

April 18-July 13, 2014



# Home Truths: Photography, Motherhood

FEATURING WORKS BY:

Janine Antoni  
Elina Brotherus  
Elinor Carucci

Ana Casas Broda  
Ann Fessler  
Tierney Gearon

Fred Huning  
Katie Murray  
Hanna Putz

**Hanna Putz**

*Untitled, (Nave 2), 2012*  
Courtesy of the artist

This guide serves as a viewer supplement to the exhibition *Home Truths* and contains information about the works on view, questions for looking and discussion, and classroom activities. You may download this guide from the museum's website at [mocp.org/education/resources-for-educators.php](http://mocp.org/education/resources-for-educators.php). A PDF with images that can be projected for classroom use can also be found there. To schedule a free docent-led tour of *Home Truths*, please complete the form here: <http://www.mocp.org/education/tours-and-print-viewings.php>.

*Home Truths* was curated by Susan Bright and was first presented at the Photographers' Gallery, London, UK as the exhibition *Home Truths: Photography, Motherhood and Identity* from October 11, 2013-January 5, 2014. Much of the content in this guide is adapted from the Photographers' Gallery's Exhibition Notes For Teachers developed by the Gallery staff.

This exhibition contains imagery that may not be suitable for younger viewers. Teachers should preview the exhibition in the online image set or in person before bringing students.

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# Home Truths: Photography, Motherhood

This exhibition aims to investigate the complex and demanding experience of motherhood through the changes that occur to a woman's identity by becoming or being a mother and challenge long-held stereotypes and sentimental views of motherhood. All the artists featured reject, update or subvert stereotypical representations of the mother and on some level ask an audience to examine societal expectations and everyday depictions.

*Home Truths* questions both the identity of the mother figure, but also the identity of photography at a time when the expectations and demands of both are in flux, and both subject and medium grapple for new meaning.

–Susan Bright

## About the Work on View



In **Elinor Carucci's** (Israeli, b. 1971) series *Mother* (2004-2013) we see the artist, known for her intimate portraits of her family, extend her practice by working with her children. Through her photographs Carucci expresses her fears of motherhood—that it would result in the loss of her creativity and sense of identity. What she discovered however, were new layers of depth and intensity within herself and her work. Carucci confronts viewers with candid depictions of motherhood—from her changing body to moments of annoyance, frustration and exhaustion but also those of great joy and tenderness.

**Elinor Carucci**

*Feeding Emanuelle from a Plastic Bottle after I Stopped Breast-feeding Her*, 2005  
Courtesy of the artist

**Janine Antoni** (Bahamian, b. 1964) has, for many years, explored the role of mothering through her relationship with her own mother and subsequently her daughter. In *Inhabit* (2009) we see Antoni suspended in mid-air wearing a dress designed as a house. The photograph is part of a performance piece in which, over the course of five hours, a spider slowly begins to weave its web inside the rooms of the house. The spider stands for Antoni's daughter while she is the supporting structure it needs for its web. *Inhabit*, and other images in the series, reflect on the complex role of the mother requiring her to be flexible yet reassuringly constant, a dominating presence but one that is able to provide for the space needed for her child to grow.



**Janine Antoni**, *Lattice*, 2009

Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York





In her series the *Annonciation* **Elina Brotherus** (Finnish, b. 1972) records herself through years of failed IVF treatments. Full of art historical references, Brotherus' images stand in sharp contrast to the traditional scenes and symbolism of Annunciation paintings. While the Virgin Mary receives the news that she is to give birth to the Son of God, Brotherus pictures herself month after month in front of a succession of negative pregnancy tests. Feelings of elation and abundance are replaced with those of sorrow and loss. Brotherus' photographs question the term 'mother', suggesting that it can stem from intention rather than being bound to biology or the physical act of having a child.

**Elina Brotherus**  
*Annonciation*, 2009  
 Courtesy of the artist

**Fred Hüning's** (German, b. 1966) work is comprised of a diaristic trilogy of books, *Einer* (2010), *Zwei* (2011) and *Drei* (2011). Starting in 2005, the books document, in a non-linear way, Hüning and his wife's journey of love and loss as reflected in everyday moments alongside extraordinary and tragic family events. *Einer* tells the story of the birth and death of their first child and the struggle which followed as they try and cope with their loss. *Zwei* shows the couple's healing process as they attempt to rebuild their relationship and Hüning's wife discovers she is pregnant again. *Drei* is a celebration of life and love as the family is made whole again by the arrival of their second son.



**Fred Hüning**  
*Untitled, (Lake)*, 2011  
 Courtesy of the artist



**Katie Murray**  
 Still from *Gazelle*, 2012  
 Courtesy of the artist

**Katie Murray's** (American, b. 1974) video performance *Gazelle* (2012) showcases the artist as she tests her limits of endurance during a workout session. Following the birth of her second child Murray attempted to lose weight by using the Gazelle Total Body Workout Exercise Machine. Frustrated by her family's constant interruptions she began exercising with her two children strapped to her back and front. Serving as a running commentary is the voice of Tony Little, "America's Personal Trainer", blaring out sexist motivational clichés. The video is intercepted with nature footage of a mother gazelle suckling her young and escaping an attack by a pair of young cheetah cubs. Murray's piece is a metaphor for her failed attempts at balancing the demands of a wife, mother and artist all at the same time.

**Hanna Putz's** (Austrian, b. 1987) photographs raise questions about today's excess of images and the need to perform for the camera in an age of social networking and permanent surveillance. By photographing young mothers and their babies she aims to create a feeling of intimacy and closeness, but without exposing anyone. The mother, solely focused on her child, is oblivious to the camera's presence and unconcerned about 'posing' for it. Composition and color are of great importance to Putz, adding a layer of anonymity to her subjects by transforming them into sculptural forms.



