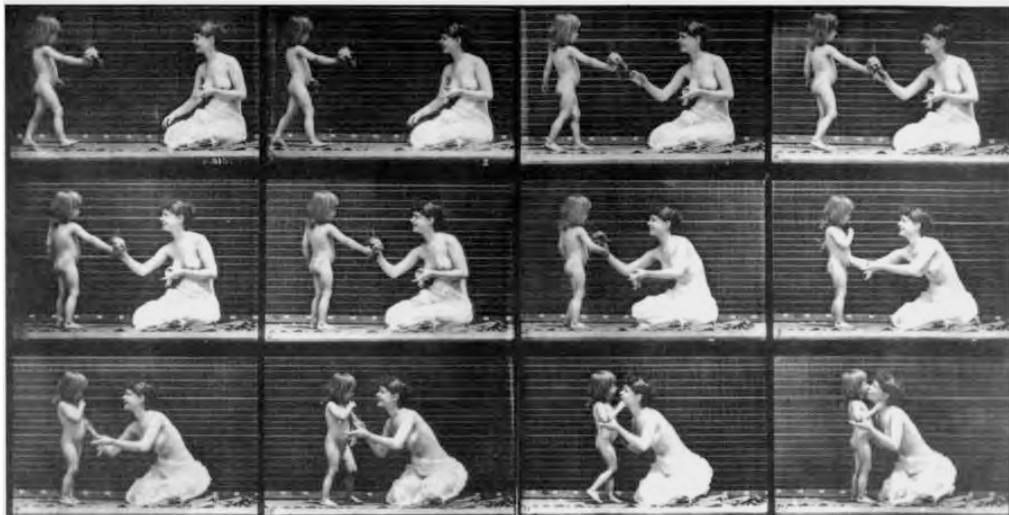


Fig 3.5.6 Eadweard Muybridge, Woman and Child, 1884-5. Collection at University of Pennsylvania.

In Artwork 2: I Sign; I Exist (Fig 3.5.7), I photographed several images of the movements as I signed and dated my pregnant belly over a short time, counted in seconds. Except for the image in the centre of this artwork, the others are displayed from left to right, in chronological order. This arrangement reveals my attempt to achieve the same aim as Eadweard Muybridge, to express the order

⁹¹ Michel Baudson. "From Cinematic Representation to the Fourth Dimension." Art & Time. Ed. BAG (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1986). 20.

and detail of locomotion clearly under the rational visual communication of time; it also emphasises that I was a mother-to-be, alert to the prevention of self-loss in every second before the pressure of giving birth. In other words, I wanted to highlight the importance of every second by showing the detail, in order to enhance the importance of the whole event.

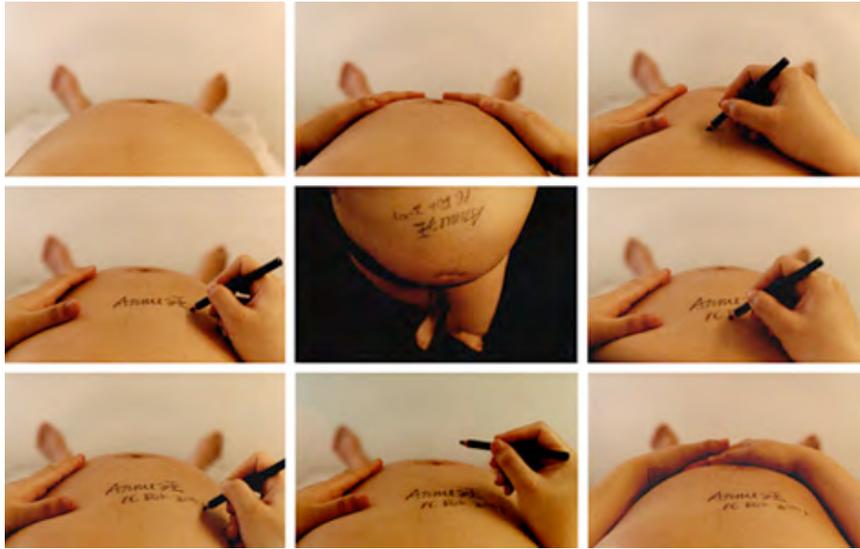


Fig 3.5.7 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Artwork 2: I Sign; I Exist, 2001. Colour photographs.

Compared to the central image with an up-side-down signature photographed from a conventional objective viewpoint, these eight sequential images exposed a self-determined mother actively announcing the identity of self and the right to create life step-by-step, whilst challenging the myth of selfless motherhood in every second.



Fig 3.5.8 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Artwork 3: Relative Measure No. 1: My Son and I, 2001-2002. Black & white photographs.



Fig 3.5.9 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height, 2001-2005. Colour photographs.

In Artwork 3: Relative Measure (Fig 3.5.8) and Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height (Fig 3.5.9), I prolonged the time interval between images to months or years to record my son's and my own growth. The thin slices of different selected times, are displayed in the same plane, from left to right. This visual arrangement allows the audience to seek out changes, during the long period of motherhood, through side by side comparison. At first glance, the similarity of the gestures in the groups of images offers a simple profile, illustrating growth at different stages. This is reminiscent of a scientific diagram (Fig 3.5.10) illustrating growth in boys based on objective data. The difference is that I used my body as a standard, thus extending the area of measurement, and tried to represent growth from closer to the actual experience, from a more subjective viewpoint. It could be said that, besides the obvious change in my son's height, the emotion, sentiment and relationship between mother and child which stem from the true experience of motherhood, can also be measured.

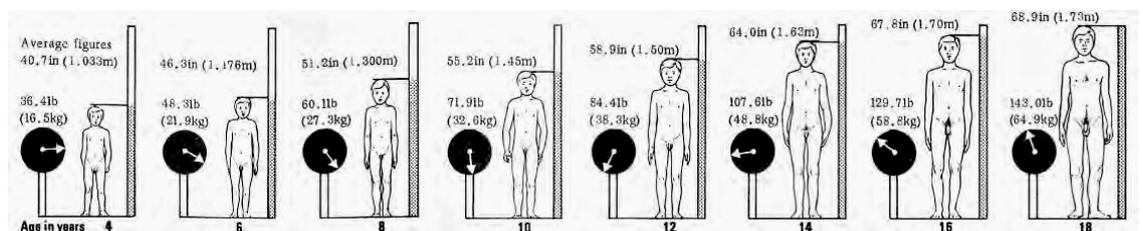


Fig 3.5.10 The diagram of Growth from Four Years Old, 1997. From the book Child's Body: a Parent's Manual. New York & London: Paddington Press, 1977.

The artistic practice of accumulating growth sequentially over time, by counting from seconds to years creates a trace to recall and to imagine the further. The experiences of motherhood, creating art and viewing these examples, taught me that time is a complicated issue and, in Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator (Fig

3.5.11), I tried to develop a way to interpret its complexities. I used a form of 'time-tunnel' sequence to express the feeling of accumulation and extension in time; moreover, to connect the meaning of a mother having a capability of fertility through her body, mind and experience. This sequence contains not only rational time order, from left to right, achieved by displaying these photographs in the same way as my previous artworks, but also a mysterious time order, from distant to close up, with a range of images in each photograph. Whether backwards or forwards, it offers a complicated visual journey which allows the audience to trace back or imagine the future by following the time-tunnel I have created.



Fig 3.5.11 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator, and a close-up of layer 4. 2001-2005. Black & white photographs.

Photographing people together with a photograph which contains an image of a beloved person from their past is an important element in the construction of the 'time-tunnel'. This method enables people who exist in different times to come together on the surface of the same photograph at the same time. It has often been used where a person who cannot meet up with someone who is dear to them (especially someone who has died) seeks evidence of their close relationship.



Fig 3.5.12 Yongping Song, My Parents – Passage (detail), 1998-2001. Black & white photographs.

Here are two examples of using 'time-tunnel' sequence to depict the deaths in a family over a period of time. The first is by contemporary Chinese artist Yongping Song, who documented the sorrowful and truthful story of his parents' passing, one after another, in his series of photographs My Parents – Passage (Fig 3.5.12). He accused his government of neglecting many helpless citizens and of letting them silently disappear without care.⁹² Besides the intention of uncovering his parents' fragile bodies to tug at the viewers' heart-strings, this artist applied the visual method of 'time-tunnel' sequencing in the last few pictures of the time trace by arranging his photographs over time from left to right. By photographing a portrait of his deceased mother in the position she previously occupied next to his father, or by photographing portraits of both his deceased parents, side by side, the sequence strengthens the power with which he expresses his sorrow at the

⁹² Karen Smith. "Song Yongping." The Chinese: Photography and Video from China. Ed. Susanne Köhler, Annelie Lütgens and Anja Westermann (Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2004) 112.

vanishing of his parents over time. Another typical example also appears in the three images of an Indian family in Fig 3.5.13. The anthropologist, Christopher Pinney, recalling the time when he helped the family to photograph these images said, “There is a powerful notion here of the translatability of an affective to a spatial proximity through re-photography, through a sort of recursive binding in of space, a representational involution, as though this photographic recuperation was capable of arresting time itself.”⁹³



Fig 3.5.13 Sequential images of an Indian family. (Left) The first image: The father, Ganpat. (Middle) The second image: The son, Hira, holds the first image to show his respect for his dead father. (Right) The third image: Another son, Remalal, cradles the second image after his brother died in an accident. Christopher Pinney photographed the second and third images in 1989.

As can be seen above, the re-photographic approach to the time-tunnel reveals the trace of time; it also produces a strong power by combining different times and space layers into the same time and surface. For example, Layer 5 of The Mother as a Creator (Fig 3.5.14) is like a magic mirror compressing the five-year journey of my motherhood onto the same image of the photograph. Different stages in my son’s and my life are closely linked together. This image energises many valuable experiences of motherhood and art which we created together, little by little, and year by year. This image is evidence of the maternal creativity and power accumulated through cooperation in our lives, time and photography.

⁹³ Christopher Pinney. Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs (London: Beakton Books, 1997) 168-169.



Fig 3.5.14 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Layer 5 of The Mother as a Creator, 2005. Black & white photograph.

This time-tunnel sequence interweaves two directions of time sequence and makes time a mysterious issue. Besides the power of accumulation, it exposes the complex feelings of combined mourning and celebration of the past, and the excitement and uncertainty of the future. This time sequence provides me with a motive for sustaining creative identity by continuously exploring the past, creating the present and expecting the future, all against the backdrop of the rational and emotional experience of motherhood.

C. Random time sequence generated by collected memories

Every time I recalled my motherhood over a period of time, the sense of rational time sequence was still there in my brain, but I was also aware of another random, irregular and associated time sequence which leapt out at me. This experience was very different to the photographic experience of recording time in chronological order. It was like casually finding a valuable item in a treasure box which stored many used objects closely connected with my past. The item would, in itself, be a minor thing, but one which caused many incidents to come to the fore

in my memory. Whenever I appreciated the same item, the group of memorised associated incidents and their sequence was different. I realised that the random memorised sequence was mutable and that this might be a useful technique for establishing an appropriate self-interpretation of the past. Julia Hirsh also indicated that our domestic photographs specifically provide an opportunity to grasp and to re-interpret the past. She said,

With our Instamatics and our Polaroids – as well as home movie, still somewhat too costly to be as democratic a medium as still-photography – we can now track not only the growth of our children and the erosion of our own bodies, but also the succession of our homes, our pets, and our spouses. The past is always at our fingertips, always available on paper or plastic for instant replay.⁹⁴



Fig 3.5.15 Joseph Cornell, Untitled (The Life of King Ludwig of Bavaria), 1941-52. 36.8×27.9×9.2 cm, Paperboard Valise containing various papers and objects relating to Ludwig II of Bavaria and swan motif, Estate of Joseph Cornell. Courtesy Catelli Feigen Corcoran.

The result of replaying the past in random time sequence, on sight of a photograph, is very similar to the process of appreciating untidy or private family photographs stored in a box. When the box is opened, fragmented family images of the past jump out, one-by-one, in no sensible order, allowing the viewers, as family members, to enter the maze of their own memories. By actively re-arranging the

⁹⁴ Julia Hirsch, Family Photographs: Content, Meaning and Effect. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 45.

sequence and re-composing these images, using fingers and brain in order to solve the puzzle, viewers activate their own memories and gain their own right to interpret the past. Joseph Cornell's Untitled (Fig 3.5.15) applied this concept of random time sequence. He let the audience join in with the active appreciation by viewing and interpreting fragmented images and documents concerning King Ludwig of Bavaria for themselves.⁹⁵ The process was like an adventure. With various kinds of sequence, chosen by the audience themselves as they viewed and touched the items in the box, different stories about the life of King Ludwig of Bavaria were structured from different viewpoints.

Inducing the audience and myself to join in with actively exploring my experience of motherhood through a random time sequence was a very important concept in the development of the series of boxes in Artwork 6: Mother Box. For example, in the early stages of developing the series, I purposely tried to ignore previous attempts at taking family photographs and to explore the hidden meanings behind the photographs by viewing them, again and again, in different combinations and with random time sequences. In this way, I gathered ideas for establishing and progressing my artworks in line with appropriate concepts and forms, taking stimulation and inspiration from various viewpoints on the interpretation of motherhood.

In the Artwork 6: Mother's Box, both the Pregnancy Box (Fig 3.5.16) and the Growing Box (Fig 3.5.17) were created using the random memory time sequence. This developed the principle of guiding the audience to actively explore my motherhood. When the boxes are open, there is no set sequence for viewing the items within. The audience can view them as they please; one item at a time; many items at the same time; or repeatedly examining a particular item or items. In inducing the viewers to join in my personal motherhood, by visualising and storing them in the diverse interior designs of the boxes, I attempt to let the audience re-adjust and strengthen the universal meaning and value of motherhood through their own interpretations.

⁹⁵ Monique Beudert. "List of Illustrations." Joseph Cornell. Ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: The Museum of Art & Prestel, 1990 (1980)) 288.



Fig 3.5.16 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the opening of the Pregnancy Box (the first box in Artwork 6: Mother's Box).



Fig 3.5.17 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the open Growing Box and the ways in which the audience actively viewed the contents (the second box in Artwork 6: Mother's Box).

3.5.3 Summary

The shortage of time in early motherhood seriously undermined my belief that I could sustain my creative identity as an artist. The tension urged me to carefully experience and explore the specific sense of maternal time. In this section, the experience of time has been analysed from three directions: losing the right to control

time, the gap in biological time between mother and child, and lack of time. Based on the practice of dealing with time in art and as a mother, these three main experiences became important sources of inspiration for several possible ways of expressing time in my artworks. The progression of specific visual languages of time, based on actual experience, offered me a way to approach the second creative identity: the interaction between motherhood and creating artwork.

In re-examining and interpreting time and motherhood in art, photography, which is a very effective way to record time, emerged as the most suitable medium. It allowed me to counter the negative impacts of time and to turn them into positives. Three kinds of visual language, here named time sequencing, have been maturely developed as a strategy for sustaining creative identity for the project. All of them – including time frozen during suffering; time in order, from seconds, to months, to years; and random time sequences based on collected memories – have broken the boundary of representing motherhood through their particular visual techniques. Furthermore, they extend the meaning of time in motherhood from its current limitations to infinity. From the viewpoint of the third creative identity, creativity in the artwork of motherhood, these time sequence representations provide a new form and meaning for the theme of motherhood in art.

Using the strategy of time sequencing, the creativity of a mother and artist has been candidly accumulated, again and again over time, with the aim of continuing throughout the photographer's life. A new approach to exploring and interpreting motherhood based on the idea of memory was also devised. Personally, these visual accumulations of my growth, and that of my son, helped me to re-understand myself and to extend of our efforts during my son's lifetime. They also encouraged me to insist on the future continuation of creativity in motherhood, for as long as I am a parent. Taken together, the visual accumulation of time sequences has undermined the paper-thin stereotype of mother-love and taken the issue of motherhood from personal to universal.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the conceptual frameworks of the thesis in terms of three strategies: self-representation, family photographs and time sequencing. All have responded to the main practice-based research question: 'How do I as a woman artist use visual strategies to sustain the creative identity under the burden of Taiwanese motherhood?' These strategies were developed from the point of view of treating the personal experience of motherhood as a crucial resource. By approaching the second aspect of creative identity (the interaction between motherhood and creating artwork), I discovered that creativity in motherhood can be rich, even when considering the negative impacts of selflessness and insufficient time; I transferred the elements I had discovered into my artistic practice. In so doing, I broke the conventional boundaries of representing motherhood in art by tackling the third kind of creative identity (creativity in the artwork of motherhood). Consequently, despite the conflict between motherhood and art, it should be possible to sustain my artistic profession (the first creative identity); I draw encouragement from the values and accomplishments of the visual strategies which I have devised for pursuing my own artistic practice.

A sense of self is essential for an artist approaching the subject of creativity in art, so the strategy of self-representation was developed first. It was researched from the viewpoint of coping with the loss of self during pregnancy and early motherhood, and of sustaining the creative identity. As explained in earlier discussions about my work and that of representative mother artists, it has been proved that the way in which a mother represents her self helps her to maintain her own identity. It also helps her to reduce the confusion arising from the conventional expectation of being a selfless and silent mother. Based on the idea of applying the personal experience of motherhood, which is most intimate for a mother, all three modes of self-representation in visual art – recording the evidence of being present; grasping the right to interpret the self; and using self-body image to break stigmatisation – have revised the unitary definition of motherhood established by the 'institution'. It should be stressed that this strategy has provided an alternative viewpoint to understanding the actual state of motherhood for mothers themselves and has

encouraged mother artists to interpret motherhood diversely in art. Maintaining an adequate sense of self by representing the self creates an advantageous inner condition for mother artists. This opposes the suppression which stems from the myth of motherhood and helps to accomplish the mission of devotion to creativity.

The similarity between pursuing the self and creativity in art for a woman artist, and in family photographs for a mother, urged me to use the concept and form of family photographs to develop a new strategy for sustaining creative identity during motherhood. Family photographs have become the most convenient artistic visual medium for mothers to use to move their stories from the domestic to the public sphere. By combining these Taiwanese family photographs into the artworks and breaking the conventional limitations of visualisation, the close relationship between creativity and motherhood is revealed. In this way, the stereotype of a mother who has no connection with creativity has been revised. Three concepts of family photographs were developed during my artistic practice: using family photographs as a visual source to examine the self; undermining the subject/object in photography through the intimate cooperation of mother and child; and unfolding the experience of motherhood through sharing family albums. All have provided new and convenient methods for artists, and even mothers, to easily sustain their identity during parenthood.

In early motherhood, insufficient and fragmented time were the practical problems I and other mother artists faced when addressing the balance between the two burdensome aspects of their lives; motherhood and the artistic profession. The strategy of time sequencing was developed out of the struggle to utilise time. Having recognised the intense pressure which comes from conventional expectations of working mothers, the idea of prolonging the time I had to produce my art for the duration of my motherhood allowed me to see the positive side of time and to make use of it in my art. From the inspiring experience of growing with a child, the strategy of time sequencing developed three innovative artistic visual languages of time for use in the interpretation of motherhood. They were: time frozen during suffering; time in order, from seconds, to months, to years; and random time sequences generated by collected memories. Through the visual accumulation of time sequences, the sense of time in motherhood has changed from the limited to the infinite and the

value of motherhood has been transferred from a paper-thin stereotype to abundant creativity.

In conclusion, the role of mother has changed from passive to passion. The silent mother has become a creative person with determination and action owing to the artistic practice of these three strategies which incorporate actions of defiance and assertions of self and identity. These three strategies have not only broken the stereotypes of mother and motherhood, they have also provided a way to release the tension between artistic practice and motherhood. Through the process of creativity transforming real motherhood into artistic activity, and then feeding back from artistic creation to real life motherhood, these visual strategies have set an innovative example for achieving the aim of the sustained creative identity of the artist during motherhood.

Chapter 4 Artistic Practice: six artworks and an installation

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Asserting the self: the transition from loss to existence during pregnancy

4.2.1 Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy

- A. Description
- B. Statement
- C. Concept and practical process

4.2.2 Artwork 2: I Sign; I Exist

- A. Description
- B. Statement
- C. Concept and practical process

4.2.3 Summary

4.3 Measuring motherhood: the physical measurement of growth in mother and child over a period of time

4.3.1 Artwork 3: Relative Measure

- A. Description
- B. Statement
- C. Concept and practical process

4.3.2 Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height

- A. Description
- B. Statement
- C. Concept and practical process

4.3.3 Summary

4.4 Reformulating motherhood: active memory-making by reviewing motherhood

4.4.1 Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator

- A. Description
- B. Statement
- C. Concept and practical process

4.4.2 Artwork 6: Mother's Box

- A. Description
- B. Statement
- C. Concept and practical process

4.4.3 The Installation of Picturing Motherhood

- A. Description
- B. Statement
- C. Concept, practical process and feedback

4.4.4 Summary

4.5 Conclusion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of three sections based on changes in my artistic practice which were aimed at sustaining my creative identity. They reflect my personal experience of motherhood over the five years 2000 to 2005 and are engaged with asserting the self, measuring motherhood, and reformulating motherhood. The chapter is fundamental to this practice-based thesis and provides details of six sets of artworks and an installation. It explains crucial elements in the development of the close relationship between the artworks and visual strategies. Important details of the artistic process for each piece of work are explored and reveal the effort involved in sustaining the artist's creative identity during her personal experience of motherhood under the influence of Taiwanese culture.

The sequence of artistic practices in this chapter reveals the process of understanding motherhood, from depression in the early stages, to sustaining the self-identity, and then to the possibility of creativity in motherhood. Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy, and Artwork 2: I Sign; I Exist, are discussed in the first section, 'asserting the self'. It is essential for an artist pursuing their artistic creativity to maintain the self, and these two works highlight the important transition between loss and existence during pregnancy. The second section, 'measuring motherhood', positively focuses on the growth of mother and child over a period of time. It explores the maternal viewpoint and visual form of accumulation, and depicts motherhood in the two artworks Relative Measure and My Son and I at the Same Height. Finally, the section entitled, 'reformulating motherhood', provides a new concept of active memory-making and develops new expressions, combining the meaning of creativity and motherhood through the artistic practices of Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator, Artwork 6: Mother's Box and the installation of Picturing Motherhood.

4.2 Asserting the self: the transition from loss to existence during pregnancy

This section concentrates on my loss of a sense of self whilst suffering the discomfort of pregnancy and being aware of the conventional expectations of motherhood present in my cultural background. Motivated by the need to deal with a sense of self-loss, which stemmed from the conflict between my artistic profession and motherhood, I produced Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy and Artwork 2: I Sign;

I Exist as representative and early pieces in this practice-based project. By discussing the loss of self and then asserting its existence in these two artworks, the process by which I as a mother artist maintained the self (essential for an artist wishing to pursue their artistic creativity) in selfless motherhood is revealed. The challenge to the boundaries between the depressed pregnant body, expectations of Taiwanese motherhood, and my artistic profession, is explored, and the working processes involved and other relevant concepts are also discussed.