**Hanna Putz**  
*Untitled, (Nave 2)*, 2012  
 Courtesy of the artist



**Ana Casas Broda**  
from the series *Playroom*, 2010  
Courtesy of the artist

**Ana Casas Broda's** (Spanish, b. 1965; lives in Mexico) desire to have children was intense. She spent five years in fertility treatments before she was able to conceive her first son. With the birth of her second son she began exploring motherhood through photography and writing. For Casas Broda having children triggered memories and fears from her own childhood, which exacerbated her post-natal depression. Using photography as a form of therapy, she was able to work through these dark periods and come to terms with her past. Titled *Kinderwunsch* (2006–2013), the series focuses on Casas Broda's games with her sons, depicting a series of complex interactions between the children's developing identities and her own profound transformations.

**Ann Fessler's** (American, b. 1951) *Along the Pale Blue River* (2001) is a short experimental film based on a personal experience. Made up of collage, video and archival footage of the farms and rivers in the Midwest of America, the story is told by voice over in Fessler's hypnotic tones as she recounts the story of a young woman (her biological mother) who runs away from her small rural town when she discovers she is pregnant. Forty years later the artist seeks out her mother's photograph in a school year book and, as if in a dream, drives to the farm where her mother grew up. She no longer lives there, but during the process of the journey she realizes that the source of the river that flowed through her hometown when she was a child sprung from her mother's town—symbolically and metaphorically joining the two women as yet unknown to each other.



**Ann Fessler**  
*Along the Pale Blue River*, 2001  
Courtesy of the artist



**Tierney Gearon**

*Untitled*, from *The Mother Project*, 2006

Courtesy of the artist

These works are set in upstate New York as **Tierney Gearon** (American, b. 1963) tries to connect with her mother who suffers from increasing mental health issues. The intergenerational connections spin throughout the series as her young children interact with their grandmother—sometimes relishing her unconventional character and other times becoming frightened by her. It is a story of two mothers connecting, battling, loving and accepting one another despite the fact that conventional roles have collapsed. Here there is no place for maternal judgments. Photography plays a vital cathartic role in bridging gaps that may have occurred between the two women. Shot with a combination of orchestrated set up scenes and intuitive moments, the photographs form a tender and complicated series that questions traditional maternal roles.

## QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING AND DISCUSSION

The work on show in this exhibition aims to challenge long-held stereotypes and sentimental views of motherhood depicted through photography.

### Before viewing the exhibition consider:

- Based on the title of this exhibition, *Home Truths: Photography and Motherhood* what images would you expect to see here? Why?
- What is the first word or image that comes to mind when you think of Motherhood? What other words or images come to mind? Discuss these words. Are they based on media representations of motherhood, your own experiences, or something else? Describe.
- What challenges do people face in planning for or having children?



**Fred Hüning**  
*Untitled, (2 photographers), 2008*  
Courtesy of the artist

### While looking at the exhibition consider:

- Look carefully and describe what you see in one body of work. What pulls your attention? Why?
- What can you tell about how the artist made this work?
- Do you have ideas about when or where this work might have been made? How?
- What do you learn about the subjects of these images? What details reveal that information? Can you fully trust this information?
- Do any of these works speak to any broader, more universal “truths” about motherhood? If so how?
- What moods or feelings are expressed through this work? How?
- What do you notice about how this work is presented and installed?
- What do you think this work is ultimately about? Why?
- In the exhibition some artists photograph staged scenarios, some capture candid moments, and others mix styles—photographing seemingly natural moments but using artificial light.

How does the style of the photograph impact the way you think about the subject?

Why do you think the artists chose to photograph or film in the way they did?

### Consider the exhibition as a whole.

- How does the portrayal of motherhood in this exhibition differ from what we usually see in mainstream media and advertising?
- How does the depiction of fathers in this exhibition differ from what we see in the media and advertising?
- How do the images on view here conform to or conflict with what you expected to see in an exhibition on photographs of motherhood?
- How do the images on view here conform to or conflict with your own experiences of being a child, parent, or both?
- When you consider all of the bodies of work on view in this exhibition as a whole, what does this exhibition suggest about motherhood?
- Has looking at the exhibition changed your thoughts on motherhood? If so, how?

## ACTIVITIES



**Janine Antoni**  
*Inhabit*, 2009

### Write from Point of View

Select an image in the exhibition that interests you. Write from the point of view of someone or something in the scene—a mother, father, child or even an object. What would you see, smell, hear, and think if you were in this scene? Or, write from the point of view of someone or something not pictured in the image, someone who might have stepped out of the frame or an outside observer of this scene.

### Depicting Motherhood

- Imagine that you will be photographing your own mother or a friend's mother.
- What would you want to communicate about that person in your images? Why?
- What 3 scenarios would you devise and use to represent that mother? Why?
- Where would you want to take these photographs? In a home setting, in a studio, outdoors? Why?
- Can you think of ways that you might represent that woman without directly showing her?
- Thinking back to the different styles of the artists in the *Home Truths* exhibition, what style would you choose to photograph in?
- Would there be particular emotions you would want to convey? How might you make that show in your pictures?
- How might these photographs be different from images we see of celebrity mothers? Why?

### Six Word Memoirs

Make a list of 25 words that describes one of the mothers depicted in this exhibition from the point of the mother in the image. Cross off half of the words, leaving the ones that you feel are most important. From that list, craft a six word memoir for the woman depicted in the image. For examples of six word memoirs see: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18768430>