4.2.1 Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy

Title: Depressed Pregnancy

Size: 23x15 cm each photograph

Quantity: 7 photographic works

Date photographs were taken: 2000-2001

Date of working: 2001, 2002 and 2005

Media: Colour photographs with deep black wooden frames

Display: Fixed low down in a dark corner of the exhibition area



Fig 4.2.1 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the installation of Depressed Pregnancy in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, 2005.



Fig 4.2.2 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy, 2000-2001.





Fig 4.2.3 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the detail of Depressed Pregnancy, 2000-2001.

A. Description

Depressed Pregnancy is composed of seven pictures selected from the photo-diary of my early pregnancy. These shadowy photographs record a life of incessant depression during the first period of pregnancy. They depict my feeble body lying in a disordered home environment. At first glance, my body, with its low and ebbing sense of self esteem, is part of the disarray and is easy to ignore.

These seven photographs were contained within deep black frames and arranged in a horizontal plane, one after the other, with no breaks between them. I displayed them low down in a corner between two walls, with no specific form of lighting. At the 2005 public exhibition of Picturing Motherhood, the setting and dark location of this artwork, under the shadow of a large red structure, rendered it almost as a separation and ignored piece, within the installation.

B. Statement

*My body and my mind felt invaded by a presence
that made me feel out of control and reluctant to take action.*

Dizzy,

sick,

painful,

powerless...

*All the symptoms of pregnancy were like scars carved into me,
bringing an incessant undermining of physical action.*

*A large number of images of motherhood
expressing the ideal of virtue sacrificed created a whirlpool,
pulling me into a helpless situation.*

*My mind, set in a pregnant body, felt drawn into
a dark and depressing space.*

*Fear and detestation filled my imagination –
so unlike the idealised expectations that society has of motherhood.*

My body and mind had been fragmented.

At this moment began the feeling of selflessness, a fateful surrender.

Hopelessly,

*I was depressingly sealed in the domestic sphere and
was gradually disappearing.*

I wanted to escape.

Could I? ¹

C. Concept and practical process

Feeling suppressed by the symptoms of pregnancy and the conventional expectations of motherhood, I used the convenient methods of a photo-diary (Fig 4.2.4), sketch (Fig 4.2.5) and a text diary to record my depression during the early

¹ Written by Hsiao-Ching Wang.

stages (Oct 2000). Having experimented with painting, photography and other media to create my works, I decided to use photography to represent the self and to prevent my identity from fading away so quickly. Photography is practical and convenient and easily allowed me to produce images of my weak bodily condition; importantly, it was also able to represent a sense of reality. At this stage, I began to develop the strategy of self-representation. Rather than adhering to the stereotypical image of blissful pregnancy portrayed by others, I used photography to record my own particularly uncomfortable experiences.

In the middle trimester of my pregnancy (Mar 2001) I selected some self-images from my photo-diary and enlarged them in gloomy tones, to express my feeling of depression. When considering an appropriate way to display them I tried to arrange them in many ways whilst bearing in mind the issue of time sequence. In the first exhibition, Motherhood and Creativity, for the thesis outline approval in 2002, Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy, was formally established (Fig 4.2.6). The time sequence arrangement of this artwork and the way in which it was set in a dark corner were intentional. They emphasise the tension of the self disappearing into the domestic sphere and the issue of Taiwanese motherhood, which was still ignored in public. A corner symbolises a negative space which is easily ignored, but also a private haven in which to hide.² It provides 'steadiness' with the support of two walls and indicates the anxiety and negativity which emanate from the work Depressed Pregnancy which finds a place of safety and comfort. In the 2005 exhibition of Picturing Motherhood (Fig 4.2.7), I further enlarged and framed these images in deep black frames as a final revision. Based on my own experiences, I attempted to use the shadow of these frames on the images to symbolise the strong torment of a mother trapped in a house.



Fig 4.2.4 Hsiao-Ching Wang, samples from the photo-diary, Dec 2000-Mar 2001.

² Gaston Bachelard. The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places. Trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 (1958)) 136-137.



Fig 4.2.5 Hsiao-Ching Wang, sample sketches, Oct 2000-Feb 2001.



Fig 4.2.6 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the installation of Depressed Pregnancy in the exhibition Motherhood and Creativity, 2002.



Fig 4.2.7 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, the installation of Depressed Pregnancy in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood; (Right) its detail, 2005.

There are two important concepts behind this artwork which support the overall description of the practical process. They are: the significance of the photo-diary in this practice-based project and the imagery of a mother trapped in her house.

- **The importance of the photo-diary**

This artwork initially utilised the documentary, convenient and introspective characteristics of the photo-diary to express the experience of self-loss during motherhood. The depiction of private events in public through the artistic photo-diary emphasised the sense of reality and the right of a mother herself to

interpret motherhood. The concept and action of considering the self through a photo-diary provide an appropriate way for a mother to maintain the self. It also undermined the convention that others, and not the mother herself, depict motherhood from an objective viewpoint, and without concern for the woman's personal subjectivity.

Taking pictures without concern for aesthetic conventions and exploring the stimulation and similarity of pattern in other's photographs helped me to understand the way I see the world and inspired me to create my own artworks. To this crucial conflict between artistic profession and motherhood, I applied the introspective method of the photo-diary. Fig 4.2.4 is a sample taken from the diary I produced during my pregnancy. It played an important role in my understanding of motherhood and of maintaining the self.



Fig 4.2.8 Jo Spence/ David Roberts, Epic Journey, 1991-2. Colour photographs.

Women photographers Jo Spence and Nan Goldin have both used the idea of the photo-diary to produce their photographic artworks. The method of exploring and representing the identity of self in their daily lives through photography has been recognised as an innovation in visual art. In Epic Journey (Fig 4.2.8), one of Jo Spence's series The final project, she selected and arranged photographs from her photo-diary during her last heroic struggle to overcome leukemia. This work was created close to the end of her life, and reveals her therapeutic intention to reduce the fear of death by 'getting to know it'.³ She insisted on using an autobiographical photo-diary as a way of photo

³ Jo Spence. Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 223.

therapy, thus providing a close relationship between the photo-diary and self-identity up until her death.

Nan Goldin has explained how she used the method of the photo-diary to create her works: stating, "I photograph directly from my life."⁴ Her photographs (Fig 4.2.9) are like a mirror, directly reflecting her life and that of her friend, and are a form of self-assertion. These raw and uncovered truths and self-representations not only move and shock us; they also reduce our prejudice towards 'outsiders'. We are able to understand their lives from her frank viewpoint.



2.
(Left) Self-portrait: "Nan one month after being battered", 1984. (Right) Self-portrait in Blue Bathroom, Berlin, 1991.

In conclusion, introspection and self-assertion are the two main functions of the artistic autobiographic photo-diary. My aim is to highlight the other function, indicated by Jo Spence, "Out of such raw beginnings come new forms of creativity and thinking" to express the importance of the photo-diary in the artistic practice of sustaining creative identity during motherhood.⁵

⁴ Ulrike Lehmann. "Nan Goldin." Women Artists in the 20th and 21st Century. Ed. Uta Grosenick (Cologne: Taschen, 2001) 156, 161.

⁵ Spence 195.

- **The imagery of being trapped in the house**

I feel so confused and frightened! Being a pregnant woman with my husband's love and support should be a source of happiness. But, why does the experience of gaining a baby mean the loss of my mind? The sense of self has separated from my body and is lost somewhere. My vegetated body seems to have been put under arrest in a very inner part of the traditional Chinese house to which my mother, my grandmothers, my grand-grandmothers and ... were always bound.⁶

Motherhood is strongly associated with the imagery of house and home. It reflects the inner part of self but also somehow implies that mothers are trapped in the domestic sphere.⁷ During my pregnancy, this feeling was intensely connected with my self, because of the physical limitations which came from the symptoms of pregnancy; my body was like a house inhabited by a baby. For this reason I used the metaphor of myself trapped in the house to represent myself bound by my body.

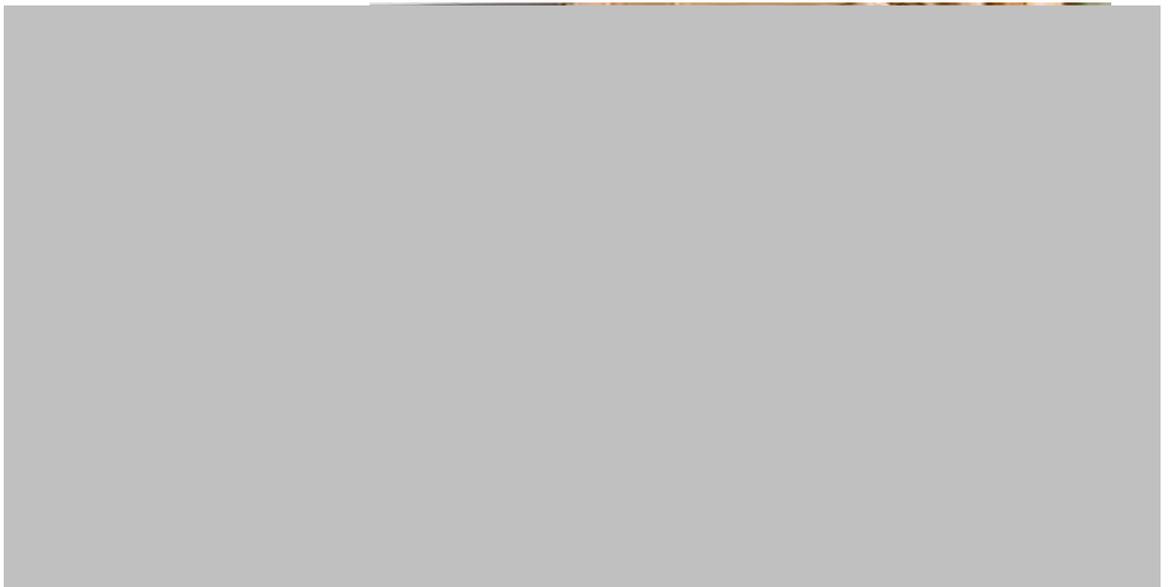


Fig 4.2.10 (Left) Hwa-Jen Huang (黃華仁), Inner Part of the House (內房) 1929.

Fig 4.2.11 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, Decades as one Day (My Mother in the Kitchen), 29 Dec 2005, from photo-diary 29 Dec 2005.

The painting Inner Part of the House (Fig 4.2.10) resonates with the tension I felt at losing my will to avoid the traditional fate of a mother trapped in her house. Passing through the dark corridor, one column after another, the viewer sees a mother sitting and sewing alone in the inner part of the house, the kitchen. Hwa-Jen Huang depicted a virtuous mother quietly hidden at home,

⁶ Hsiao-Ching Wang. "The Second Month of Pregnancy: 22 Nov. 2000." Diary. 2002.

⁷ Clare Cooper Marcus. House as a Mirror of Self: Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home (Berkeley: Conari Press, 1997) 11.

dedicated to spending her life looking after the members of her family. As Juan-Ying Yen (顏娟英) explains that in the picture, the calendar with a small mirror implies the mother spends all her time in the house; the orchid signifies her virtue; the sewing machine and the shrine indicate her obligations to work at home and to give birth to a son to carry on the bloodline of her husband's family; the tablet "The great achievement is to assist the husband" hanging above the door represents the ultimate aim of her life.⁸ For Taiwanese people, this is a representative image of the traditional mother imprisoned in a visible house, and of the invisible morality of her life.⁹ I have personal experience of a mother unswervingly trapped in the inner part of the home; my own mother existed in my family. In the photograph Decades as one Day (Fig 4.2.11), I pictured my mother silently and relentlessly carrying out her 'mission', alone in the kitchen and taking care of her family by dealing with the cooking and housework.



Fig 4.2.12 (Left) Louise Bourgeois, Femme-maison, c.1946-47.

Fig 4.2.13 (Middle) Sandra Orgel, Sheet Closet, 1971.

Fig 4.2.14 (Right) Judy Olausen, Life Sentence (from the Mother series), c1996.

Not only did Taiwanese mothers, who were expected to adhere to the stereotype of traditional virtue, become trapped at home, Western women, who possessed more equal gender rights, did too. These three artworks by Western women artists (Fig 4.2.12 - 4.2.14) prove that the limitation of the mother's body and mind to the home was a universal experience. In the series of paintings Femme-maison, Louise Bourgeois depicted a house with tiny windows perched on top of a woman's nude body, in place of her head. This expressed the view that women were isolated, restricted to the family house,

⁸ Juan-Ying Yen (顏娟英). "The Images of Taiwanese Fine Art and the Cultural Interpretation: The Redefinition of Women." Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica. 15 Feb 2005. <<http://saturn.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/~yency/theme03/F-theme3.htm>>

⁹ Julian Lai (賴明珠). "Significance of the Images Depicted by Traditional Female Artists." Ming and Spirit: Women's Art in Taiwan. Ed. Exhibition Department, Taipei Fine Arts Museum (Taipei: TFAM, 1998) 33.

and not allowed to voice their feelings. By combining a woman's body, home and art she indicated "the home as a place of conflict for the woman artist".¹⁰ Sandra Orgel installed a female mannequin literally trapped inside a linen closet, and Judy Olausen directly represented her mother in a prisoner's costume working in the kitchen to interpret the straitened circumstance of a mother imprisoned at home with tedious housework.¹¹



Fig 4.2.15 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the detail of Depressed Pregnancy, (installation view), 2005.

Compared with these Western women artists, who directly used the body to represent the private experience of a mother in the domestic sphere, most women Taiwanese artists, including myself at the beginning of my first pregnancy, only dared to implicitly express the maternal body in metaphorical or fragmentary visualisation. This difference reveals the difficulty Taiwanese women have in frankly facing the experience of their own bodies within a Taiwanese culture that forbids exposure and discussion of the body in public. For instance, in Depressed Pregnancy (Fig 4.2.15), I used the deep black frame and its shadow to illustrate and define fragmentary bodily images taken from my daily life to symbolise the overwhelming fate of a mother trapped in her house. In so doing, I emphasised the gradual disappearance of the self, the fear of facing the changes in my pregnant body, and the disregard for the maternal body in Taiwanese society.

¹⁰ Whitney Chadwick. Women, Art, and Society (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996 (1990)) 324.

¹¹ Judy Chicago. Through the Flower (Taipei: Yuan-Liou, 1997 (1975)) 134. Judy Olausen. Mother (New York: Viking Studio, 2000) 6, 69.

4.2.2 Artwork 2: I Sign; I Exist

Title: I Sign; I Exist

Size: 24.2×15 cm each photograph

Quantity: 9 photographic works

Date photographs were taken: 2001

Date of working: 2001 and 2005

Media: Colour photographs

Display: Fixed high on a crimson wall



Fig 4.2.16 Hsiao-Ching Wang, I Sign; I Exist, 2001.



Fig 4.2.17 Hsiao-Ching Wang, I Sign; I Exist (installation view), 2005.

A. Description

This artwork consists of nine sequential photographs placed in order in a grid (3×3) and displayed high on a crimson wall. These photographs record me signing and dating my pregnant belly. The representation, without a head, allows the audience to concentrate on the signature. There are two points of view within this artwork. The eight photographs around the centre are taken from my viewpoint; seeing my belly as I would whilst writing my signature. The central picture, with an upside-down signature, is the way the audience would see me.

B. Statement

*My belly was bulging gradually.
After incessant torment, there was a little achievement at last.
My body devoted all its attention to creating a new life.
It is like the feeling I encounter in making my artworks.*

*Why this 'great body' –
able to create a new life but being treated just as a 'receptacle'?*

*The pregnant mother is asked to surrender completely her own sense of self
in preparation for the role of the self-sacrificing mother in our society.
How could I let my rights as a creator (my sense of copyright) be taken away
from me so easily?*

*I carefully sign my name on my belly, as I sign my artworks.
In this way, I assert myself as a creator of life.
The act of signing stood for my resistance to the imposition of the model of
the anonymous and self-sacrificing mother over my sense of self.*

C. Concept and practical process

From February 2001, when the symptoms of early pregnancy began to abate, I started to find various ways to sign my name on my belly to connect with the idea of artists signing their names on their artworks (Fig 4.2.18). In so doing, I aimed to free myself from the passive state of a pregnant woman, and to develop an appropriate artistic method for expressing the concept that a mother is like an artist, having the capability and the right to be an active creator. In March 2001, the artwork I Sign; I Exist (Fig 4.2.16) was completed, and consisted of nine sequential photographs. The images were taken from two different directions and, thus, captured the signature on my belly from the objective and subjective

viewpoints. I attempted to challenge the huge gap between myself and the silent pregnant women depicted in Taiwanese art, from the viewpoint of the onlooker.



Fig 4.2.18 Hsiao-Ching Wang, experimental samples of signing my pregnant belly, 2001.

I first tried to show the transition of the self from passive loss to active assertion by displaying Artwork 1 and Artwork 2 at dramatically different heights in the exhibition Motherhood and Creativity (2002; Fig 4.2.19). Then, in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood (2005; Fig 4.2.20), I used bright frames hanging high on a crimson wall in a narrow space to emphasise the positive, active characteristics side which developed out of the tension of losing the self during pregnancy. In the sequence of the images in the artwork and the design of the installation I attempted to allow the audience and myself to re-think the meaning of motherhood.

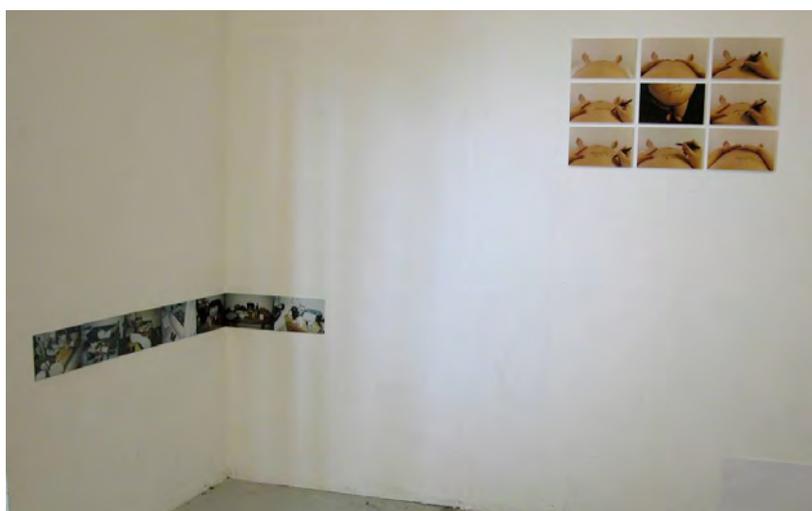


Fig 4.2.19 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy and Artwork 2: I Sign; I Exist, in the exhibition Motherhood and Creativity, 2002.

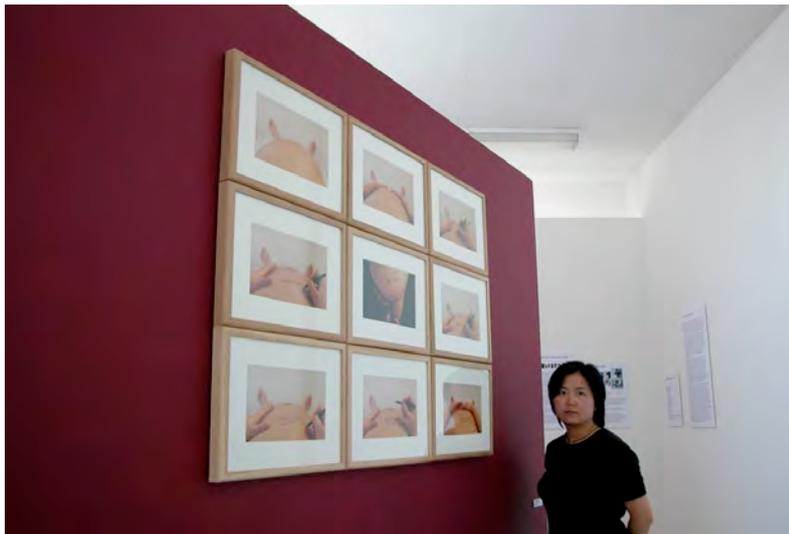


Fig 4.2.20 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Artwork 2: I Sign; I Exist in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

The following are two details from this artwork provided to make the concept clear.

- **My name as a symbol, ‘Annie 汪’.**

This project began in 2000 when I became pregnant whilst living in Britain. Living in such a different culture, far away from Taiwan, where I was born and grew up, I was able to explore motherhood as a new experience, in an advanced feminist country, and without continuous pressure from the traditional Taiwanese value system.

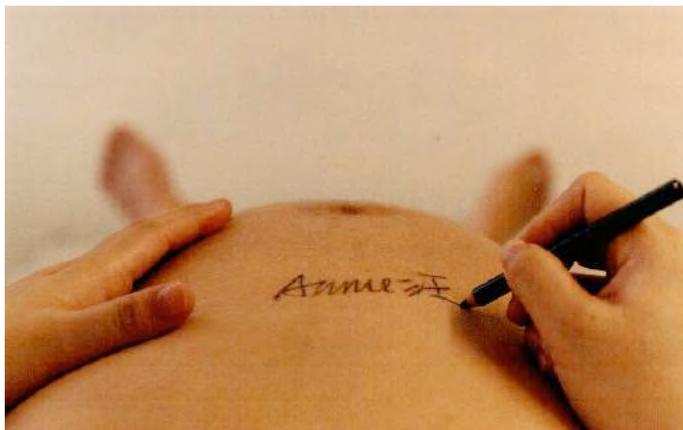


Fig 4.2.21 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the detail of I Sign; I Exist, 2001.

Using the form ‘Annie’ in English and ‘汪’ in Chinese (Fig 4.2.21), I tried to indicate that I have used alternative viewpoints to re-think the issues of self-identity and motherhood and to develop this project against a mix of two different cultures. ‘Annie’ is the English name I chose when I was a teenager. I chose it myself, rather than being given it by my parents, and it communicates to the English speaking world. The actively action of self-choice and communication are important parts of what I want to highlight.

‘汪’ (Wang) is my family name in Chinese. It is a symbol of my relationship with previous generations, my nationality and my culture. Using ‘汪’ without adding my husband’s family name reveals that I am concerned with the subjectivity of women in Taiwan. In my mother’s generation, most women had to add their husbands’ family name in front of theirs after marriage. This was the convention which effectively caused woman to live without a sense of self and to become subsidiary to men.

- **The meanings of signing my own naked and pregnant belly**

In the past in Taiwan, a woman’s virtue and chastity were ensured by binding her feet to limit her movement. Even today, the forbiddance of exposing the female body still exists, and especially for the maternal body.¹² I was greatly influenced by this. However, the changes in my body became the things I was most concerned with and were focused upon by regular progress checks on the health of the foetus and myself. The intense feelings of excitement, worry, curiosity, fright and happiness prompted by observation of my body had reduced the previous feelings of guilt cultivated by my culture. I began to look at my maternal body more frankly and realised that it could be a fertile and valuable resource for both exploring and sharing. Adrienne Rich indicated that “...I believe, come to view our physicality as a resource, rather than a destiny. In order to live a fully human life we require not only control of our bodies (though control is a prerequisite); we must touch the unity and resource of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence.”¹³ Strictly speaking, my artistic practice began with this powerful feeling which was rooted in the maternal body. It began with tracing the loss of self and allowed me to assert my existence by representing my pregnant body without concern for the representation of the naked belly which was forbidden in my culture.

The technique of signing my own naked and pregnant belly was inspired by Jo Spence. Fig 4.2.22 and Fig 4.2.23 are two of Spence’s self-portraits taken before and after her mastectomy. In Fig 4.2.22, she exposed and emphasised her left breast which was diseased with breast cancer by writing a question ‘Property of Jo Spence?’ on it. She treated this handwriting on the body as a talisman to remind herself that she had some rights over her own body.¹⁴ In Fig 4.2.23, she unmasked her feelings and the appearance of her resected breast by writing across her chest, in big letters, the word ‘Monster’. Pam Meecham

¹² Huan-Yue Liu. A-Chao Chen and Chin-Fung Chen 213.

¹³ Adrienne Rich. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1997 (1977)) 39.

¹⁴ Jo Spence. *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political Personal and Photographic Autobiography*. (Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1988 (1986)) 157.

and Julie Sheldon indicated that Spence used radical and provoking visual action to question the way that society and medicine forcefully control the representation of bodies, and to reveal the hidden power within in the discrimination against unusual bodies.¹⁵ For me, more than the normal documentary photographs which efficiently express the view that a victim is in a passive and pitiful situation, her self-portraits actively and nakedly disclose the displeasing body and unfortunate experience of the self with stunning power. It makes viewers not only feel shock and pity, but also catalyses their power to explore the meanings hidden in the protagonist or viewer themselves and to face their own 'ugly selves. Besides posing questions in the way I photographed my own body, as Jo spence did, I attempted to find more subjective viewpoints and artistic actions with which to further announce my ownership of the maternal body and baby, against the conventional myth of the selfless and sacrificial mother in our culture.



Fig 4.2.23 (Right) Jo Spence, One of the photographs in Narratives of Dis-ease: Exiled. undated.



Fig 4.2.24 (Left) Joan Semmel, Me Without Mirrors, 1974. Oil on canvas.

Fig 4.2.25 (Right) Albrecht Dürer, Perspective Study: Draftsman Drawing a Reclining Nude, c.1525.

¹⁵ Pam Meecham and Julie Sheldon. Modern Art: A Critical Introduction. Trans. Siu-Man Wang (王秀滿) (Taipei: Weber, 2003) 280-282.



Fig 4.2.26 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, the detail of I Sign; I Exist, 2001.

Fig 4.2.27 (Right) Piero Manzoni, Vivid Sculpture, 1961. Performance.

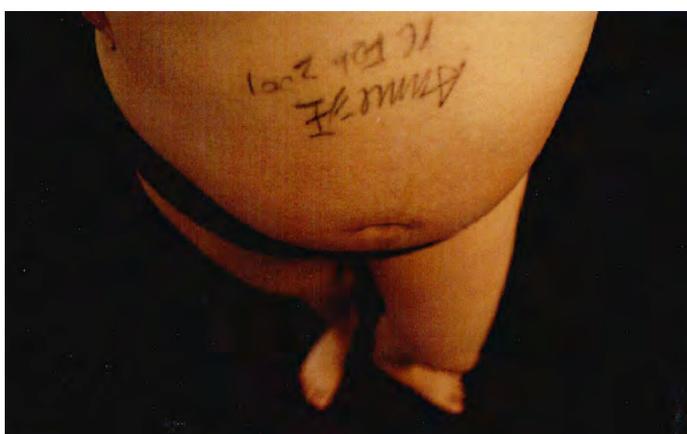


Fig 4.2.28 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the detail of I Sign; I Exist, 2001.

Fig 4.2.29 Nancy Roberts, Naming Sydney, 1993.

In terms of visual tactics, I used a similar visual angle to Joan Semmel's Me Without Mirrors (Fig 4.2.24) to visualise my naked pregnant belly. It subverts the conventional and traditional masculine way of viewing the female nude as a passive object, which is illustrated by Albrecht Dürer's Perspective Study: Draftsman Drawing a Reclining Nude (Fig 4.2.25). Presenting the self from the subjective viewpoint of my own visual perspective, instead of the 'objective viewpoint' of others, actively emphasises my status as a mother. Furthermore, in recording the process of signing my name on my belly (Fig 4.2.26) I assert that the nude is the artist, and not just an unnamed 'model'. This, together with the foetus created by my body, is analogous of an artist creating her/his artwork. In so doing, I regained my rights over my own body and revised the stereotype that the female nude is occupied or created by male artists like Piero Manzoni as presented in his performance Vivid Sculpture (Fig 4.2.27).¹⁶ This male artist impolitely treated a woman as an erotic object with the action of signing his name on the bottom of a female nude. This announcement of defining the female body was his artwork reveals the arbitrary power of a male artist and male gaze in the realm of art. To the contrary, my signature is used

¹⁶ Gilles Néret. Twentieth-century Erotic Art (Köln: Taschen, 1999) 89.

to prove the identity and creation that are from my own body. By signing my name on my pregnant belly, I seek to assert that I am in charge of my self and my body, and to challenge fixed ideas imposed by society of women's bodies.

Furthermore, both Nancy Roberts's Naming Sydney (Fig 4.2.29) and the image in the central photographs of I Sign; I Exist (Fig 4.2.28) represent the way in which spectators view the pregnant belly. However, instead of writing the names from the onlooker's viewpoint, as Roberts did, I purposely presented my signature upside down to allow them to re-think motherhood from my perspective.

4.2.3 Summary

The concept and practical processes involved in the first step of the artistic development of this project are explained by analysing the detail of two representative artworks: Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy and Artwork 2: I Sign; I Exist. In the transition between passive loss and active assertion, the sense of self is highlighted as a key point for dealing with the issue of sustaining creative identity for an artist during a tormented pregnancy (2000 to 2001). Applying the artist's perspective to my personal experience of pregnancy, I discovered, in a positive way, that the pregnant body and its development were full of creativity, and were thus similar to an artist creating her/his art. Therefore, the experience of motherhood was treated as an important source of help; after the birth, exploration of its creativity became an essential concept in the development of visual strategies for sustaining creative identity in artistic practice. This development will be explored in the following sections.

This section also considers some important concepts stemming from the practical process. Firstly, the photo-diary, with its strong introspective characteristics, is an embryo of the strategy of self-representation and allowed me to develop Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy. It enabled me, as a mother, to trace the self, and to avoid its disappearance or limitation in the domestic sphere in accordance with the conventional myth of selfless motherhood. Secondly, every detail of the process of signing my name on my naked pregnant body is a further action through which I assert my self. Artwork 2: I Sign; I Exist has reversed the passive images of a mother in my culture. Overall, the display of these artworks combined private and domestic images of the maternal body with a sense of self in public. It has broken the unspoken rule that says a mother should be represented as a passive woman whose role is to serve her husband and family.

4.3 Measuring motherhood: the physical measurement of growth in mother and child over a period of time

This section focuses on the second step in the artistic development of the project. Continuing from the previous idea of asserting the self, my child's growth became a source of positive inspiration, visually sustaining my creative identity as an artist during motherhood. Artwork 3: Relative Measure and Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height are representative of this. In these two works, the action of measuring growth in relation to my body provided a subjective maternal viewpoint revealing the actual relationship between mother and child. In addition to creating a celebration of growth, I have developed a number of ways to record our physical measurements and to express deeper issues connected to gender, hierarchy and time, in the form of family photographs. By taking, assembling and displaying these photographs, in accordance with specific rules which I had set, my achievement as a mother was revealed through a series of visual accumulations. The results have encouraged me to sustain my creative identity for as long as I am a mother.

4.3.1 Artwork 3: Relative Measure

Title: Relative Measure No. 1: My Son and I

Size: 25x27.5 cm, 28.5x29 cm and 30.5x33 cm

Quantity: 3 photographic works

Date photographs were taken: Jun 2001, Oct 2001, and Dec 2002

Date of working: 2002 and 2005

Media: Black & white photographs within a stair-like frame

Display: Fixed on a wall



Fig 4.3.1 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Relative Measure No. 1: My Son and I, 2001-2002.

Title: Relative Measure No. 2: My Family

Size: 20x26 cm, 24x28 cm and 31.5x35 cm

Quantity: 3 photographic works

Date photographs were taken: Jun 2001, Oct 2001, and Dec 2002

Date of working: 2002 and 2005

Media: Black & white photographs within a stair-like crimson and black frame

Display: Fixed on a wall



Fig 4.3.2 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Relative Measure No. 2: My Family, 2001-2002.



Fig 4.3.3 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the installation of Relative Measure in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

A. Description

Relative Measure consists of two series of works which trace the development of, and relationship between, my son, my husband and I as a nuclear family. Each series contains three photographs taken at different times between the end of my pregnancy and the time my son began to walk (2001-2002). These images measure out the changes in my body, my son's growth and our family development, all of which can be seen by comparing the sequential photographs.

In this work, my fixed height is a standard. The area of the photographs which is enlarged depends on my son's size and my feelings about the self. The photographs become bigger and bigger, in time sequence, and are arranged from left to right, each series within its own stair-like frame.

B. Statement

*My son has become much bigger than my belly.
He grows tall and rapidly puts on weight.
I become slim and slowly lose weight.*

*The warm one hugs the tender one.
This is our intimate body measure.
This measurement is full of mutual experience.
It warmly measures the evidence of our growth.*

*Besides height and weight,
it also measures out
a kind of attraction generated by interdependency
a kind of repulsion generated by the same.¹⁷*

C. Concept and practical process

Sequential pictures depicting the process of gestation over time, such as Karl Baden's photographs of his wife (Fig 4.3.4), have always attracted me. Sandra Matthews and Laura Wexler considered this a highly inventive way to visualise the evolution of pregnancy.¹⁸ From these clear schematic photographs, showing changes in the pregnant body and taken at the same time each month, I was easily able to imagine the process in my own frame and to enjoy the growth by comparing them with my actual bodily experience.

¹⁷ Written by Hsiao-Ching Wang.

¹⁸ Sandra Matthews and Laura Wexler. Pregnant Pictures (New York and London: Routledge, 2000) 64.

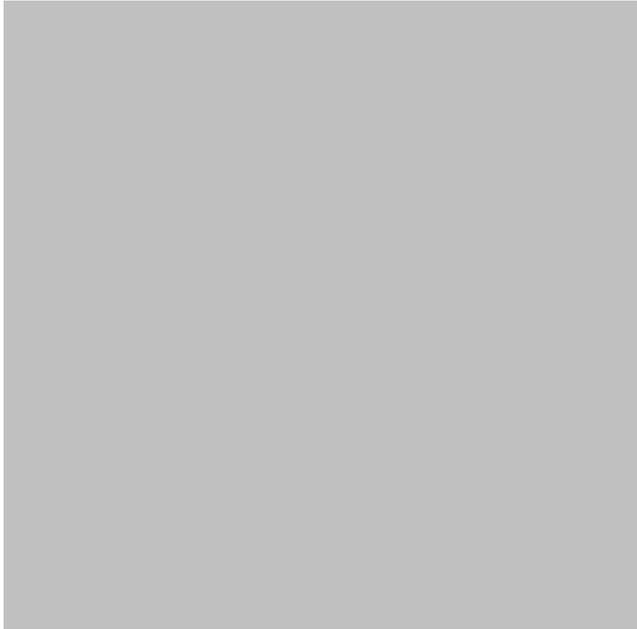


Fig 4.3.4 Karl Baden, from Gestation Animation: A Labor Manual, 1994.



Fig 4.3.5 (Left) Annie Leibovitz, the cover photograph of Vanity Fair, August 1991.

Fig 4.3.6 (Right) Dorothea Tanning, a close-up of Maternity, 1946-7. Oil on canvas.



Fig 4.3.7 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, a close-up of the first photograph in Relative Measure No. 1: My Son and I, Jun 2001.

Fig 4.3.8 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, a close-up of the second photograph in Relative Measure No. 1: My Son and I, Oct 2001.

Using this inspiration, I began to explore appropriate ways of using sequential self-body representations to express the rapid changes before and after birth. Firstly, I completed a period of image-research, seeking out representations of pregnancy and its meaning. I believe that the cover photograph taken for Vanity Fair in August 1991 (Fig 4.3.5) by Annie Leibovitz was a revolutionary indicator of the popular public visual domain, and crossed previous boundaries by exhibiting a pregnant nude. Although it caused an instant scandal in the time, the gesture of the actress, Demi Moore became an icon for pregnancy in Western society.¹⁹ In my opinion, this gesture cleverly de-eroticises and emphasises the female reproductive power by highlighting the pregnant belly whilst the model's hands cover the most sexual parts of the body. It mimics what Dorothea Tanning did in her painting Maternity (Fig. 4.3.6). In my case, I saw that this gesture could be continued beyond pregnancy, by holding the baby. I decided to treat it as a basic mode, but to face forward (Fig 4.3.7 and Fig 4.3.8) instead of turning to the side. This departs from the conventional artistic depiction of the female nude as a passive 'thing' to be gazed upon by voyeurs.²⁰

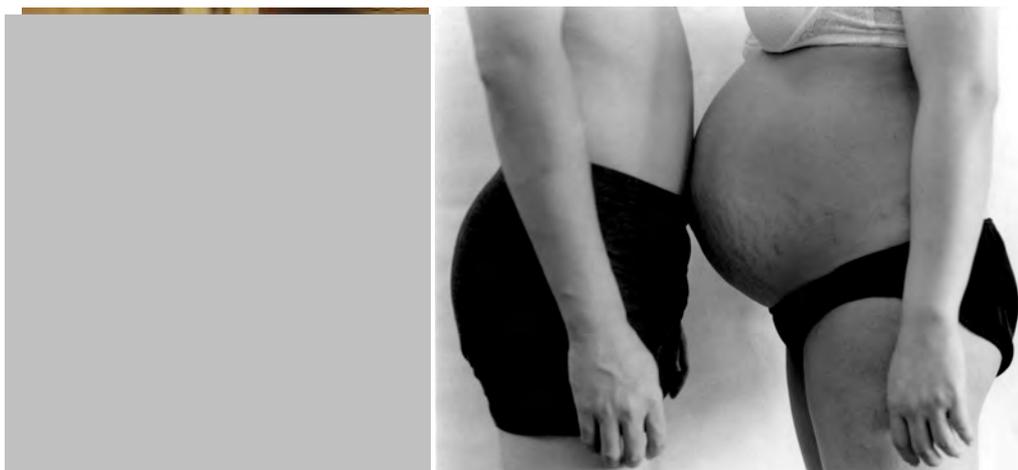


Fig 4.3.9 (Left) Dorothea Tanning, Family Portrait, 1954.

Fig 4.3.10 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, a close-up of the first photograph in Relative Measure No. 2: My Family, Jun 2001.

I created the second series, which explores the relationships within my nuclear family, by expressing the changes in our bodies over a period of time, from pregnancy to the child's growing up. I intended to challenge the fixed traditional hierarchy where 'the father is the master of the family'. For instance, Dorothea Tanning's Family Portrait (Fig 4.3.9) satirically implied that the privilege and power of a father in a real family life is over inflated and a mother is over belittled. I used the pose of touching my husband's stomach with my protruding pregnant belly, thus forcing him to face the situation and to show that our baby is a shared responsibility, rather than mine alone (Fig 4.3.10).

¹⁹ Sandra Matthews and Laura Wexler 199.

²⁰ John Berger. Way of Seeing (Taipei: Ming Wen, 1991 (1972)) 56-58.



Fig 4.3.11 Anna and Richard Wagner, A German Christmas, 1900-1945. Berlin, Heimatmuseum, Charlottenbury.



Fig 4.3.12 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The stair-like frame for Relative Measure No. 2: My Family in the exhibition Motherhood and Creativity, 2003.

After I had taken the third images in both series, I planned to continue to produce these artworks for as long as Anna and Richard Wagner produced self-portraits for their Christmas cards – 45 years (Fig 4.3.11).²¹ Then, in 2003, I displayed my ambition for continuity by installing these two series in stair-like frames in the exhibition Motherhood and Creativity (Fig 4.3.12). However, the long-term plan came to an end when I realised that flexibility is important when dealing with change and growth during motherhood. By the time I had stopped breast-feeding and my son had begun to enjoy walking, we both began to feel uncomfortable about being photographed in the nude and in the positions previously adopted. For me, it was a meaningless exercise to force him to take part merely to satisfy my ambition to continue my plan. Therefore, I decided to discontinue the work

²¹ Kristen Lippincott. The Story of Time (London: National Maritime Museum, 1999). 228.

when he was one and a half years old. In 2005, the artwork Relative Measure was eventually shown in its final form in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood (Fig 4.3.14). I did, however, develop another artwork, My Son and I at the Same Height (see next section 4.3.2), to continue the concept of a long-term project involving physical measurement.



Fig 4.3.13 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The installation Relative Measure No. 1: My Son and I, 2005.



Fig 4.3.14 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The installation of Relative Measure and the detail of the frame, 2005.

The final concept of these artworks relates to their framing. Using Relative Measure No. 1: My Son and I (Fig 4.3.13) as an example, in the left-hand image, I framed my nude pregnant body without exposing my face in order to question the limitations society places on pregnant women whom it defines as selfless receptacles. In the middle image, I extended the area to frame our bodies to imply that my son and I had started to experience the self as two individual people. I still, however, struggled with the concept of the 'faceless' mother and my son's physical dependence on breast-feeding. In the largest image, on the right, my eyes are in the photograph, which shows that I have gained sufficient confidence to deal with the self. My son has challenged me by watching over my shoulder; he wishes to explore his own world. The stair-like frame, surrounding three stages of our growth (Fig 4.3.14) symbolises the view that the strength of self and the values of motherhood increase step by step.

4.3.2 Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height

Title: My Son and I at the Same Height

Size: 29.5x19.3 cm, 46x32.3 cm, 28.5x18 cm, 31x21.5 cm, 37.5x24.5 cm, 36.7x25 cm, 41.2x30.5 cm, 56.5x36 cm and 58x36 cm

Quantity: 9 photographic works

Date photographs were taken: 24 Aug 2002, Dec 2002, 07 Jan 2003, 10 Jan 2003, 11 Jan 2003, 25 Aug 2003, 8 Apr 2004, 15 Oct 2004 and 2 Jan 2005

Date of working: 2002 and 2005

Media: Colour photographs in dark brown frames

Display: Fixed on a wall. All images of me in the photographs are positioned so that the top of my head in the picture is at my actual height measured from the ground



Fig 4.3.15 Hsiao-Ching Wang, My Son and I at the Same Height, 2002-2005. Colour photographs.



Fig 4.3.16 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The installation of My Son and I at the Same Height, 2005.



Fig 4.3.17 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The first image of My Son and I at the Same Height, 1Y 02M (24 Aug 2002). In front of our rented flat at Hove Park Villas. Hove, UK.



Fig 4.3.18 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The second image of My Son and I at the Same Height, 1Y 06M (24 Dec 2002). In front of my mother-in-law's home. Su-Ao, Taiwan.



Fig 4.3.19 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The third image of My Son and I at the Same Height, 1Y 06M (07 Jan 2003). My sister-in-law's wedding party in the National Hotel. Tai-Chung, Taiwan.



Fig 4.3.20 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The fourth image of My Son and I at the Same Height, 1Y 06M (10 Jan 2003). In front of the sign for Ching Tien Street, where I spent my childhood. Taipei, Taiwan.



Fig 4.3.21 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The fifth image of My Son and I at the Same Height, 1Y 06M (11 Jan 2003). In the ancestral shrine at my parents' home. Taipei, Taiwan.

Fig 4.3.22 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The sixth image of My Son and I at the Same Height, 2Y 03M (25 Aug 2003). In a 30 limit zone. The 30 reminded me of my age. Munich, Germany.



Fig 4.3.23 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The seventh image of My Son and I at the Same Height, 2Y 10M (8 Apr 2004). In front of the main door of 26 Hove Park Villas. Hove, UK.

Fig 4.3.24 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The eighth image of My Son and I at the Same Height, 3Y 04M (15 Oct 2004). The day before moving house (our landlord wanted to sell the flat). Hove, UK.



Fig 4.3.25 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The ninth image of My Son and I at the Same Height, 3Y 07M (2 Jan 2005). In front of our new flat, Blenheim Court. Hove, UK

A. Description

This project is a sequence of colour photographs of my son and I standing at the same height in different places and at different times. In this time of growth, my son's height is the most significant aspect. These photographs are intended to record a game we played, one involving feelings and finding out about our growth together. The rule of the game is that the taller person is the standard, and we try to find a place, chosen from our day-to-day lives, where the taller one supports the shorter one so that both are the same height. The camera is set at our eye level. This is a game-like project and a snapshot setting for a family photograph. I plan to continue it throughout my life, if my son agrees to co-operate. There is no specific time when the photographs must be taken but in order to record my son's growth they have so far been taken at least once a year.

The pictures are enlarged to various sizes because I set the rule that all images of me should be of the same size. Another rule is that, when displayed, the top of my head in all images should be at my actual height, measuring from the floor (see 4.3.26).

B. Statement

When my son walked and I supported him with my hand on the low wall in front of our home in Hove, we felt extremely happy, because of this

interaction at the same height, so I recorded the image. The first photograph was taken initially without a sense of its being important as it was just a snapshot but it quickly inspired me to make this artwork.

The smile, I discovered, came naturally from the happiness I felt at my son's growth and our interdependence. It seems to imply that we love to get along with each other without pressure from gender and hierarchy. I feel there is equality and mutual respect between us. I hope we can often remind ourselves to treat each other equally and with mutual respect.²²

C. Concept and practical process

At the end of 2002, I was determined to continue this series of photographs and planned to develop this artwork as a long-term project. As a game of searching for suitable places with my son and taking at least one photograph a year, I recorded many photographs between 2002 and 2005. I selected five of them to exhibit in 2003 and nine in 2005.²³

In 2003, for the exhibition Motherhood and Creativity, I established two further concepts: that I would enlarge all the images so that I was the same size in all of them, and that I would display them all at the same height, without concern for their difference in size. In 2005, with more careful arrangement, these images were further enlarged, framed and hung in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood. This time there was an additional element: the images of me were positioned at the same height from the floor in all of the frames (Fig 4.3.26).



Fig 4.3.26 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The installation view of My Son and I at the Same Height, 2005.

²² Written by Hsiao-Ching Wang.

²³ This artwork has grown continually since 2005. Two new images, taken in 2006 and 2007, were exhibited together with the previous nine pieces in the Chain exhibition, held in the Chinese Art Centre, Manchester in the UK in 2007. Information about this exhibition is provided in the appendix 3.

- The meanings of standing at the same height



Fig 4.3.27 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The installation of My Son and I at the Same Height, 2005.



Fig 4.3.28 Charles Ray, Family Romance, 1993. Mixed media, 134.6×215.9×27.8 cm. Edition of three. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of the Norton Family Foundation.

The gesture of standing at the same height in this artwork and exhibition (Fig 4.3.27) implies that both mother and son make a stand against the conventional hierarchy of the family and create a better relationship by respecting one another as individuals. The action of finding a place to stand at the same height leads us to recognise that respect for one another does not come naturally and that there is a need to carefully educate and practice, step by step. I purposely maintained the ratio of our bodies in the images to avoid the mocking 'fake equality' of Charles Ray's sculpture Family Romance (Fig 4.3.28). He made all the family members the same height to conform to the modern social planner's finest dream for the nuclear family.²⁴ Its manipulation

²⁴ Anne Middleton Wagner, Mother Stone: The Vitality of Modern British Sculpture, (London and New Haven: Yale University Press) 9-10.

of scale, with large children and shrunken adults, challenges and disrupts society's balance of power. In my opinion, there is no real or fixed meaning of equality in society, but we need to approach it by avoiding oppression of others or suppression of ourselves, and respecting the differences between people. Moreover, from the experience of educating my child from dependent to independent, I believe that pursuing the self as an independent individual, and trying to support the 'weaker' or 'lower' with full respect, are very important approaches to a healthy state of equality.

Whenever I reviewed this artwork, my son and I at 'the same height' still worried me. Looking back at my childhood, I found it evoked a feeling of conflict with my experience of growing up. The happier I felt about growing up, the more I felt pain at becoming a woman under the suppression of the traditional hierarchy. In our society, children have better treatment and freedom than women; therefore, growth for me meant I was losing the protection of childhood and the right to be a happy person. I realised that this simple method of visualisation – finding something to support the shorter person to make us the same height – had the potential to heal me. Therefore, it has developed as an artwork with rich inner meanings, including the celebration of growth, the challenge of gender bias, and the cultivation of respect for others, especially in the various statuses old/young, male/female, and power/powerless.

- **Measuring increase in height based on bodily experience**

In changing my son's gesture from lying down to upright when measuring his height, this artwork carries forward the idea of the previous work Relative Measure. It emphasises the bodily experience of growth, rather than its scientific measurement, and reveals our relationship.



Fig 4.3.29 Dextrose advertisement, 1943. From Fortune magazine.

The viewpoint on the celebration of growth through bodily experience illustrated in the advertisement in Fig 4.3.29 is similar to that in Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height. A group of photographs of a father and his daughter at different times are used to document the girl's development, and the changes in height are emphasised by a red growth curve. Measuring their height in comparison to their parents is a universally happy experience for children. This image successfully allows the audience to absorb the detail of the images as a way to discover both the story behind it and the relationship between the two people during growth. More ambitiously, in Artwork 4, I purposely use the physical activity of finding a suitable place to stand to highlight the importance of bodily experience. In so doing, we together celebrate my son's growth rather than making an unnecessary anxiety out of scientific measurement.

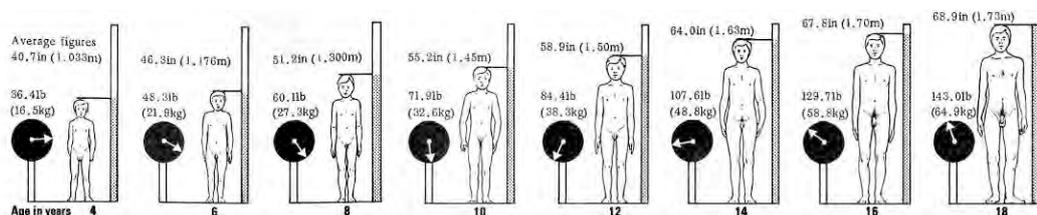
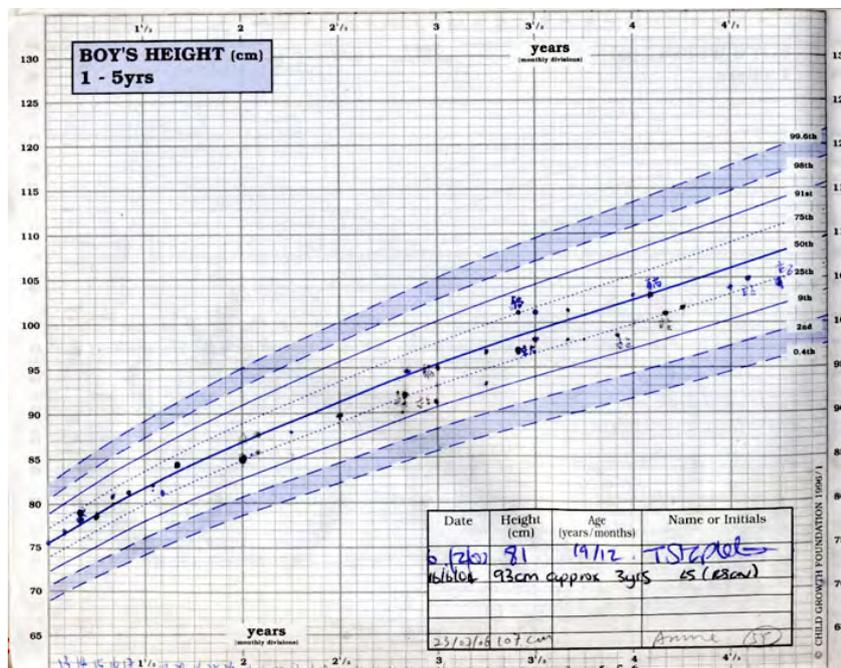


Fig 4.3.30 The Chart and Diagram of Growth. (Above) The chart is from my son's Personal Child Health Record in the UK. (Below) The diagram is from Ruth Midgley and Susan Sturrock. Child's Body: A Parent's Manual. New York & London: Paddington Press, 1977.

When a child is born, the governments of both Taiwan and Britain provide growth charts and diagrams (such as Fig 4.3.30) for parents which help them to record their child's progress and to ensure they are on track. However, in my experience of motherhood, these scientific numbers often produce

unnecessary anxiety if a child's growth deviates slightly or falls below the average. Over a period of time, I understood that growth is organic and contains many individual differences with built in degrees of flexibility and unexpectedness. If we insist on conforming to the fixed scientific numbers for children from different backgrounds it will destroy the essential pleasure of growth.

4.3.3 Summary

The second step of artistic development stemmed from the idea of the interaction between motherhood and creating art. Artwork 3: Relative Measure and Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height are representatives. Due to my earlier attempts to maintain the self (the crucial element of sustaining creative identity) in art, I gained more confidence to continue the project through the discovery of creativity in early motherhood. My son's and my shared excitement with regard to growth led me to develop a sequential representation for recording it, which was different from the conventional methods of scientific measurement. Highlighting the bodily experience from the maternal viewpoint, these two artworks reveal the change in our relationship and the concept of not suppressing one another during our growth. The achievement of motherhood is also exposed by the visual accumulation of our growth and emphasised by my intention to develop these artworks for as long as I am a mother. In this section, the concepts of bodily experience, the choice of gesture and the means of displaying the artworks were also explored as part of the practical process.

In conclusion, using bodily experience in artwork has resulted in the development of a different means of representing growth, from the subjective viewpoint of the mother. The selection and research of suitable gestures for use as basic modes in these sequential images has resulted in significant developments for visual art and motherhood; from the female nude, previously treated as a passive 'thing', but now as a subjective individual, through to the shift in responsibility for childcare, from the mother alone, to two parents facing one another in Relative Measure. Moreover, the gesture in My Son and I at the Same Height expresses the complex issues of the celebration of growth, respect for one another and equality in the family. In addition, the specific attitude of flexibility and respect for growth, coming from the experience of motherhood, was demonstrated when I decided to discontinue Artwork 3 as my son learnt to walk. The idea of a long-term project did not stop, and has continued in Artwork 4 and the two works which are discussed in the next section.

4.4 Reformulating motherhood: active memory-making by reviewing motherhood

Continuing on from the previous ideas – asserting the self in opposition to the conventional expectations of motherhood, and sustaining creativity through the action of measuring growth – this section mainly discusses the concept of reformulating motherhood by reviewing and reinterpreting memories and recollections. It is the third step in the artistic development of this project and its main characteristic, of looking back at my motherhood, is the most significant difference to my previous artworks. All of the artistic practice in this step, including Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator, Artwork 6: Mother's Box, and the installation, Picturing Motherhood, create a new dimension, accumulating the achievements of a mother through active memory-making.

The Mother as a Creator is a time-tunnel of sequential, annual self-portraits of my son and me. It represents and reconstructs the important events we have shared in diverse creative situations. In addition to tracing our growth and discussing other details about the making of this artwork, the sense of intimacy and complexity coming from its compressed dimension are explored in this section. Mother's Box is a series of cubic boxes designed as various interior storage devices. Each box stores materials and documents collected and created at different stages in my motherhood. They are not only my personal treasure chests, but also small portable museums which allow my audience and me to appreciate all my memories and achievements of motherhood at first hand. In the installation Picturing Motherhood I took the opportunity to communicate with different spectators and to reformulate motherhood using the concept of creativity. It continues the theme of persistently creating art and giving voice to the visual story of my own motherhood; taking it from the private to the public domain. The feedback from all of these allowed me to examine the extent to which I have achieved the aim of sustaining my creative identity and of being both an artist and a mother.

4.4.1 Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator

Title: The Mother as a Creator

Size: 81x119 cm each photograph

Quantity: 5 photographic works

Date photographs were taken: 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005

Date of working: 2001-2005

Media: Black & white photographs

Display: Hanging on crimson walls inside a box-like structure



Fig 4.4.1 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The Mother as a Creator, 2001-2005. Black & white photographs.



Fig 4.4.2 Layer 1 of The Mother as a Creator, 2001. The day before I was due to give birth. Taken at my studio in Taiwan.



Fig 4.4.3 Layer 2 of The Mother as a Creator, 2002. Pressing the camera shutter together.



Fig 4.4.4 Layer 3 of The Mother as a Creator, 2003. My son's leg was in plaster.



Fig 4.4.5 Layer 4 of The Mother as a Creator, 2004. Celebrating Christmas.



Fig 4.4.6 Layer 5 of The Mother as a Creator, 2005. Setting up the exhibition.



Fig 4.4.7 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the installation of The Mother as a Creator in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

A. Description

The Mother as a Creator is a series of black and white photographs. They are sequential self-portraits taken with my son, year after year, and they trace our growth and development from the beginning to the present.

The first picture was taken on the day before I was due to give birth. I then took a photograph each year to represent a significant event, with my son and myself in the foreground in front of the previous picture. Owing to the aggregation of layers, the composition and content of the pictures has become more and more complicated over time. Eventually, with all these layers of time, all of my son's and my portraits emerge on the same surface in the final photograph.

I plan to make this artwork over a period of 20 years and the 20th layer will be established in the year when my son is 19 years old. His age then will mean that I have completed the first step of motherhood as my son enters into adult life. I chose this age because, after the date of birth, most of the solar/lunar birthdays fall on different days. However, every 19 years, the solar/lunar birthday appears on the same day. It is a meaningful year in our tradition and also, for me, celebrates the culmination of my creativity.

B. Statement

I carefully take a representative photograph each year as a portrait of my son and myself, and then the next year take another image of us in front of this photograph.

Different stages in my son's and my life are overlaid; and with the different pictures we have created a dialogue with each other in this dimension; a compressed dimension.

From these dimensions a new visualisation of motherhood can emerge.

*Looking back at my motherhood after a short period of time,
I was strongly aware of the mother as a creator, because
I had created a vivid life from my body,
created a fluid matrix of experience between my child and me, and
created a particular motherhood upon my own wisdom and continuous effort.*

*By accumulating them year-by-year and layer-by-layer,
these images are
a powerful visual evidence which proves that
the mother is a creator and good at creating.²⁵*

C. Concept and practical process

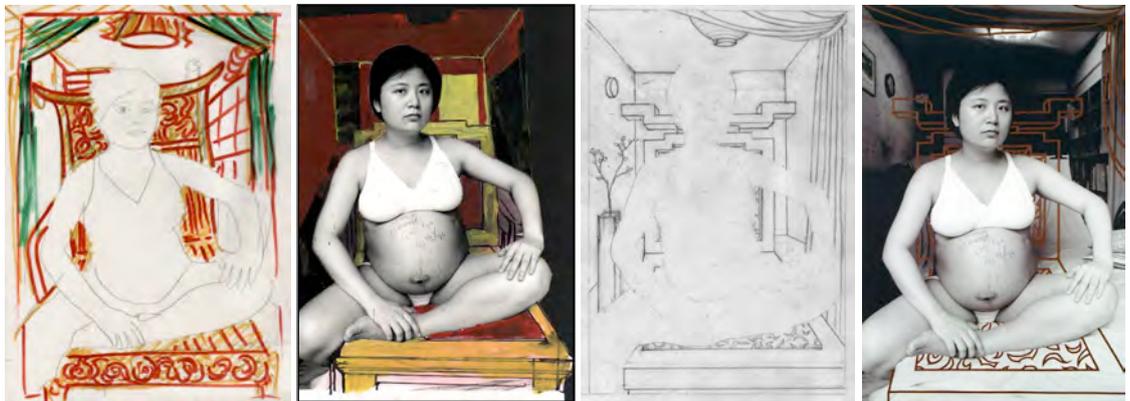


Fig 4.4.8 Hsiao-Ching Wang, samples of my attempts to design and paint a chair on the first photograph of The Mother as a Creator, 2001.

Continuing with the idea of asserting a self-identity from Artwork 2: I Sign; I Exist, where I signed my own pregnant belly, I took the first photograph of this artwork to announce the mother's capability to create. It was taken before the date on which I was due to give birth. After passing an uncomfortable ten month pregnancy and experiencing the crisis of being in labour for four days and three nights, I felt that maternal creativity was extremely difficult to maintain and that the creative contribution needed to be given a high priority. Therefore, to challenge the situation, I enlarged the image to life size, and painted an imposing chair on in order to physically confirm my status as a mother (Fig 4.4.8).

- **The cause of using layered images**

Observing this large size image hanging in my studio, I became aware of a very interesting dialogue between the two versions of me; the one existing inside and the one outside the image in different time and space. Inspired by this experience, I began to imagine and research a mysterious dimension

²⁵ Written by Hsiao-Ching Wang.

which could compress many images of me in different times and spaces into the same time-space, and also express my son's and my growth over a period of time. Two types of image, identified through my image research, explain the method and concept of the new visual language I aimed to develop. The image I See by the Paper (Fig 4.4.9) provides a sense of layering, with an endless repetition of a person seeing himself in the same position in the newspaper. For me, this tunnel-like sequence psychologically reveals a confused bottomless pit of exploring the real self. It has attracted me since I was young and attempted to apply it in my artistic practice. However, the problems of dramatically shrunken and blurred images in the third and following layers, and the technical repetition of the same gesture without overpowering content reduced both the possibilities and my passion for the idea.

Although Jo Spence's Mother and Daughter Work: Saying Goodbye to My Introjected Mother (Fig 4.4.10) only contains two layers, it gave me inspiration to solve the problem of over shrinkage and blurring by using a large inset image, and to revise the content from boring repetition to enrichment by creating a meaningful interaction between two of the selves inside and outside the image.²⁶ Therefore, I tried to develop a new visual language, time-tunnel sequence, which expresses the long process of our growth by compressing the old layer and the new scene together. Following careful consideration of the visual connection in 2002, I made a decision to take a new photograph of my son and me, in front of a large version of the previous year's photograph, every year. In 2005, this artwork had developed five layers and was exhibited in Picturing Motherhood (Fig 4.4.7); one more layer was produced in 2006 and all of the layers were exhibited together in the exhibition Chain in 2007.²⁷

²⁶ Jo Spence said that she tried to come to terms with her own death in this photograph. She enacted a ritual form of saying goodbye to the Working-Class Mother, a person of whom she was taught to be ashamed. From: Jo Spence. Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 170.

²⁷ The Chinese Art Center in Manchester invited me to exhibit two of my photographic works of motherhood in the exhibition 'Chain' from 12 April to 17 June 2007. This gallery leads the world in focusing mainly on contemporary Chinese art. The exhibition implies a notion of confinement and restraint, but it can also be understood simply as the connection of a series of things, which are linked together by something they have in common. All three artists in this exhibition used personal stories to illustrate an aspect of the reality of family intimacy. For more information about the exhibition Chain, please see Appendix 3.



Fig 4.4.9 I See by the Paper, insurance advertisement from Fortune magazine, July 1939.



Fig 4.4.10 Jo Spence/David Robert, Mother and Daughter Work: Saying Goodbye to My Introjected Mother, 1988.

- **The sense of intimacy and complexity in the compressed dimension**
The compressed dimension in this photographic artwork The Mother as a Creator bridges the gap and highlights the relationship between different

photographs that are divided by 'thin slices of time'.²⁸ Comparing it with the photographs Dave, Maggie and Steve Summerton (Fig 4.3.11) taken by Daniel Meadows, the latter reveals the change more clearly, by the dramatic growth of the mother and her children over 25 years.²⁹ Visually, the sharp divide between these two images interrupts the flow and is a reminder that abundant stories about them have completely disappeared. This split cuts off the fluidity of their growth, emphasising the tension of the result in the simple form of before-and-after. However, the form of compressed dimension in my photographs revises the gap and strengthens the intimate relationship at each check-point time in the long process of growth within the images.

This compressed dimension lends itself to the concept that motherhood is a long-term process with a complex weaving and accumulation of experiences. For viewers, these overlapping images produce confusion by interweaving logical perception and intermixed sentiment. At first glance, all the images of my son and me, taken at different times, are stuck complicatedly together in the same image and make it difficult to understand. They are similar to the chaotic language of Michael Snow's Authorization (Fig 4.4.12) in which he repeatedly re-photographed himself and multiple images of himself in a mirror. By carefully reading my artwork, however, an intimate time sequence is revealed, one by one, using the clue of logical tunnel perspective. This compressed dimension, composed of layered photographs, allows me to express the senses of complexity and intimacy which come from the experience of motherhood and the process of growth.



Fig 4.4.11 Daniel Meadows, Dave, Maggie and Steve Summerton, 1974 (left) and 1999 (right). Daniel Meadows completed a series photographic project called The Bus in which he found and re-photographed the people in the original image after a period of 20 years.

²⁸ The concept that a photograph is 'a thin slice of time' is taken from Susan Sontag's book, On Photography (London: Penguin, 1979(1977)) 22-23.

²⁹ Daniel Meadows. The Bus: The Free Photographic Omnibus 1973-2001 (London: Harvill, 2001) 168.



Fig 4.4.12 Michael Snow, *Authorization*, 1969. Black & white Polaroid photographs, adhesive cloth tape, mirror and metal frame, 44.5x54.5 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

- **Active memory-making by photographing representative gestures and scenes in each year of motherhood**

In order to determine the gesture and scene in each new layer, I always research my son's and my growth during the year by reviewing my photo-diary, recalling meaningful events or steps forward, making sketches and taking lots of practice pictures. I use the term 'active memory-making' to emphasise the characteristic of reconstruction and to differentiate it from the approach in the previous four artworks which record the presence of motherhood. For example the gesture in Layer 2 was inspired by a photograph (Fig 4.4.13) in my photo-diary. I used it as a basic mode for a series of photographic sketches, such as the photograph in Fig 4.4.14. In 2002, in order to assess the possibility of carrying out this re-photography plan, I developed a sketch on the computer, using collage, for Layer 3 (Fig 4.4.15), and this has been my approach to every subsequent layer. The sketch and final result of Layer 3 (Fig 4.4.16) clearly describe the important process of memory making in this artwork.

The way of marking the date when the picture was taken, also reveals my ambition for active memory-making. These close-up images of each layer (Fig 4.4.17) show how I included the date to highlight our growth and creativity. For example, the bricks in Layer 3 imply that, in 2003, my son loved to pile them up and was starting to recognise their number and colour.



Fig 4.4.13 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, from Annie Wang's photo-diary, 4 Dec. 2001.

Fig 4.4.14 (Middle) Hsiao-Ching Wang, an attempt at the second layer of The Mother as a Creator, 2002.

Fig 4.4.15 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, a test version of the third layer of The Mother as a Creator, created using collage on the computer, 2002.



Fig 4.4.16 Hsiao-Ching Wang, two sketches (images on the left) of Layer 4 and the final result, 2004.



Fig 4.4.17 Different ways of marking the date in each layer. Five close-up images of each layer in The Mother as a Creator, 2001-2005.

- **Mother and child in the process of creating**

The ongoing self-portraits symbolise the mother's unceasing creativity. Besides being inspired by the myth of earth mothers, who were the primal divinity in almost every society, the idea of mother as a creator came directly from my actual experience of motherhood.³⁰ I found that the mother created both a new life and her own new life; moreover, she supported her children in creating their own specific growth by dealing with her motherhood in her own creative way. From my viewpoint as an artist, all these creative processes in motherhood were similar to artistic creativity. The unstable and unpredictable characteristics of motherhood especially arouse the nature of creativity. However, they are all seen as undervalued domestic occurrences by conventional society. Therefore, in The Mother as a Creator I tried to show how my son and I use the action of creation to encounter growth over the long period of motherhood.



Fig 4.4.18 The processes and detail of Layer 4, 2004.

Besides recording the action of creation, the objects set in the scenes demonstrate what we had created in that year. For example, in Layer 4 (Fig

³⁰ Gaia is the most famous of the earth mothers. In Ancient Greek myths, she created every living thing, and the mountains, and the waters. From: Cassandra Eason. The Complete Book of Women's Wisdom (London: Piatkus, 2001) 14.

4.4.18), we mark my son's first Christmas celebration with our hands. In an excited and creative way, we decorated our Christmas tree and marked the date the picture was taken.

- **The time rule used to create these layered photographs**

One year one layer is the basic rule for this artwork. Initially, the plan was to take each layer on my son's birthday. However, it changed when I tried to put it into practice. Experience showed me that the life of a mother and child was flexible and fluid, and I had to confront realities such as sudden accidents or the withdrawal of co-operation. Keeping a rigid timetable meant that we would miss meaningful events that had or might happen unexpectedly. Therefore, I gave up the strict rule, used artificial dates, and saw my son's birthday as a reminder, urging me to review our development.

I plan, during the creation of this artwork, to produce 20 layers from the day before my son's due date to his 19th birthday (2001-2020).³¹ If we both want to continue the project, we will do so by agreement, indefinitely. If my son wishes to stop before his 19th birthday, I will continue by other means. I believe the concept of co-operation produces much more creativity than does coercion. I have chosen to terminate the project on his 19th birthday, because this is a big day. The second solar and lunar birthday (which in that year fall on the same day), symbolises the turning point where my son becomes an adult and I finish the first step of motherhood.³² In our culture, we use the lunar calendar to celebrate and record the important events in our lives. There is a tradition in my family that we do not pay much attention to the child's birthday until this special one, at 19 years of age.

- **The imagery of crimson**

After giving birth, use of the colour crimson was intuitive when I considered painting a maternal chair on Layer 1 to highlight the creative power of the pregnant body. For me, the imagery of this deep red directly connects to the blood in the womb and the imagery of fertility and creativity. However, in my culture, it is stigmatised as a symbol of filthiness and misfortune. In Taiwan, some traditionally-minded people still believe that every newborn baby should have its head shaved because the 'dirty' blood of his/her mother has contaminated the hair.³³

³¹ In the lunar calendar system in our country, a baby is one year old on the day it is born. Age is measured from when we are in our mother's belly. Therefore, when my son is 19 years old by the solar calendar he will be 20 according to the lunar calendar.

³² After the date of birth, most of the solar/lunar birthdays appear on different days. However, every 19 years, the solar/lunar birthday appears on the same day. Using solar and lunar calendars I can sustain the balance between Eastern and Western cultures.

³³ Huan-Yue Liu, A-Chao Chen and Chin-Fung Chen (劉還月, 陳阿昭, 陳靜芳). The Etiquette and Customs of Taiwanese People (Taipei: Formosa Folkway, 2003) 116-117.

In the gap between social interpretation and my experience, I attempted to break this conventional stigma by using feminine crimson to celebrate and emphasise the concept of mother as a creator in Artwork 5. In 2003, in the exhibition The Creativity of Motherhood, I tried to paint crimson arches as a background for each photograph and to construct an altar-like environment (Fig 4.4.19). In 2005, in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, I replaced these arches (Fig 4.4.20). I created a crimson space without interruption, reflection or separation, and let all the images of this artwork naturally exist within it (Fig 4.4.7 and Fig 4.4.21-22). Peacefully embracing by the clam crimson, without any fright, a new imagery of menstruation or lochia becomes nourishment to enrich the female creativity.



Fig 4.4.19 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the installation of The Mother as a Creator in the exhibition The Creativity of Motherhood, 2004.



Fig 4.4.20 The reflection from the crimson arch. The installation of The Mother as a Creator in the exhibition The Creativity of Motherhood, 2004.



Fig 4.4.21 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The installation of The Mother as a Creator in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, 2005.



Fig 4.4.22 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The installation of The Mother as a Creator in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

4.4.2 Artwork 6: Mother's Box

Title: Mother's Box No. 1: Pregnancy Box

Size: (Closed) 20x20x20 cm; (Open) 20x20x40 cm

Quantity: 6 series of items within a box

Date of working: 2001-2005

Media: Mixed media

Display: Box positioned on a stand at the same height as my belly



Fig 4.4.23 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Mother's Box No. 1: Pregnancy Box, 2001-2005.

Title: Mother's Box No. 2: Growing Box

Size: (Closed) 32x32x32 cm; (Open) 96x64x64 cm

Quantity: 9 series of items within a box

Date of working: 2003-2005

Media: Mixed media

Display: Box positioned on a table with chairs at a suitable height for children to use



Fig 4.4.24 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Mother's Box No. 2: Growing Box, 2003-2005.



Fig 4.4.25 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The installation of Artwork 6: Mother's Box in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, 2005.



Fig 4.4.26 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The demonstration of Artwork 6: Mother's Box in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, 2005.



Fig 4.4.27 Hsiao-Ching Wang, one of the Artist's Books for Mother's Box.

A. Description

The Mother's Box is a series of cubic boxes made of wood that store the materials and documents collected and created at different stages of my motherhood. All boxes were, or will be, designed with various interior storage devices which open in different ways. When they are closed, the boxes can be displayed individually or as building-blocks, stacked in various forms or piles, just as children would do. When they are open, they are like small museums which allow my audience (and me) to appreciate all my memories and achievements of motherhood at first hand.

Because this is a long-term project, the number of boxes is increasing as time goes by. In 2005, two boxes, the Pregnancy Box and Growing Box, were complete and were displayed in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood. The items in these boxes are precious, so I set a rule for the audience; only after my demonstration, and in small groups, are they allowed to carefully touch or open the boxes and to view the items. Alternatively, they can read in detail the Artist's Books about the two boxes (Fig 4.4.22).

There are six series of items within the blue Pregnancy Box (Fig 4.4.23). They are entitled 'Dizzy Sea', 'Swimming Baby', 'Pregnancy Poems', 'Muffled Murmurs', 'Private Measure', and 'Useless Pain'. Nine groups of items are stored in the red Growing Box (Fig 4.4.24), named 'Freshness', 'Relief', 'Toy Diary', '100% Cotton', 'Train Train', 'Baby Talk; Boy Talk' (sound recorded), 'Monthly Growth', 'Irritating' and 'Step by Step'.



Fig 4.4.28 An illustration of 6 groups of items documents within the Pregnancy Box.



Fig 4.4.29 An illustration of 9 groups of items within the Growing Box.

B. Statement

*From foetus to infant,
from toddler to grown-up,
from gloomy pregnant poem to painful EFM report,³⁴
from pleasing soft buggy to enjoyable colourful tricycle,
all the things I kept in motherhood are invaluable treasures.*

*In my love for my son,
every item my son used retains our intimate sensation,
every sentence I have written reflects my sincere feelings on his growth,
every photograph I have taken reveals stories with a mixture of sadness and joy.*

*Piling up from few to many, from a hill to a mountain,
things are more and more chaotic as my memory.*

*Instead of throwing them away or squeezing them in the attic,
I create a particular mother's box to collect/recollect them in my own way.*

*From closed to open, from open to closed,
using this ritual, I encourage myself to carry on touching these little achievements
accumulated in motherhood.*

I feel, the fertile power of motherhood is pouring out from my abundant box.³⁵

³⁴ EFM stands for electronic fetal monitoring. This is a way of recording the contractions of a woman in labour, and listening to her baby's heartbeat using sophisticated electronic equipment.

C. Concept and practical process

From inspiration, planning, design, making, and installation through to demonstration, the process of making and exhibiting this artwork is very complex compared to the other works in this project. It involves the realm of visual art, literature, sound and performance, as well as knowledge of motherhood, memory, cooperation and education. All of these resonate with the similar complex and onerous characteristics of motherhood. Audience feedback from the exhibition Picturing Motherhood in 2005, concluded that Mother's Box is both art and a valuable heirloom conveying a universal experience of motherhood which used to be hidden in the private sphere.

- **The inspiration for using the form of a box**

The rapidly increasing work of tidying up the things and documents that my son used and I created urged me to explore the relationship between maternal memory, collection and creativity through artistic practice. In 2002, when I visited my parents in Taiwan, I unexpectedly found an old leather box which had belonged to my grandfather who had passed away almost 30 years before (Fig 4.4.30). My father kept the box as his treasure and had not allowed me to touch it until I found it. There are no jewels or money inside it, but some personal documents, photographs and used objects that my grandfather had collected. By carefully touching and appreciating these private items, the big gap between my venerable, long departed, grandfather and me was suddenly bridged. It was the first time I had been able to communicate with him and to appreciate his sensitive gentle mind which I had never previously understood.

This strong experience – discovering one's memories stored in a box – inspired me to develop the artistic idea of active memory-making, to deal with the increasing memories of motherhood. In 2003, I made many sketches of boxes which might contain the creativity of tidying up in motherhood. For example, in sketch Fig 4.4.31, I tried to find a way to easily store and display various maternal objects with respect to their meanings and functions. I decided to use cubes made from wood as a basic form for the artwork, to connect with the creative, constructive function of building bricks, and to reveal the intention of actively interpreting my own memory of growing together with my child.

³⁵ Written by Hsiao-Ching Wang.



Fig 4.4.30 My grandfather's box and his collection, 1930s-1970s.

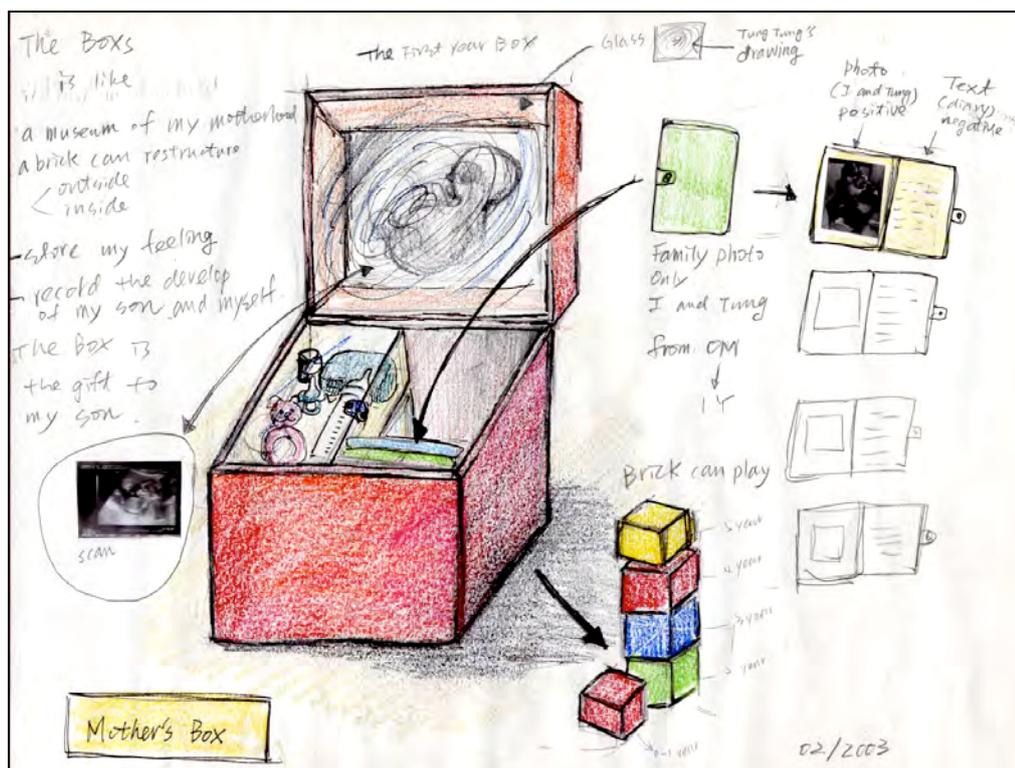


Fig 4.4.31 Hsiao-Ching Wang, A sample sketch for Mother's Box, 2003.

- **The box symbolises a maternal space**

The original meaning of 'box' is a receptacle made of box wood.³⁶ It is a container or space for placing or storing things. Dona Z. Meilach indicated that "We begin in the enclosed space of the womb, we live our lives in boxes:

³⁶ Henry Cecil Wyld, Ed. The Universal Dictionary of The English Language (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1961) 121.

rooms, automobiles, homes and, finally caskets. The box represents the microcosm of man's existence."³⁷ More than using similar imagery, in my artistic practice I tried to revise the conventional treatment of a woman's body as a passive incubator. By designing a series of boxes which could be opened in different ways, and including various internal constructions and fertile memory sources, the maternal space I created gradually developed diverse and creative characteristics.



Fig 4.4.32 The opening mechanism of the Growing Box provides an altar-like environment.



Fig 4.4.33 Hans Memling, The Virgin with Child and Donors, c1400. National Museum of the Fine Arts, Havana.

To explain the personal sacred-like feeling of comfort, calm and healing which comes from reviewing the objects that my son used or I created in motherhood, I liken my Mother's Box to a personal woman's altar which emphasises special maternal power. Kay Turner indicated that in recent times women have come to altar-making by enjoying a subjective and self-created religious reality. She said, "Their claim on the altar tradition is based not on religion *per se*, but on an intuitive or political – often a feminist – alignment with the *spiritual dimension*, a feeling for the sacred that is broadly based on individuality, receptivity, and creativity."³⁸ For the opening mechanism of the Growing Box (Fig 4.4.32), I

³⁷ Dona Z. Meilach. Box Art: Assemblage and Construction (New York: Crown publishers, 1975) 7.

³⁸ Kay Turner. Beautiful Necessity: The Art and Meaning of Women's Altars (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999) 61.

used the same concept, again making a religious environment similar to a traditional triptych-style altar (Fig 4.4.33). This allowed me to concentrate my own spirit on the memory of motherhood whilst securely embracing the symmetrical form.

- **The box is like a portable museum of memory**

Besides considering an appropriate way to store memorable objects from the domestic sphere, taking inspiration from family albums I planned to create my boxes to be shared in public.³⁹ With the further intention of professionally and easily storing and sharing the objects within the boxes in my daily life and in the exhibition domain, I created this artwork using the idea of portable museums, as in Marcel Duchamp's Boîte en valise (Fig 4.4.34). In his statement, Duchamp said,

Instead of painting something new, I wanted to reproduce those pictures of which I was so fond, in miniature and contained in a much reduced space...I thought of having a box in which all of my works could be collected and mounted as if in a small museum, a portable museum, and that was the reason why I installed it in a suitcase.⁴⁰



Fig 4.4.34 Marcel Duchamp, Boîte en valise partially unfolded, 1941.

In executing the idea of the portable museum, I was interested in investigating methods used by other museums in my artistic practice. James Putnam indicated, "...the fact of being exhibited in a museum confers on objects an aura of importance and authenticity, endowing whatever is presented with a sense of significance."⁴¹ Therefore, how to design and then make these

³⁹ Please see the Section 3.3 (The Strategy of Family Photographs) in this thesis.

⁴⁰ The statement of Boîte en valise written by Marcel Duchamp in 1941. Source from: Juan Antonio Ramírez. Duchamp: Love and Death, Even. Trans. Alexander R. Tulloch (London: Reaktion books, 1998) 187.

⁴¹ James Putnam. Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001) 34.

particular cubes sum up my candid memories of motherhood, and how to install and reformulate my collections in these reduced spaces became the main challenges. The pregnant belly sized, dark blue, and enclosed internal environment of the Pregnancy Box was designed first, connecting my body and mental experience of pregnancy within the inconsiderate and inflexible medical system. Using the form of unfeeling medical equipment, I tried to evoke the feeling that my sensitive mind was oppressed by an uncomfortable treatment during pregnancy. I set out six sections and displayed the items using medical-like materials, so that they could be stored and observed. For example, instead of using the original manuscript on paper, in the Pregnancy Poem section, eleven poems were printed on small transparencies reminiscent of the medical glass slide, and were installed in a structure similar to a specimen box. In the section Private Measure, two poems describing the change in my belly and breasts were written on two breast-like tape measures used for prenatal checking (Fig 4.4.35). In so doing, the hidden and shrunken sense of self in pregnancy is only revealed when the viewer pulls the tapes out.



Fig 4.4.35 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the interior of the Pregnancy Box. (Left) sections of the Pregnancy Poem poems were printed on transparencies. (Right) sections of Private Measure poems were written on tape measures.

Secondly, I added the function of play, to let my audience explore motherhood through handling items in my portable museums. This relates to the experience of educating my child through play and practice in early motherhood. The idea that the items are not just to be looked at, but can be played with, is similar to the concept of Joseph Cornell's boxes (Fig 4.4.36). It was considered that Cornell made his toy-like boxes initially in order to amuse his invalid brother.⁴²

⁴² Encyclopedia of World Biography. "Joseph Cornell." Bookrags. 2005. <http://www.bookrags.com/Joseph_Cornell> Lynda Roscoe Hartigan.

In my artwork Mother's Box, I made my toy-like portable museums as teaching aids for my child, to explain our personal experience and knowledge of growth. In addition, I purposely made the activity of appreciating the boxes into an adventure. Through the specific design for discovering and playing with the items inside the boxes, and through the viewers' practical participation, I attempt to reveal a mother's actual bodily and mental experiences. For example, in the section Swimming Baby (Fig 4.4.37) in the Pregnancy Box, by making the first photograph of my son float in a square transparent box which can be turned and shaken, I aimed to connect with the intimate but distant experience on seeing my untouchable baby swimming in my soft belly on the hard hospital monitor. In the Useless Pain section (Fig 4.4.38), I included my EFM (Electronic Fetal Monitoring) report, which recorded the painful contractions of the womb throughout my four day and three night labour, in a special book-form. Because of the experience of failing to give birth naturally and being sent for a caesarean section, I made it so that the report is pulled out page after page after page, just as it printed out by the side of my hospital bed. It expresses my frustration at the long, useless, painful experience whilst in the unfriendly environment of the hospital.

As well as dealing with the torment emanating from my sickly, pregnant body, I constructed and designed many playful sections for the documents and used objects in the Growing Box, to celebrate our growth together. By handling them, not only can my son and I recall the time when we grew together, but the audience can experience the complexity and creativity of daily motherhood. Fig 4.4.39-Fig 4.4.43 are samples selected from this box. They provide viewers with diverse ways to explore different sections of the portable museum.



Fig 4.4.36 Joseph Cornell's Boxes. (Left) Untitled (Medici Princess), c1948. Private collection. (Right) Object (Roses des Vents), 1942-53. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Fig 4.4.37 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, the Swimming Baby section in the Pregnancy Box.
 Fig 4.4.38 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, the Useless Pain section in the Pregnancy Box.

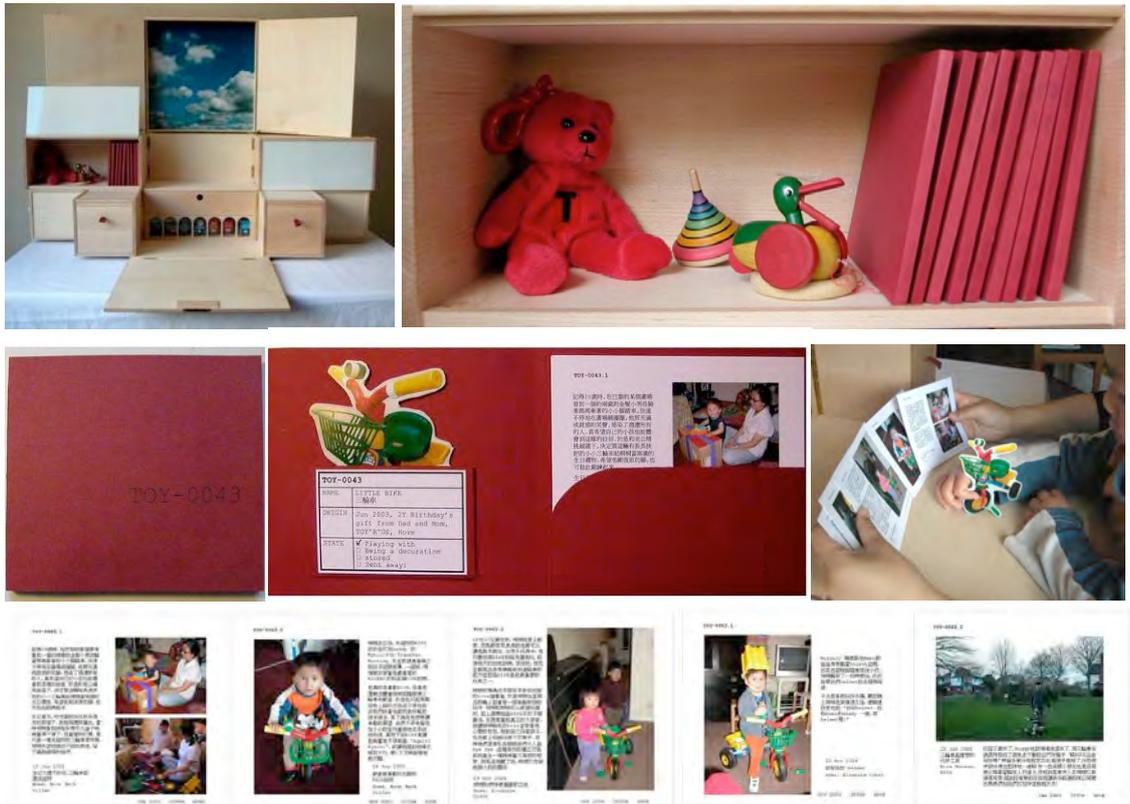


Fig 4.4.39 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the Toy Diary section in the Growing Box and a part of the diary TOY-0043. This segment of the diary recorded the steps in the relationship between my son and his Little Bike, as observed and interpreted by me, between 2002 and 2005.



Fig 4.4.40 Hsiao-Ching Wang, (left) the section Relief; (right) the section “Train Train” in the Growing Box. Both store and display real, used objects, and allow the audience to touch and play.



Fig 4.4.41 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the section 100% Cotton in the Growing Box stores selected 100% cotton shirts worn by my son from 2001 to 2005. Each bag contains a shirt and a card which records details and an image of my son wearing the item.



Fig 4.4.42 Hsiao-Ching Wang, the section Monthly Growth in the Growing Box. In this section, I used a traditional library card index system so that viewers could use their fingers to quickly find out about my son's growth. In this index drawer, I selected one picture for every month from birth to 4 years old, marked them with the date and arranged them in order.



Fig 4.4.43 Hsiao-Ching Wang, (left) the section Baby Talk; Boy Talk in the Growing Box allows the viewer to press the green button and listen to my son talking as a baby, then as a boy; (right) the section Irritating shows the medication my son often used for his skin problem. It is not only a record but also a teaching kit which helps my son to clearly understand how to use them correctly.

- **The meaning of closing and opening the Mother's Box**

When the boxes are closed, they are like building bricks which could be played with and piled on top of one another, as my child and I would use them to create various structures. Their toy-like outside symbolises the Taiwanese stereotype of the mother who is defined as a nurse; someone who is easy to play with and gets along with her children. Before they are opened, the insides of the boxes are a mystery. I use this to imply that women are often superficially seen as esoteric 'animals'. In our tradition, a woman should be sweet, gentle, silent and a selfless mother; however, her mind is not so simple. Historically, strongly suppressed by the discipline of being a virtuous woman, and without an opportunity to express her varied and valuable thoughts, her mind unconsciously became a mystery, difficult to understand, and filled with many conflicts. Some were even seen as hysterical. To imply that women's minds were hidden and limited I used the boxes to symbolise their creative potential through the metaphor of the inside of the box as a pregnant woman 'creating' a baby in her belly.

By designing various ways to open each box and various ways to store objects/documents, I tried to challenge the stereotypical description of motherhood. In fact, motherhood is full of creativity, mystery, complicated and complex feelings and thoughts. I believe mothers have the ability to explore the abundant resources hidden within them. Therefore, by using large, wide and powerful structures for opening the boxes, I signify that only we, mothers, have the will to examine and explore ourselves; the power and value of motherhood pours out with the fertile treasures and experiences in front of us.

- **Exhibiting the boxes**

In the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, I installed the artwork Mother's Box carefully considering the functions and specific meanings of each box in relation to my experience of motherhood. For example (Fig 4.4.44), I set the Pregnancy Box on a pillar at the same height as my belly to make viewers touch the inside of the box in the same position I adopted when I lowered my head to observe my bulged belly during pregnancy. The Growing Box was set on a table-like stand with three cube chairs set at a height suitable for a children's table. This arrangement conveys that I, as a sympathetic mother, often bend or kneel down my position to communicate with or educate my young child and his friends.

I insisted on demonstrating this artwork to the audience myself, because I wanted to build on the idea of sharing a mother's family album, to blur the boundary between private and public (Fig 4.4.45 and Fig 4.4.46). The close contact with the audience, facilitated an interactive form of two-way communication which allowed us to intimately discuss the issues of motherhood, from the very personal to the universal.



Fig 4.4.44 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The setting of the Pregnancy Box (one of the boxes in Artwork 6: Mother's Box) in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

Fig 4.4.45 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The demonstration of the Pregnancy Box in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, 2005.



Fig 4.4.46 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Demonstrating the Growing Box; communicating and interacting with the audience in the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

- **Expanding the meanings of the word 'box'**

In addition to the previous discussion, I here include other dictionary meanings of the word 'box' to explain my further intentions for this artwork. First is the definition 'fighting with fists', illustrated by the self-portrait of Judy Chicago in the boxing ring (Fig 4.4.47). This encourages me to continuously face and to challenge the difficulty of motherhood, and to break the stereotype of the inferior mother. I use another meaning of 'box', 'a gift', to illustrate my plan for my son. This artwork Mother's Box will be a gift to him in the future. The fourth layer of Mother as a Creator (Fig 4.4.48) is an advance announcement of this, with all my love.



Fig 4.4.47 (Left) Judy Chicago, An advertisement for a Judy Chicago exhibition in the Jack Glenn Gallery, from the US art magazine Artforum, 1971.



Fig 4.4.48 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, The fourth layer of The Mother as a Creator, 2004. In this image, I hold and open the first box (Pregnancy Box) of the Mother's Box to celebrate Christmas and to imply that the box will be a gift to my son.

4.4.3 The installation of Picturing Motherhood

Title: Picturing Motherhood

Time: 25 Aug-7 Sept 2005, 10am-5pm

Place: Painting Studio R208, University of Brighton

Date of working: 2004-2005



Fig 4.4.49 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The installation view of Picturing Motherhood, 2005.



Fig 4.4.50 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The installation view of Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

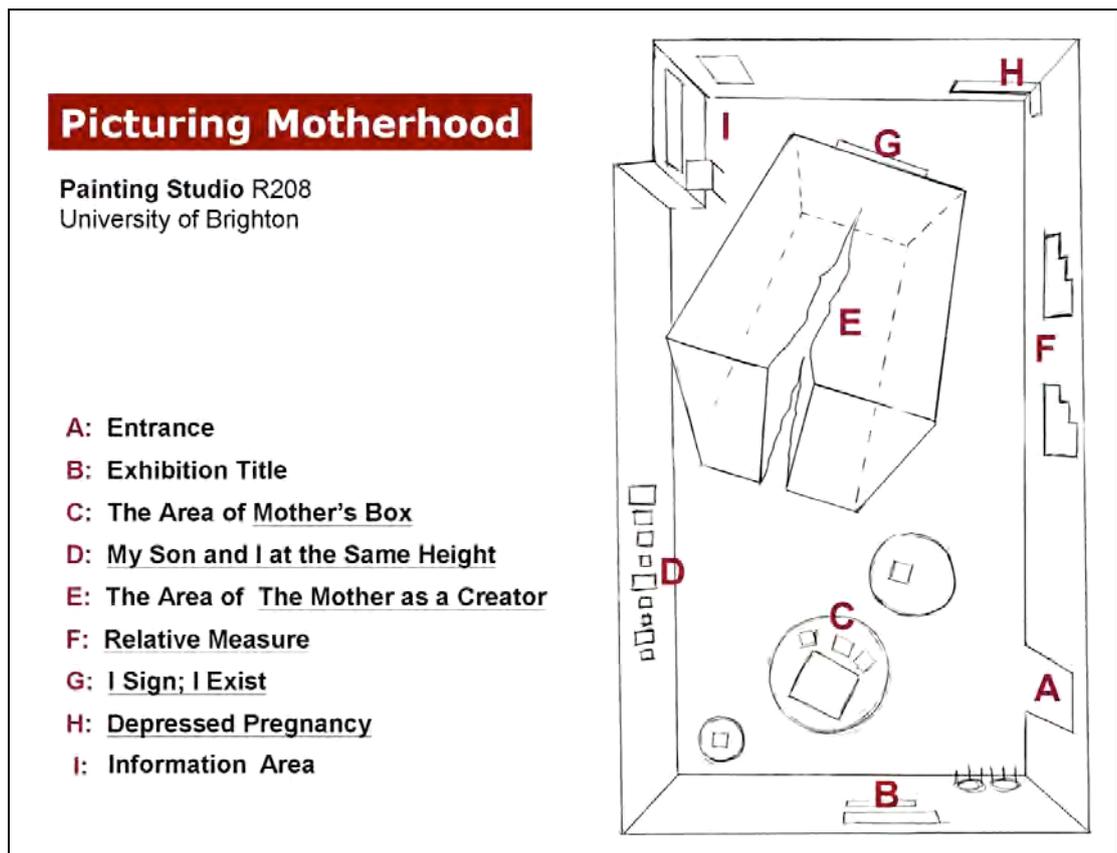


Fig 4.4.51 Hsiao-Ching Wang, A bird's eye view of Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

A. Description

The installation Picturing Motherhood is the culmination of my work on early motherhood, presented to the public as an arrangement of six artworks and a large, box-like, crimson structure in a room which used to be a painting studio. There are nine areas within this space which are designed to take into consideration the fluid sequence and interaction between my subjective experience of motherhood and the way the audience views my artworks. These areas are entitled 'Entrance', 'Exhibition Title', 'Mother's Box', 'My Son and I at the Same Height', 'The Mother as a Creator', 'Relative Measure', 'I Sign; I Exist', 'Depressed Pregnancy' and 'Information'.

The large crimson structure symbolises the origin of my maternal creativity and is set in the centre, dividing the room into various small spaces. Each space has different characteristics with respect to size, shape and light, all of which strengthen the artworks. There is no fixed route between the works; audiences can create their own adventure as they experience my motherhood within these spaces. After their first exploration, most people decided to spend more time and to revisit the space and artworks again. In line with the concept of providing a friendly maternal environment, I established a play area with building bricks on the red circular carpet, a comfortable area for the audience to join in with the ritual of

opening the Mother's Box, and a seating area for reading information and giving feedback. In this way, both adults and children were encouraged to linger in the space and to enjoy the active journey of exploring motherhood.

B. Statement

*Roaming around,
exploring around,
the experience of encountering motherhood becomes an adventure
in this maternal space.*

*Evoking the creative power of growth,
from inside to outside,
from dark to light,
from private to public,
from accumulating to pouring out
I am no longer to be a silent mother.*

*Coming in
to feel and to reformulate.
Bliss or torment,
toughness or consideration,
complexity or fertility,
flexibility or persistence.
After experiencing in person,
picturing motherhood has been in my mind.⁴³*

C. Concept and practical process

As a mother artist, holding an exhibition is the best way to communicate with the outside world. I believe the timing of the audience's reactions to the exhibited works is critical to the perception of my project. Therefore, instead of simply hanging photographs on a wall in the traditional way, in my 2005 presentation of Picturing Motherhood I applied the concept of installation. Adhering to the principle that "Installation Art is an activity that activates a space", I carefully engineered the interaction between the artworks (in the space as a whole) and the physical experience of the audience.⁴⁴

⁴³ Written by Hsiao-Ching Wang.

⁴⁴ Adam Geczy and Benjamin Genocchio. What is Installation? An Anthology of Writings on Australian Installation Art (Sydney: Power Publications, 2001) 2.

- **The maternal bodily imagery of inside and outside**

I believe that bodily experience is about viewing, but also about touching and roaming. It evokes the candid feelings involved in understanding and reacting to the world. In this project, I purposely explored and visualised my pregnancy and motherhood through my maternal body. However, I found that visual images - photographs - as the main medium were unable to express the entirety of my feelings. Therefore, I created a special space in which I could carefully install different stages of my photographic works in ways which would enhance the strong feelings of being a mother artist which arose from my bodily experience. The British artist Barbara Hepworth said, "Body experience ...is ...the centre of creation. I rarely draw what I see. I draw what I feel in my body."⁴⁵ Some artworks by women artists, such as Niki de Saint Phalle's Hon (=she), Judy Chicago's Dinner Party, and Juin Shieh's Chora, emphasise the feeling of the inner body experience to establish their own female identities and to challenge the abuse of the female body by the outside world. The huge installation Hon (=she) (Fig 4.4.52), for example, allowed audiences to explore the interior by entering through the work's vagina between two open legs. Instead of treating the body as a voyeuristic object, Saint Phalle gave it the functions of playground, shelter and pleasure palace, even including a milk bar within the installation. She reclaimed the maternal body as 'a site of tactile pleasure', reducing the fear originating from its traditional definition as a mysterious 'dark continent'.⁴⁶ This playful and colourful environment successfully diminished the stereotypical view of the female body. However, from my complex experience of motherhood, I felt that there should be more to this than Saint Phalle's interpretation. In 2005, in the installation Picturing Motherhood, I created my own imagery for entering the maternal body in the form of a large crimson structure. This represented the womb and contained a sacred, fertile, chaotic, pleasure, pain, abstract.



Fig 4.4.52 Niki de Saint Phalle, Hon (=she), 1966. 23.5x10x6 m, Stockholm, Moderna Museet.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Knowles. "Introduction." The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) xi.

⁴⁶ Whitney Chadwick. Women, Art, and Society (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996 (1990)) 337-338.

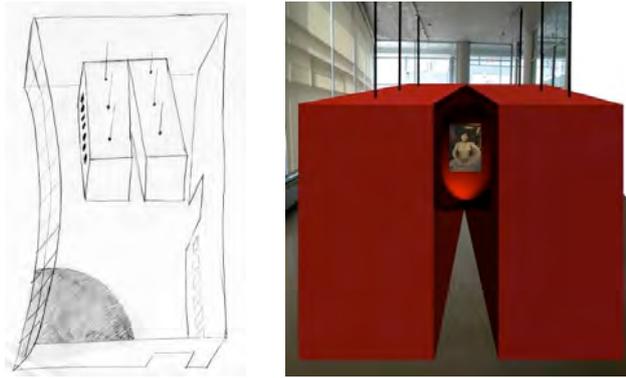


Fig 4.4.53 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Sketch of the crimson structure for the installation Picturing Motherhood, 2004.



Fig 4.4.54 (Left) Hsiao-Ching Wang, Conker No. 4, 1999. Oil on canvas.

Fig 4.4.55 (Middle) Hsiao-Ching Wang, Sketch of the crimson structure for the installation Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

Fig 4.4.56 (Right) Hsiao-Ching Wang, Model of the crimson structure for the installation Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

Rather than imitating the body in a realistic way, as in Hon (=she), I tried to produce a metaphorical maternal space, peacefully embraced by vital crimson, to communicate the original sense of creativity emanating from within me. In 2004, extending the concept of Mother's Box, I designed a box-like crimson structure inside which I displayed Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator. My aim was to reinforce the creativity of the maternal body. The sketch in Fig 4.4.53 reveals my initial intention to interfere with and challenge the traditional white exhibition space by building at the centre an intensely coloured structure, of huge volume. The opposing atmospheres of a bright outside and dark inside provided a change which prompted the audience to abandon their pre-conceptions and to adopt a different perception of the maternal power hidden and ignored for so long in our society.

Furthermore, in the revised plan (Fig 4.4.55 and Fig 4.4.56) and the result (Fig 4.4.57 and Fig 4.4.58), by applying the ideas used in my earlier painting Conker (Fig 4.4.54), I added a crevice (Fig 4.4.57) to signify the pain and effort of a mother creating new life or of an artist creating her works. After experiencing labour pain, I discovered a maternal power that I had not recognised before. Springing up naturally alongside the great ability to produce

a life and the new experience of motherhood, I realised that I already had creativity within my body and that creativity was trying to spill over. Therefore, I did not need to equip myself with arms, as I had done in my painting Conker, to defend the oppression of women in our society. For me the opening crevice on the structure indicates that the pain of breaking limitations leads me to actively explore the inner maternal power. Also, the intention of inviting the audience to enter the structure symbolises that I, at last, have the confidence to explore and share the creativity of my motherhood with others. The process of planning, making and presenting the crevice on this crimson structure was significant, because it showed that I had enhanced my creative identity after a period of effort.



Fig 4.4.57 The process of creating to presenting the crevice on the crimson structure for the installation Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

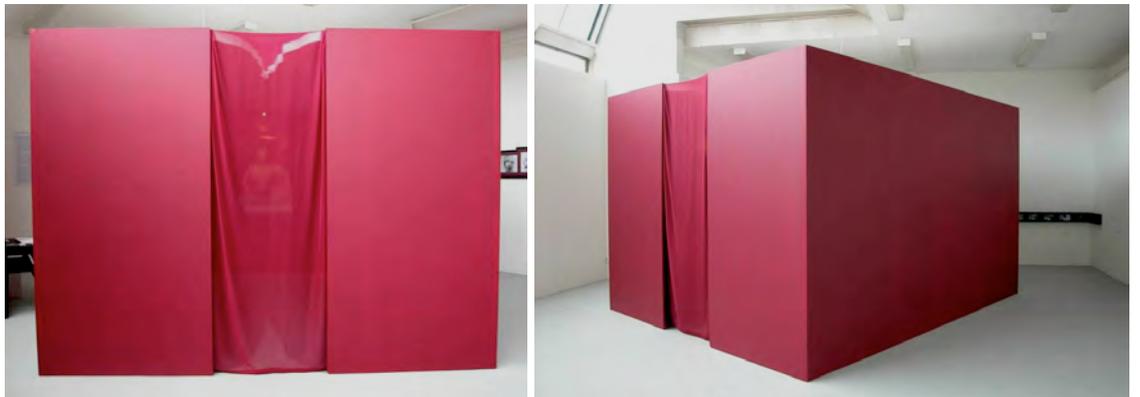


Fig 4.4.58 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The crimson structure from the outside in the installation Picturing Motherhood, 2005.



Fig 4.4.59 Hsiao-Ching Wang, Inside view of the crimson structure in the installation Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

- **The arrangement of spaces, viewing sequences and colours**

In the installation Picturing Motherhood (Fig 4.4.60), in order to highlight the disharmony between the inner experience of motherhood and the outside world, I unusually located the huge crimson structure in the centre of the room to interfere with and break the order of the rectangular white space which is the formal and conventional form for exhibiting art. This divided the room into diverse and fragmented areas, each with their own characteristics. Carefully installing six artworks in these spaces and giving careful thought to their interaction, I attempted to reveal the various experiences of facing motherhood over a period of time. For example, when the narrow area H to G is compared to the more commodious area C, the tension of challenging society at the beginning of motherhood and the comfort of developing creative power from inner experience in the three years after are clearly distinguishable and on display.



Fig 4.4.60 Hsiao-Ching Wang, The final installation plan and images of each area in Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

Flexible routes for viewing the artworks within the space are designed to respond to the experience of recalling my motherhood and to reflect Julia Kristeva's thoughts on 'chora'. She uses the term 'chora', which means enclosed space or womb in Greek, to denote a maternal space with a sense of mobility and "extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral states".⁴⁷ She considers that this semiotic space is maternally oriented and pre-Oedipal, based on primary processes. It contrasts with the symbolic space of the Oedipalised system operated by secondary processes and the law of the father.⁴⁸ With no set terminal viewing point for the artworks and disconnected spaces, the viewers created their own journey and adventure through different steps of my motherhood in each of the different areas. Personally, viewing from distinct viewpoints allowed me to reformulate an appropriate identity for myself. For the audiences, these unfixed routes aroused curiosity and encouraged them to actively explore motherhood and to challenge their tendency to ignore the issues. It was apparent from observation and interviews that most viewers decided to remain in the installation for much longer than they had expected, exploring the artworks and experiencing the space in various orders.

I used crimson and black as the main colours for the installation because of their specific meanings. Crimson symbolises fertility and creativity, in line with the imagery of blood in the womb.⁴⁹ Black signifies restriction and limitation. The black frames in my artworks highlight the tension between the creativity of motherhood and the limitations of conventional expectations.

- **The interaction between space and physical experience**

Instead of viewing the artworks at the same level on each wall, I carefully considered the physical movement of the audience through the installation. Bearing in mind the daily movements and emotions of a mother concerning her young children, I installed my artworks at various levels within the space to allow adults to experience the different working positions of taking care of children in early motherhood and also to let young children join in easily with the artistic activity. In accordance with the design aim of creating a friendly family environment, my visitors, no matter what their age, freely enjoyed the different movements required to interact with the installation - standing, walking, bowing, squatting, kneeling, sitting, crawling or running (Fig 4.4.61). In bringing a mother's creative movements from the private to the public arena, the

⁴⁷ Julia Kristeva. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia UP, 1984) 25-26.

⁴⁸ Madan Sarup. *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*. 2nd ed. (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1993) 124.

⁴⁹ See section 4.4.1 about the imagery of crimson.

installation altered the conventional way of viewing artworks in a gallery through the audience's bodily participation.



Fig 4.4.61 Various audience postures at Picturing Motherhood, 2005.

- The creative feedback



Fig 4.4.62 A guest book and the area where visitors wrote their comments at Picturing Motherhood.

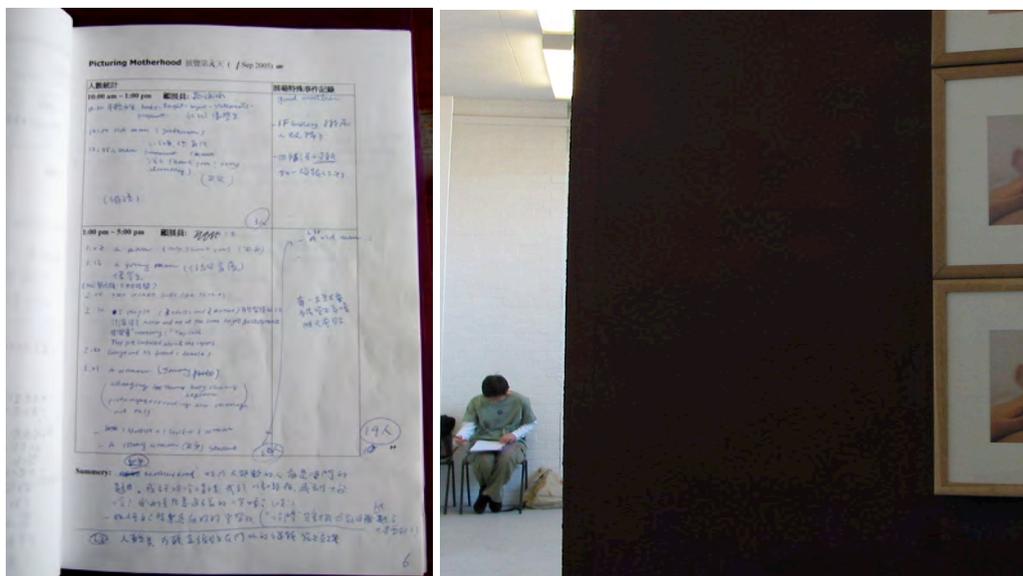


Fig 4.4.63 (Left) A sample of the daily report for Picturing Motherhood. (Right) The report being written. This report recorded important things which happened during the day at the exhibition and a summary of the artist's and assistants' feelings about that day. 2005.

Four main methods were used to obtain feedback from visitors to Picturing Motherhood. Firstly, I prepared a guest book for collecting viewer's comments

(the usual approach for a formal exhibition (Fig 4.4.62)), but differently, in order to allow the visitor to concentrate whilst writing, I provided a table and a chair in a quiet place located in the 'Information Area' (see area 'I' in Fig 4.4.60). In addition, a small chair and a low bookshelf with some children's books were purposely set up nearby for children to read. The scene of one adult writing and a child reading, and sometimes talking together, reflected situations in which my son and I worked together during my motherhood. Secondly, I observed and recorded the audience's body movements, viewing sequence, and reactions to the installation as a kind of feedback. Photographic records of the exhibition and its visitors and the daily report (Fig 4.4.63) were important because they enabled me to examine the whole project. The third means of acquiring feedback was through personal interviews. This was the most efficient way to find out about specific issues I aimed to understand from the audience's point of view. The final method of gathering feedback had the most creative results. I set up a box of building bricks in the Mother's Box area (see area 'C' in Fig 4.4.60), and viewers were welcomed to build anything they wanted in response to the Picturing Motherhood installation or just for fun. The images in Fig 4.4.64 are their creative feedback.

Overall, the audience provided many pieces of important feedback, two kinds of which are addressed in the following. The vast majority indicated that this installation had given them a chance to experience and rethink motherhood from the viewpoint of creativity that they either used to ignore or had forgotten. Taking inspiration from my artworks and installation, they were prompted to carefully review and think about their mothers, wives or selves, and agreed that the close connection between motherhood and creativity expressed by my artistic practice had broken 'the paper-thin stereotype' widely held by society.⁵⁰ For example, one visitor, Susan, wrote in my guest book "...Your exhibition has made me think again about mothering/creativity... it is very personal, at the same time universal..." A doctor who visited with his three children said in my personal interview "I am inspired by your intention to combine motherhood and creativity...As a father loving my own children (but not having given birth to them), I would like to identify the specific creativity which stems from my fatherhood, as you have done for your child and yourself."

⁵⁰ A comment by Mr Chris Rose in my guest book.



Fig 4.4.64 Creative audience feedback given in building bricks at Picturing Motherhood.

Feedback varies from culture to culture. I was able to identify two broad groups, those from the East and those from the West. I found that those from a Western background concentrated on the original and creative artistic techniques I had employed to depict the long-term nature of motherhood. Those from Eastern countries, especially from China or Taiwan, paid more attention to the issues surrounding the exhibition of the maternal body in public and also on my child's good fortune. For example, Mana Rogusa and Alice Fox,

both from the West, indicated that they loved the way the photographs captured the child's growth over time and the creativity of motherhood, and considered that these were the most original depictions of the passage of time they had seen. On the other hand, I found that Asian female visitors often expressed their surprise that I should exhibit images of my pregnant self in public. Although some thought it a great breakthrough, but not suitable for use in normal family situations, other young females expressed a will to use similar methods in future to capture images of their own pregnant bodies. They also admired the things I had done for my son. As Jin-ya said, "Your son is very lucky and privileged to have you recording his growth in such a loving and original way." However, one mother from Mainland China shocked me, because my artworks made her feel guilty. She said in the interview, "How ashamed I am. I was not as good a mother as you, because I did not do as much as you do for my son." The feedback, which came from a similar cultural background to mine, reminded me that there was still a long way to go in facing the mother stereotype and to move motherhood from the private to the public sphere in my country.

4.4.4 Summary

After a period of accumulation, instead of capturing moments in motherhood as they happened, as in the previous two steps, the third stage of my artistic development took a different approach towards sustaining creative identity through the reinterpretation of memories and their expression in the public rather than the domestic domain. The method of active memory-making was used to develop Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator and Artwork 6: Mother's Box, and also in the installation of Picturing Motherhood. All of the artistic practices in this section – recollection, sharing, and reviewed/revisited documentation, creation and appreciation – provided both my audience and me with numerous opportunities to reformulate my early motherhood, more and more precisely, through a process of careful and repeated review. Directly stimulated by the experience of giving birth, in addition to continuing with the concepts of asserting the self and celebrating growth, as in previous artworks, I developed a new dimension for accumulating the achievements of a mother underpinned by the idea of unceasing creation from inside to outside. This step is the zenith of my early motherhood. In it, I reformulated motherhood through my particular artistic practice and revised the rigid expectations of being a mother in Taiwanese culture. Through active review and artistic representation, I, as a mother artist, and no longer as a passive silent and selfless figure, discovered an abundant and creative source inside the world of motherhood and began to express it and to share it with the outside world with increasing confidence.

This section has also enhanced my definition of the important concept of maternal space by analysing the practical processes involved, from two-dimensional photographic works to three-dimensional installation. The Mother as a Creator developed a time-tunnel sequence in a compressed photographic dimension by portraying and accumulating images of my son and me, layer over layer, year by year. Besides illustrating a time of growth for both of us, it manifests the characteristics of maternal space: intimacy and complexity. The Mother's Box reveals my intention to share and convey my feelings about the fertile source and power of the maternal space, and to take them into the public domain. I seek to achieve this through the design of the diverse interior storage devices, and the different ways in which the cubic boxes are opened and the items used or created at different stages in my motherhood are viewed. Consistent with the concept of documentation, these sources are not only my personal treasure chests, but also small portable museums at a level of reality which allows the audience to explore my memories and achievements of motherhood at first hand. In the installation Picturing Motherhood, I created a large crimson structure in the centre of a white room, arranging my artworks around it so that the viewing sequence was flexible and the viewer might truly experience the maternal space. By roaming through the exhibition in different ways, adopting various body positions to view the works and partaking of different adventures in the course of the journey, the audience created their own specific way of interacting and communicating with the works within a friendly atmosphere. This was the first time in this project that I had invited people to enter the maternal space. It successfully blurred the strict boundaries between the private and public spheres, as defined by society.

In conclusion, I tried to diversify the dominant language of the phallic order by creating a maternal space with a sense of intimacy, flexibility and complexity.⁵¹ From the practice of these three artistic works, I found that discovering and developing the multiplicity of maternal experience continually from private to public sphere has undermined the rigid expectation of motherhood from the stable system of 'patriarchal binary thought' in patriarchal society.

⁵¹ Troil Moi. Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Methuen, 1984) 132-135. The phallic order is Derrida's concept of phallogocentrism, in which the word dominates the way in understanding meaning and social relations, and it is central to a system that privileges the phallus as the source of power.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter is the main body of my practice-based research thesis. It gives details of and outlines the chronological development of six series of artworks and one installation concerning my motherhood between 2000 and 2005. Its purpose is to explain the more physical aspects of a woman writing her personal 'herstory' and to put into words the exploration and solution of the main research question, 'How do I, as a woman artist, use visual strategies to sustain my creative identity under the burden of Taiwanese motherhood?'

In contrast to traditional PhD research, which concentrates mainly on thought processes, this chapter organises a number of documents from my artistic work into an order which emphasises both the importance and the main method of research through practice. This piece of work offers a great deal of detail about the process and, in this way, is similar to the experimental record of a piece of scientific research. It provides a clear chain of events, which reveals how the thoughts behind the research were identified, solved and examined. In this chapter, the artistic practices have been divided into three periods which are further categorised by significant challenges experienced by mother artists in Taiwanese culture. Artwork 1: Depressed Pregnancy and Artwork 2: I Sign; I Exist were grouped together into the first period - 'asserting the self' - in order to highlight the importance, but difficulty, of maintaining the self when perpetuating artistic creativity. This is achieved by revealing the transition from loss of to assertion of the self in motherhood against a background of expected selflessness. Artwork 3: Relative Measure and Artwork 4: My Son and I at the Same Height fall into the second period - 'measuring motherhood'. Attempts to measure the growth of mother and child over a period of time, and exploration of the theme, demonstrated how an artist might turn her motherhood inspired creative ideas into art by exploiting her maternal viewpoint and a visual form of accumulation. Artwork 5: The Mother as a Creator, Artwork 6: Mother's Box and the installation Picturing Motherhood are the works of the final period - 'reformulating motherhood'. They express the contribution of active memory-making in sustaining creative identity and also examine the artistic processes involved in the project as a whole.

Although it is extremely difficult to continually strive to sustain creative identity during motherhood, this chapter proves that I have been able to do so: from understanding the depression of motherhood in the early stages to maintaining the self-identity, and then to creating many possibilities for creativity in motherhood and art. As well as solving my research questions, the most valuable personal benefit to me of the whole artistic process was that I cultivated an ability to treat a negative crisis as a positive opportunity; to review and to change my life from the viewpoint of creativity.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

5.1 Contributions to knowledge

- A. Establishing the theme 'creative identity'
- B. A new perspective for criticising the art of motherhood in Taiwan
- C. Creating three visual strategies for sustaining the creative identity of a mother artist

5.2 Personal development

5.3 Suggestions for further research

Chapter 5 Conclusion

This chapter summarises the overall achievements and contributions of this thesis. There are three main outcomes: contribution to knowledge, personal development and suggestions for further research.

5.1 Contributions to knowledge

Study and research in a foreign country are very important to this research which aims to explore my own culture. Someone once asked me why I had chosen the United Kingdom, which is different to and far from my homeland, to explore Taiwanese motherhood. There are two main reasons. My original motive was to go to one of the birthplaces of feminism to experience in person how Western women artists break the limitations of the patriarchal system to achieve a status that tends more towards Western women's liberty in contemporary life. The second reason was the experience of migration, which allowed me to identify the differences between the two cultures. It also provided me with a broader viewpoint from which to investigate and think about some of the facts and questions that I had ignored or had not considered in the past. It prompted me to explore my culture and myself both subjectively and objectively through my practice and research.

In the Book Gender and Migration: Asian Immigrant Brides in Japan and Taiwan, Dr Chu-Wen Ciu pointed out that "Migration makes the gender consciousness of women change in terms of marriage, appointment, premarital sexual behaviors and the power of making decisions during sexual intercourse."¹ In seven years studying abroad, my mind and place of abode continually moved between these two countries and this had a profound impact on my conventional cognition of gender and culture. As I experienced the actual life of British women, the predicament of Taiwanese women was revealed in sharp comparison. Furthermore, because of my temporary separation from the direct suppression and constraints of my original culture, I was able to embrace this freer and more open country as my feminist training ground, and as somewhere to develop my thoughts. Having built up some steadfast and strong opinions, I returned to my own country to put them to the test in intensely challenging situations. Although I often felt lonely, or that I did not fit in whilst alternating between Eastern and Western cultures, spiritually this situation provided me with a new angle which departed from the conventional and the familiar.

¹ Chu-Wen Ciu (邱璦雯). *Gender and Migration: Asian Immigrant Brides in Japan and Taiwan* (Taipei: Chu Liu, 2005) 35.

With a new level of detachment and freedom, I had the opportunity to focus purely on my role as a Taiwanese mother, to look inwardly and to precisely pinpoint areas which I wanted to change. This was similar to the approach of dual perspectives which I often use in my artistic creations. It involves close scrutiny in a virtually myopic encounter with my art, and the arm's length, more dispassionate view of an outsider. In other words, living in these two cultures made it easier to develop a more objective point of view for discussing and depicting my own culture. Homi Bhabha declared that "the truest eye may now belong to the migrant's double vision."² In summary, through difference and disparity, migration led me to discover the problems of being a Taiwanese woman and allowed me to search for a suitable solution.

Studying in a 'First World' country (the United Kingdom), immersed in Western culture and receiving Western academic training, I was worried that my research would not escape the devil's clutches of post-colonisation and would become embroiled in Western thought. Over time, however, I discovered that it is hard to free oneself of the influence of Taiwan in transaction and of oneself in migration. Whether self-consciousness controls cultural consciousness is a key point. As a non-white female adult and having grown up in a purely Taiwanese culture, it is impossible for me to give up the intrinsic concepts of my culture and to completely imitate the theories of Western scholars when solving the problems of Taiwanese women. Gayatri C. Spivak also considered that if feminist discourses excluded the elements of race and class, it would be difficult to apply them to the problems of non-white women.³ Therefore, whenever I tried to understand Western women's problems or looked deep within myself at the problems of Eastern Women, I purposely involved the element of culture in my considerations. For example, there is a significant cultural difference in that Western people place a high value on their personal rights, whereas Eastern people take more account of the harmony within their group. The issue of culture has emerged as a sensitive one due to the differences in place and race involved in my research into Taiwanese motherhood. Moreover, in order to communicate with Western scholars and readers, I have had no choice but to expend a lot of energy analysing and explaining my culture. Due to continuous questioning by Western people and the need to ceaselessly explain and re-explain, I re-discovered some cultural concepts and phenomena which I had previously ignored or treated as a matter of course. These included, the need to give birth to a male child to carry on the bloodline of the husband's family, and the representation of a mother's love, both of which became important issues to be explored in depth. I understand that my research and artistic creation were inevitably influenced by the West; however, I attempted to use cultural consciousness and self-examination to minimise and overcome any unsuitable imitation or appropriation. Concluding the above discussion, I consider that researching the issues of Taiwan in the West has given me an indelible advantage:

² Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture* (Routledge: London, 1994) 5.

³ Li Cao (曹莉). *Gayatri C. Spivak* (Taipei: Sheng-Chih Book, 1999) 114-115.

if there were no stimulation from different cultures and no distance from which to observe my country, this thesis, with both subjective and objective perspectives, would have been hard to produce.

Whether experiencing the West, re-understanding my own culture, examining methods of imitating Western theory in the East, finding my own way of dealing with my own culture – most of these have developed out of my artistic practice. My introspection and the transformation of my self and my culture are candidly reflected on my artworks.

These reflections on my practice, as previously described, might provide a fundamental example from which to rethink Western impact on our country. After the Taiwanese government declared that martial law had ended in 1987, Taiwan and the Western world entered into frequent, day-to-day contact. Politics, the economy, society and culture in Taiwan were all greatly changed under the strong influence of the West. Thoughts on Western feminism were also introduced along with this trend. After the shortlived 'New Feminist Perspective' promoted by Hsiu-Lien Lu (呂秀蓮) in the early 1970s, Taiwanese women's movements were revived again in 1982 when the first feminist magazine, *Awakening*, began to import the concept of women's rights from the West.⁴ This contemporary stream of thought, however, mainly depended on ideas introduced from other cultures and not from our own. Although, in recent decades, this has suddenly and greatly promoted the status of Taiwanese women through external factors such as educational propaganda and policy formulation, it has also revealed a huge gap between the external and internal situations. Taiwanese women's experience is quite different from that of Western women who found and developed their self-consciousness directly based on their daily lives and culture. For traditional Taiwanese women, who have always obeyed the Confucian systems of patriarchy and hierarchy, awareness of the gap is unprecedented. These contemporary women are deeply influenced by Western thought, especially those, like me, who also need to play the important domestic role of mother. The difference is particularly obvious where they are encouraged to pursue equal rights in the public sphere but expected to keep the traditional virtues of women in the domestic sphere. It makes the predicament of motherhood in the Taiwanese patriarchal system unendurable for most young women, and especially so for those who are mothers. They can not easily accept or deny the value of motherhood for women, and the conflict in their hearts is greater than ever.

Through its investigations of the personal to the universal experience of motherhood in Taiwan today, this thesis has discovered a new and common problem for mothers due to the complications and conflicts between new and old, Eastern and Western. It seriously explores the origin of the predicament for Taiwanese mothers - the patriarchal system. It reveals the suppression of contemporary Taiwanese mothers,

⁴ Hui-Tan Chang (張輝潭). *The First Exploration of the Women's Movement and Feminist Practice in Contemporary Taiwan* (Taichung: Press Store, 2006) 63, 82.

and uses the experience of a Taiwanese artist and mother living in a Western environment, and the concept of the 'creativity of motherhood', to provide a more thorough exploration of the issues of Taiwanese motherhood.

The three significant contributions to knowledge created by this practice-based research are described below.

A. Establishing the theme 'creative identity'

At the heart of this thesis is the establishment of the theme 'creative identity' within the realms and art of motherhood. The concept of creativity, which used to be neglected in Taiwan, has been discussed and developed with a view to overcoming the difficulties of sustaining the artist's identity during motherhood.

My research into motherhood found that Taiwanese mothers are cultivated as selfless figures and this ensures that they devote themselves to the production of male offspring for their husband's family and to the care of all of its members. The terms mother and motherhood in this patriarchal society have no connection with the concept of creativity; they mainly indicate sacrifice for children and family. Mother artists, as discussed in this research, are a group of women who find it extremely hard to continue their artistic creation. Such difficulties can not, however, halt the creativity of real artists and may even become a creative source for their work. Therefore, in this research 'creativity' equates to a powerful force which enables mother artists to identify themselves.

My research found that motherhood could be an origin of creativity and it reflected on the thoughts of Adrienne Rich who divided motherhood into institution and experience in the book Of Woman Born. I found that the process of pregnancy and giving birth, as well as the actual task of bringing up and educating a child, are parallel to the process of creating art which requires abundant creative ability. Over a period of time during which I cultivated my motherhood and art together and also explored the definition of the artist, the term 'creative identity' emerged as the central theme of the thesis. Furthermore, my artistic practices identified three strategies – self-representation, the family photograph and time sequencing – which bridge the huge gap between being a creative artist and being a selfless mother (conclusions on these three strategies will be drawn in p.308-310 in this section). This liberates the definition of the artist in patriarchal society, and gives mother artists a space for self-exploration and self-expression.

I have analysed the definition and broadened my viewpoint on the exploration of the artist's identity in three aspects. Initially, I tried to apply the conventional definition of creativity in art to my research into mother artists and the art of motherhood, but I realised that the term 'artist' had been linked with genius – a term traditionally

attributed to male creativity throughout history, as many Western feminist art researchers have argued. For example, Linda Nochlin, Rozsika Parker, Griselda Pollock, Christine Battersby and Marsha Meskimmon have highlighted the existence of monopolised tradition which rejects or ignores the creativity of women in art history (please see p.28-30 in section 1.2). Their viewpoints helped me to empathise with mother artists who find themselves in detrimental situations in society, but not enough to explain the specific experiences facing motherhood and the persona of the artist at the same time. Without further explorations to explain the creativity of mother artists, especially with regard to the interaction between the process of creating art and the experience of motherhood, I extended my investigation into three aspects of their creative identity: the artist's profession, the interaction between motherhood and creating art, and creativity in the artwork of motherhood. Some artworks made by Western mother artists, such as Sally Mann's Immediate Family and Mary Kelly's Post-Partum Document, reflect and strengthen the point of departure of my research which is to explore and develop the creative identity of the Taiwanese experience by adding a discussion about the interaction between motherhood and art. This thesis examines the sequences of creating art which sustain the mother artist's creative identity in terms of these three aspects, and avoids being suppressed by mainstream conventional definitions. It provides a wider viewpoint for those mother artists who break through the existing limitations and choose to pursue the development of their creative motherhood and artwork.

Furthermore, as a piece of practice-based research, I used autobiographical methods to formalise the concept of creative identity. Taking inspiration from feminists' autobiographical writings and self-portraits, I put myself into the research. This first-person point of view provided an inner perspective for exploring the theme of creativity. This is essentially different to most research about such issues. At the beginning, my work grew out of the frustration of realising that the new role of mother-to-be seriously threatened my original identity as an artist. When I reviewed the situation of mother artists and artworks of motherhood in Taiwan, I felt miserable and dissatisfied that there were so few of them and that most were restricted to a similar stereotypical mode. After a period of time, with the will to sustain my own artistic profession during motherhood and being curious about how motherhood obstructs women artists, I made myself a central figure in the research. This change was a milestone in my work. Exploration of my personal experiences and artistic practices, historical investigation, image research and relevant references, unearthed distinctly contradictory definitions of creativity, between experience on the one hand and the conventional expectations of motherhood in our society on the other. Defining the shared creativity of motherhood and art was, thus, fundamental to the research and its aim of reducing conflict and sustaining creative identity in the mother artist.

B. A new perspective for criticising the art of motherhood in Taiwan

This research has established the first systematic analysis of this particular issue in academic and art circles; that is, mother artists and the art of motherhood in Taiwan from the viewpoint of a woman researcher/artist. Artworks of motherhood and relevant research in Taiwan are scattered and on the fringe, and this research proceeded with difficulty, taking into consideration image collections, literature reviews and interviews.

From my starting question, “Why have there been so few professional mother artists in Taiwan?”⁵, this thesis explores and reveals the difficulties of being a mother artist; also it exposes the causes of the scarcity of work and the stereotypical representation of Taiwanese motherhood. Furthermore, I found the answer to this question was not to be found in the women artists themselves, but in a deeper cultural issue; the problem of women suppressed by a patriarchal society. I have particularly used image research in art and family photographs, and the low status of Taiwanese mothers has been discussed through an analysis of the hierarchical visual structure. The influence of the myth of selfless motherhood, the hierarchical position of mothers within the family and society, and the conventional codes which depict motherhood in art have been systemically researched. This research points out that these obstructions prevent mother artists from pursuing their creativity in art and motherhood and originate from the authority of men in Taiwan.

However, following a series of discussions on the dearth of Taiwanese artworks on motherhood, I have discovered an encouraging phenomenon in the contemporary art of Taiwan. Although artworks on motherhood are mainly controlled by men, in the last several decades a small group of Taiwanese mother artists, influenced by women’s movements in society and art circles, such as Chin Chen (陳進), Ming-Huei Yan (嚴明惠), and Juin Shieh (謝鴻均), with great self-consciousness and courage, have begun to use their personal experiences of motherhood in art to challenge the stereotype. They provided proof that, using the specific experiences of mothers based on their own maternal bodies or motherhood, mother artists could increase their chances of sustaining their artistic identity and creating particular works despite the burden of traditional expectations and the reality of motherhood in the realms of Taiwanese art.

In conclusion, the investigation of the art of motherhood in this thesis has offered a new perspective for criticising and understanding the specific cultural predicament of Taiwanese mother artists. It has opened a window for mothers influenced by strong, cultivated traditions, especially mother artists, so that they may be aware of their

⁵ This is an extension of Linda Nochlin’s provocative question “Why have there been no great women artists?”

own situation. It also provides an understanding of how contemporary Taiwanese women artists break the limitations of their own practice.

C. Creating three visual strategies for sustaining the creative identity of a mother artist

My artistic strategies are based on self-representation. In the world of mothers where everything is hidden, the best way to speak out is through the strategy of self-representation, to express various parts of the self. I, as a woman and a mother, have tried to actively create my own self, instead of being passively interpreted by a male artist, as is traditional. From this point of view, Jo Spence is the best source of inspiration to me. Unlike Judy Chicago's approach, which was to establish a 'Women's House' where a group of women artists were free to discover their female selves away from the harassment of men, I followed the approach suggested by the Chinese proverb: "If you don't enter the tiger's den, how will you get the tiger's cub?"⁶ In other words, I did not separate myself off from the world of patriarchy, but integrated myself with it to understand motherhood and to undermine its stereotypical standards. I grew up in a traditional patriarchal Taiwanese family, away from worldly affairs, but through education and studying abroad I discovered that this was not purely a place of suppression and negativity. It was a place from which I could actively test my ideas on self and on women's consciousness. My patriarchal background does not, then, muffle my voice; rather, it arouses my will to challenge and to become a woman artist with full experience of patriarchy. These results are all reflected in my artistic practice. The contents of my artworks reveal my attempt to radically change the traditional selfless fate of mothers.

Through my practice and research, three visual strategies to help mother artists to sustain their creative identities were established: self-representation, family photography, and time sequencing.

Among them, self-representation is the most efficient strategy for resisting the conventional definition of the selfless mother. Although it has a different representational form from the autobiography in the field of women's writing, this visual strategy has a similar purpose to that proposed by Adrienne Rich in the book Of Woman Born. She said,

My own story, which is woven throughout this book, is only one story. What I carried away in the end was a determination to heal – insofar as an individual woman can, and as much as possible with other women – the separation between mind and body; never again to lose myself both psychically and physically in that way. Slowly I came to understand the

⁶ This Chinese proverb in Chinese is “不入虎穴，焉得虎子。”

paradox contained in 'my' experience of motherhood; that, although different from many other women's experiences it was not unique; and that only in shedding the illusion of my uniqueness could I hope, as a woman, to have any authentic life at all.⁷

For me as an experienced artist devoting myself to visual creation, compared with literature which deals with many fixed definitions of words, self-representation through visual practice is much more intuitive and exposes the hidden self. Besides helping mothers to maintain and heal the self, my first-hand visual records symbolise the starting point of a mother's right to voice and to interpret motherhood on her own. Also, these materials became important historical sources in establishing a 'herstory' which corrects misunderstandings based on the long-term unitary viewpoint of men.

The second visual strategy, family photographs, was inspired by the close relationship between mothers and family photographs. Using the convenient functions of the camera, I took a great number of family photographs to keep a record of my thoughts, creativity, accomplishments and details of things which happened during my busy early motherhood. The documentary characteristic of photography makes this an efficient strategy for directly reflecting the inner feelings captured by these images, consciously or unconsciously selected in real life. Adopting the concept of the family album, I carefully re-organised and re-interpreted these fragmentary photographs to make them representative of my own identity as a mother and to communicate to others. These serious actions not only achieve the aims of a mother creating her own story, but also enabled me to defiantly air the private issues of motherhood in public.

The third strategy, time sequencing, was an ongoing project to represent maternal time in the art of motherhood. It was inspired by a feeling of the high 'density' of time triggered by my son's rapid growth. Over a period in which I became aware of time in motherhood and artistic creation, I realised that growing together with my son I would face long-term unceasing change with many joys and hardships. The achievements of motherhood are not like most vocations which yield a regular tangible remuneration after short-term endeavour. Instead, they continually accumulate, draw from each event over the long-term and complicate the process of motherhood. I also considered that if I, as a mother artist, only pursued short-term efficient results in my artwork as before, then characteristics of maternal time, such as flexibility, creativity and accumulation of experience, would be suppressed. The work of creating art would become a heavy burden and lose its function in helping me to sustain creative identity under the overlapping time pressures of motherhood and creating art. Therefore, I prolonged the time in which my art was created to match the duration of my motherhood and I displayed the images taken at different

⁷ Adrienne Rich. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virgo, 1997 (1977)) 40.

times in specific sequences in order to express the change in and the accumulation of growth. This sequential method not only provided evidence of the effort and achievements of a mother at different stages of motherhood, but also offered an alternative viewpoint and new visual language in a kind of temporal lexicography in experiencing and interpreting time.

In the exhibition Picturing Motherhood, many visitors gave me positive feedback on the strategies I used to sustain my creative identity. I selected one message, left in my guest book by a young Taiwanese female designer, who used to reject motherhood, to indicate the significant effect of these strategies on others. She indicated,

As a Taiwanese woman, I am extremely afraid of being a mother. I don't want to have the same fate as my mother, falling into the conventional trap of motherhood. However, your artworks evoke my deepest hidden desire to be a mother... Today, I realise that a mother can have the right to pursue the self and creativity, as you have proven. Your creative attempts and effort have made me look forward to challenging my future.

This highly appreciative comment was a very positive response to my thesis. It appears that I have carried out my aim in allowing my female compatriots to re-understand the value of motherhood.

In conclusion, these strategies are as vulnerable, veiled and delicately as the role of motherhood from the viewpoint of patriarchy; however, my research and artistic practice were attempts to reveal these hidden characteristics and to use them to challenge a world monopolised by men. Through an examination of the self and the confrontation between genders and culture, a number of differences have been identified. They range from doubting, through identifying, to the expression of uniqueness. It is clear that these visual strategies have not only enriched the field of art, but have also proved their own value.

5.2 Personal development

Continuously and insistently treating a crisis as a favourable turn of events was the most difficult part of this project for me, but was the aspect from which I gained the most. Over the past seven years, I have continually encouraged myself to examine and to deal with my weaknesses in the face of every frustration. I did not allow myself to escape from confusion or setbacks for too long, and urged myself to carefully experience, to understand, to improve and to develop them from negative feelings into positive actions. It was not easy for me to carry this forward over a

period of several years, given the overlapping demands of being a mother, an artist and a researcher. However, I found the most challenging aspect was the need to often put my 'naked' self on public display, especially to be scrutinised and criticised in front of art or academic experts, owing to the requirements of a doctoral thesis. In the process of developing this project, I cannot count how many times I felt excitement and affirmation because I had improved from a weak starting point and gained the support of the experts; and I do not know how many times I lost confidence and was disappointed with my efforts because I was suffering from the difficulties of balancing motherhood, creation and research, and the serious critiques of others. These up-and-down emotions were closely bound with my research and my life, and they produced a great deal of trepidation about making progress. Nevertheless, by reviewing all these difficulties I overcame them. Because I did not give up on them, I gradually developed an ability to deal with my negative feelings through far-sightedness and to decrease my expectations of ultimate success instead of remaining trapped in short-term, temporary problems. In addition, using creativity to find solutions, I put into practice the concept of transferring a crisis into a favourable result. Turning the negative into the positive is one of the keys to this research. I have analysed and provided details of change throughout the whole process to reveal its importance in this project and in my personal development.

Observing all of the artworks I have created from past to present, it could be said that I had achieved a higher level of thinking and depiction of the issues of women in art during these years of hard work. Prior to the last seven years, I merely questioned patriarchal culture by revealing or satirising the oppressed situation of women in my artworks. Although I achieved the aim of speaking out and provoked the audience to re-experience the plight of being a woman, I did not consider any positive and active solution for women in art. This time, however, instead of just adopting a resentful attitude to the predicament of motherhood, as before, I attempted to apply my artistic profession to explore and to solve the confusion about the identity of being a mother. Simultaneously, a positive change happened in my family life. Giving up the traditional custom where mothers would only complain privately about their motherhood with one another, I attempted to create many opportunities for my husband and my son to experience and to explore the joys and sorrows of motherhood by joining in with my artistic practice. As a result, in my family the issues of motherhood are no longer the private problems that mothers suffer by themselves. Motherhood has become an important experience, transparent, shared and shouldered together. In fact, after growing with me in my motherhood project, my husband's attitude was changed from denial at having a child to one of active participation in his fatherhood. I felt the more he participated in my project, the more he could break away from the stereotype of the absent father and the conventional expectation to ask me to be a selfless mother. He even expressed his envy that women have the ability to go through pregnancy and to give birth, both of which used to be looked down upon in our country. All this change in my art and my family reveals that using the idea of creativity in an artistic project

and also in my actual motherhood has been of value to the parenting in my family. It could be an example for many unhappy mothers and for those who deny themselves the right to be mothers in Taiwan.

5.3 Suggestions for further research

As part of the investigation of this thesis, the relationship between the art of motherhood and the creative identity of mother artists in Taiwan has been reviewed and critiqued. However, there are still many 'more complicated processes and details' waiting for further study, as noted by Hui-Tan Chang in his research about women's movements in contemporary Taiwan.⁸ Moreover, among the works and concepts considered are some important research materials which are involved in ongoing artistic projects currently being developed by contemporary mother artists against a backdrop of rapid development in Taiwanese society and culture; these need to be continually observed and explored by later researchers. After completing this PhD research, I plan to stay in Taiwan and use the case study method to explore in-depth and discover more hidden issues in the relationship between the creative identity of mother artists and their culture.

This research has offered three practical visual strategies which can enable mothers and artists to pursue their creative identities during motherhood. Nevertheless, there are other strategies waiting for further artists and researchers with different experiences of motherhood to discover and develop. I will continue to use my strategies and to try to create new ones through my artistic practice in the next steps of motherhood. Also, I plan to organise an art-growing group for mothers. With the idea of putting my thoughts into practice and examining their possibilities for others, I will attempt to lead the group in exploring and sharing their creativity through artistic activities. I suppose that different steps of motherhood, such as joining in with our children's abundant imagination during their childhood, dealing with conflicts during their puberty and facing the empty nest syndrome during our post-parental period, are all possible motives for developing art from real life.

"Why has the father disappeared?", one Western father seriously questioned me in my Picturing Motherhood exhibition. The answer is very simple. It is because I only focused on discussing motherhood in this period of creation and research. I purposely used self-representation to emphasise the mother's subjectivity in order to elevate her status – which used to be denigrated or ignored in our society. In fact, during the whole process of developing this project, my husband participated with us

⁸ Chang (張輝潭) 176.

in the struggle against stereotyping motherhood. Owing to his active participation in my motherhood over a period of time, he realised that growing together with our child was an extremely precious experience and he began to enjoy his fatherhood. For me, the interrogative point of view of the Western father mentioned above not only made me aware of the active attitude of a man defending his right, but also reminded me to rethink the issue of fatherhood. Given the traditional attitude that in Taiwan “men work outside and women inside”, a father playing the same important role as the mother in parenthood was universally absent from the family. This is true even in recent years when many mothers have begun to work outside the home. For a long time, there has been a huge gap between the absent father in real family life and the high status awarded to fathers in stereotypical family representations. Compared to the efforts of a few mother artists expressing their creativity on the issue of motherhood, the experience of fatherhood is still less represented or discussed in art. Therefore, based on my experience of researching motherhood, I suggest further researchers or artists, especially those in the role of father, could carry out more in-depth exploration of fatherhood, based on their real experiences, to reappraise the ossified representation.

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Appendix 1

Documents Relevant to the 2005 Exhibition Picturing Motherhood at the University of Brighton

A. Exhibition statement for Picturing Motherhood, 2005

This exhibition is a crucial part of my practice-based PhD thesis. Through a sequence of six artworks within an installation, it pictures the culmination of my early motherhood from the viewpoint of a Taiwanese woman artist. Presenting my artworks and research ideas in the public domain will allow me to examine the audience's reactions and perceptions.

In Taiwan, most people believe that the nature of motherhood is sacrifice and the ideal mother needs to be a provider of selfless support to her family. A mother's concept of herself is easily denied because she is often seen as fulfilling her allotted role as provider of a male heir for her husband's family. Today, education and working opportunities for women are increasingly equal to those for men. However, a woman artist, who plays her role with strong self-awareness, is still more or less content to accept the pressure from the traditional male-dominated system, where it is expected that she will surrender her own creative identity for personal, family and social reasons.

In 2000, with my first pregnancy, I began to face directly the pressures of impending motherhood within Taiwan's patriarchal society. Expectations of the sacrifice demanded of me impinged on my activities as an artist. I felt frustrated that mothers are not viewed as creative figures. Neither is the role of the mother seen to have any connection with the role of the artist; they are even viewed as opposing, or indeed conflicting with one another. Only representations of the stereotypes of ideal and sacrificial motherhood are permitted. Therefore, in this PhD research, I tried to examine the proposition that an artist during early motherhood can establish visual strategies for sustaining a creative identity to counteract the stereotypical role of the mother in the patriarchal society of Taiwan.

My child, Tong Tong, is now four years old. Pregnancy and giving birth have been the most exciting parts of my life. Pleasure, anger, satisfaction, fear, worry, upset...I have had so many changing feelings throughout this time. Sometimes, I feel I am happier than ever before; sometimes, I feel tired-out and want to give up. With all

these complicated emotions and enriching experiences, I try to record and picture the changes in myself, alongside my child's growth, as a means of understanding Taiwanese motherhood. Living in the UK, but coming from a different cultural background, I have found that creativity and flexibility have a strong part to play in care, play and education and the interaction between my son and me, and that this is so without continuous pressure from traditional value systems. Creativity and flexibility urge me frequently to refresh my mind, my behaviour, my attitudes and my concept of life; and then they unexpectedly inspire my artworks. I would say that the creative process of motherhood is similar to that of artistic creativity. For me, the creativity that interweaves motherhood and my profession has helped me to develop a new understanding of motherhood as a means of undermining the stereotype.

B. Propaganda

- Two versions of the invitation card



- A special invitation for a very important person



- Advertisements for the exhibition at the University



- Websites for advertising the exhibition:
<http://picturingmotherhood.blogspot.com/>

Picturing Motherhood

PHD DEGREE SHOW BY 汪曉青ANNIE WANG (25 AUG - 07 SEP 2005)

ARTIST
 汪曉青 Annie Wang

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION
 Exhibition Statement
 Artwork 1
 Artwork 2
 Artwork 3
 Artwork 4
 Artwork 5
 Artwork 6
 About the PhD Thesis
 Special Thanks

RESEARCH LINK
 Research in U.of Brighton
 First Supervisor
 Second Supervisor
 The Culture Archive
 Research Group

PREVIOUS POSTS
 !Exhibiton OpenWelcome to visit
 More pictures...
 ...
 Special Thanks from Annie Wang 汪
 曉青 Supervisors ...
 PhD Thesis Title: Sustaining the
 Creative Ide...
 Artwork 6: Mother's Box Looking back
 on my p...
 Artwork 5 My Son and I at the Same
 Height I...
 Artwork 4 The Mother as a Creator
 The mother...
 Artwork 3 Relative Measure 2001,
 2002, 2003 ...
 Artwork 2 I Sign; I Exist ...
 Artwork 1 Depressing Pregnancy
 2000-2001My bod...

ARCHIVES
 30/07/05
 31/07/05
 01/08/05
 03/08/05
 27/08/05
 04/09/05

Exhibiton Open
 Welcome to visit

Picturing Motherhood
 PHD DEGREE SHOW 2005

More pictures

C. Special thanks and images of setting up the exhibition



Special thanks from Annie Wang 汪曉青

Supervisors

Prof. Jonathan Woodham
Ms. Clare Strand

Ex-supervisor

Dr. Chris Mullen

Assistants

Tien-Yi Chao 趙恬儀
Mei-Feng Chen 陳梅鳳
Thomas Chen 陳文國
Djine Lee 李靜宜
Chia-Chen Shih 師家珍
Ming-Chang Tien 田名璋
Monica Wang 汪君曦
Shao-Tung Wang (Tong) 汪劭桐
Chia-Mei Yang 楊佳梅
Jo-Chieh Yao 姚若潔

Technician

Steve Mace

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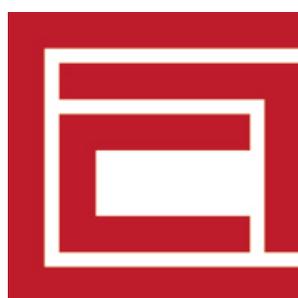
Centre for Research Development, University of Brighton
School of Arts and Communication, University of Brighton
Mr. Mike Wang 汪明傑 先生
Ms. Li-Hwa Wang Hwang 汪黃麗華 女士



Appendix 2

Documents Relevant to the 2007 Exhibition Chain at the Chinese Arts Centre in Manchester

A. Exhibition information and statement for Chain, 2007



Chinese Arts Centre

Chain

He Chengyao, Annie Haiso-Ching Wang, Amy Cham

13 April – 17 June 2007

Preview 12 April 2007



He Chengyao



Annie Haiso-Ching Wang



Amy Cham

Chain implies a notion of confinement and restraint, something to which we are attached and vulnerable. However it can also be understood simply as a connection of a series of things, which are linked together by something they have in common.

Chain exhibits works by three lens-based artists. Using their personal stories with their mothers, and the experience of being a mother themselves, they aim to illustrate an aspect of the reality of family intimacy.

He Chengyao responds to some past memories through her body. She is hoping to find out the answer to something she was too young to understand, but still remembers vividly. Whether a painful or emotional memory, she tries to heal herself by the process of re-acting.

Annie Haiso-Ching Wang is carrying out a life-long project with her son which began with her pregnancy, as a testimony of the extension of life as well as the family chain.

Passing on the cooking knowledge to the next generation is an iconic symbol of the prolongation of a family history. **Amy Cham** tries to explore whether it is a celebration or a question about the notion of nurturing and motherhood.

For email interviews with the artists, images and further information on the Chinese Arts Centre, please contact Alyson Doocey on:

+44 (0) 161 832 7271

marketing@chinese-arts-centre.org

www.chinese-arts-centre.org

Listings information

Chinese Arts Centre, Market Buildings, Thomas Street, Manchester, M4 1EU

+44 (0)161 832 7271

Mon-Sat 10am – 6pm and Sun 11am-4pm

Notes for editors

The Chinese Arts Centre was established in 1986 and acts as the national agency to promote, commission and exhibit Chinese artists. Following on from a £2.5 million Lottery grant it opened its new Centre in November 2003, received a RIBA award for architecture and was a finalist for the accessible building of the year award in 2004. In 2006, the Chinese Arts Centre was proud to receive a Pearl Award for Creative Excellence.

©Chinese Arts Centre 2006 Confidential

Established in 1986

LOOK 07
J



B. Views of the exhibition, Chain



Images were taken by Tim McConville and Hsiao-Ching Wang.

C. Art events for Chain



The screenshot shows the Chinese Arts Centre website. The header includes the logo and the text "Chinese Arts Centre WELCOME TO THE CHINESE ARTS CENTRE, THE UK AGENCY FOR CHINESE ARTS, CULTURE AND CREATIVITY". A navigation menu on the left lists: Home, Latest News, About Us, Events diary, Exhibitions, Education, Breathe, Hire & Hospitality, Shop & Teahouse, Noticeboard, Artist Database, Book Archive, and Online Gallery. The main content area is titled "Events Diary" and contains the following text:

Public events will be regularly organised and hosted by Chinese Arts Centre to run alongside exhibitions and other activities taking place at the centre. Events will include book launches, talks and demonstrations of arts and crafts practices. For other activities please also browse the Education section of this website.

Please contact the centre to confirm places, there may be limitations on attendee numbers.

Although we endeavour to ensure that information is correct, this section of the website is regularly updated, please contact the centre for confirmation as events are subject to change.

Getting Together: A Family Portrait workshop with Annie Wang
Thursday 19 April 2007, 2pm-4pm
Artist Annie Wang, exhibiting work in our forthcoming exhibition *Chain* hosts a workshop where participants can create their own family portraits and collages. The workshop aims to celebrate women, motherhood and the family by encouraging participants' creativity and exploring subjects relating to the *Chain* exhibition.

Chain: An exhibition talk hosted by Annie Wang
Thursday 19 April 2007, 6pm-7.30pm
Join us for an informal yet enlightening discussion hosted by Annie Wang. Annie will also explore the subjects of 'womanhood' and 'motherhood' and how they have been incorporated in to the artwork.
British Sign Language interpretation is available on request.

Photography Workshop with Amy Cham
Tuesday 29 April 2007, 2pm-4pm
Exhibiting *Chain* artist Amy Cham invites participants to bring along their favorite portrait and be transported to the far-off exotic locations of their dreams.

Chain: Artist's talk hosted by He Chengyao
Tuesday 31 May 2007, 6pm-7.30pm
Artist He Chengyao hosts an evening that takes an in-depth look at the work & extensive career of one of Mainland China's most established and prolific female contemporary visual artists.

Monkey: Journey to the West
28 June - 15 July 2007
A programme of workshops for this event takes place between April and May 2007
The Festival's launch event is - *Monkey: Journey to the West* - a groundbreaking new circus opera production based on the Chinese literary classic. The Festival is also running an education programme in partnership with the Chinese Arts Centre for primary schools and secondary schools.

Cinema China
Now showing at *Cornerhouse, Manchester* until Sun 29 April
Throughout April *Cornerhouse* will be showing classic Chinese films as part of *Cinema China*. This is a rare opportunity to see films from the past eight decades of Chinese Cinema.

- Private viewing



- **Artists' talks**

Yahoo! Mail - artamiewang@yahoo.com
 http://us.f545.mail.yahoo.com/ym/ShowLetter?MsgId=2903_17156808_8178_152
 中文 繁體 簡體 Mac Amazon eBay 台灣 Yahoo! 國際 新聞 Apple eBay Yahoo! News

Watch exclusive Christina show!
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Chain: Artist talks
 at Chinese Arts Centre
Meet the Artist: Annie Wang
 Thursday 19 April 2007, 6pm-7.30pm

Relative Measures, Annie Hsiao-Ching Wang - 2000-2001, Photograph

'Chain' implies a notion of confinement and restraint, something that we are being attached to vulnerably. However it can also be understood simply as a connection of a series of things, which are linked together by something in common. **Chain** exhibits works by three lens-based artists. Using their personal story with their mothers, and the experience of being a mother themselves, they aim to illustrate an aspect of the reality of family intimacy.

Join us for an informal yet enlightening discussion hosted by **Annie Wang**, one of the artists exhibiting in **Chain**. Annie will be on hand to contextualize themes present within the exhibition as well as to detail her own work and professional practice. Annie will also explore the subjects of 'womanhood' and 'motherhood' and how they have been incorporated in to the exhibited artwork.

RSVP to info@chinese-arts-centre.org to your place
[Click here for more information](#)

- **Workshop**



Workshop title: Getting Together: Photographing with Our Family Photographs.

D. Propaganda

- The invitation card



The obverse side.

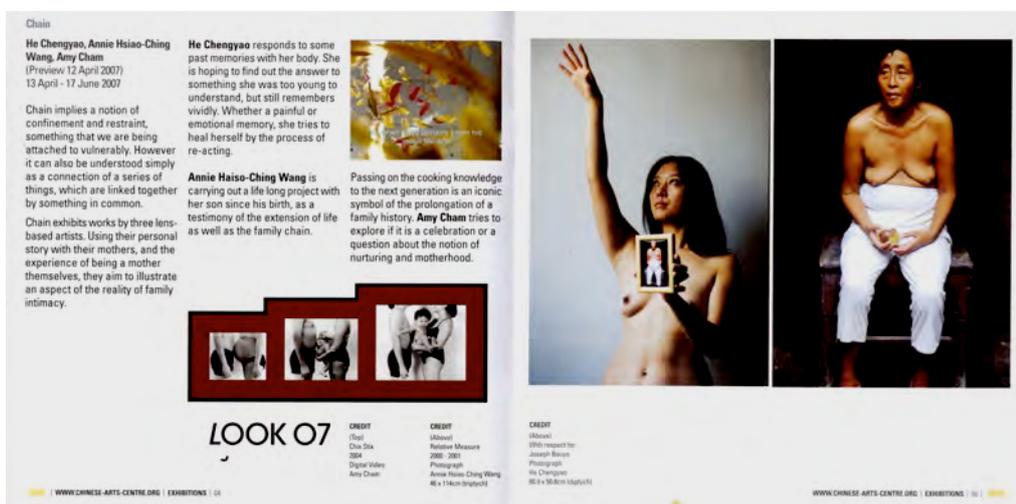


The reverse side.

- The programme of Chinese Arts Centre events: Issue 09



Front and back covers of the Programme.



Pages 4 and 5 of the Programme.

- Advertisements in art magazines

Chinese Arts Centre
华人艺术中心

Chain

He Chengyao,
Annie Hsiao-Ching Wang,
Amy Cham

13 April - 17 June 2007

Chinese Arts Centre, Market Buildings, Thomas Street, Northern Quarter, Manchester, M4 1EU, UK
Tel: +44 (0)161 832 7271 info@chinese-arts-centre.org www.chinese-arts-centre.org

LOOK 07 ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

ArtAsiaPacific No.52 Mar/Apr 2007, p.56.

LOOK 07

THE DEMOCRATIC IMAGE
ONLINE PROJECTS
EXHIBITIONS
WORKSHOPS
COMMISSIONS
EVENTS

Chinese Arts Centre
www.chinese-arts-centre.org | Market Buildings Thomas Street Manchester M4 1EU | 0161 832 7271
Mon - Sat 10am - 6pm, Sun 11am - 4pm

CHAIN

13 APR - 17 JUN

A chain can be the source of confinement or restraint, or it can simply imply a connection between things that have something in common. This exhibition shows the work of three lens-based artists. Each one uses her experience of motherhood or of her own relationship with her mother to illustrate an aspect of family relationships.

He Chengyao conjures up memories of things she was too young to understand but which she tries to heal through a process of re-enactment. Annie Hsiao-Ching Wang shows work from a life-long project that she began at her son's birth five years ago. Amy Cham uses the metaphor of the passing on of culinary skills to the next generation as a symbol of family history.

ARTISTS' TALK

ALL ABOUT A WOMAN

THU 26 APR 6PM - 7.30PM

A conversation between the artists and the curator explores issues such as the body, marriage and child-raising and how these relate to the artists' work.

Free. Please book a place with Teige Maddrell on 0161 832 7271 or email info@chinese-arts-centre.org

The programme for Look 07¹; the front page and p.10.

¹ Look 07 places Manchester at the centre of global developments in photography. It is a programme of activities concerned with photographic revolution. The programme includes a symposium, online work, exhibitions, workshops, commissions and events.

E. The artworks of Annie Hsiao-Ching Wang in the exhibition Chain

- The Mother as a Creator, 2001-2006



This new photograph, taken in 2006, was added to the series The Mother as a Creator and displayed in this exhibition Chain.

- My Son and I at the Same Height, 2001-2007



Two new photographs, taken in 2006 and 2007, were added to this series and displayed in this exhibition. (Left) 5Y3M (6 Sep 2006), in our kitchen where our family often cook and tidy up together. Hove, UK. (Right) 5Y6M (5 Jan 2007), in front of my son's school, as a year 1 student. Hove, UK.

F. Reports and feedback

- **Reports**



This report is in the section "Art News" of the magazine Asian, May/June 2007 issue.



Report from the Metro Newspaper, 29 April 2007.

- **Creative feedback from Mr Monkey on the Internet**



