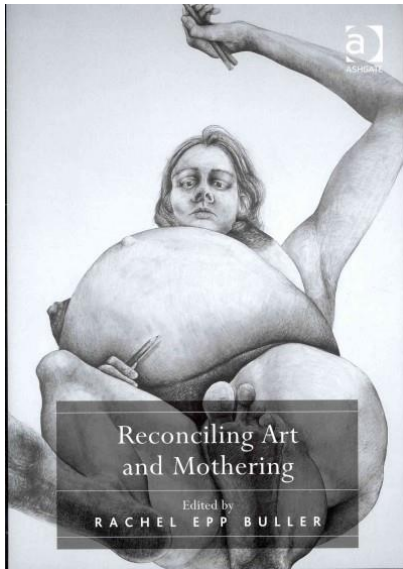


Reconciling Art and Mothering, ed. by Rachel Epp Buller. Ashgate, September 2012. 332 p. ill. ISBN 9781409426134 (cl.), \$119.95.



Reconciling Art and Mothering is a highly readable collection of twenty-five essays examining the depiction of and critical reception to maternal imagery throughout art history. Works and artists represented range from early modernism to contemporary. The first few essays look at works from as early as the eighteenth century; the remaining bulk of the artists discussed are of the twentieth and twenty-first century. The essays are edited by Rachel Epp Buller, Assistant Professor of Art at Bethel College and an independent curator, artist, and coordinator of The Feminist Art Project. The book is divided into two parts: "On Representing the Maternal Body: Critical and Theoretical Reflections" and "Contemporary Artist-Mothers: Statements and Negotiations." The nine essays in the first part are written by art historians; the second part contains sixteen essays, some very short, by contemporary artists about their own experiences as mother and artists.

Some of the essays offer fascinating glimpses into the seldom-researched area of how and why mothers were portrayed during the early modern era. The perspective of mother-artists is particularly interesting, as it raises the concept of work/life balance (in terms of art/motherhood), a commonplace dilemma for working mothers today. This area is particularly explored in the first essay, "Modern Motherhood and Female Sociability in the Art of Marguerite Gérard" by Heather Belnap Jensen, in which the author discusses the depiction of mothers as parts of necessary communities of women involved in child-rearing – particularly apt in a discussion about the works of Gérard, a childless artist herself who helped raise the children of her sister and brother-in-law, Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Other essays address the symbolism behind breastfeeding imagery, including the nineteenth-century belief regarding breastfeeding's hereditary transmission of moral values (and vices) and what that meant for immigrants, often depicted breastfeeding, and the changing landscape of the United States.

The essays dealing with contemporary works debate issues surrounding feminism and identity as artist/mothers, and how only recently some artists have been comfortable even revealing their status as mothers in their professional life. Post-partum depression, maternal ambivalence, breastfeeding, and lesbian mother-artists are surveyed, as is the charged question of whether it is possible to successfully be a feminist and a mother.

This book is highly recommended for library purchase, as it offers wide appeal and insight into areas of art history not often covered. Although students and faculty researching feminism and women's issues will be particularly interested, the range of authors and artists represented will appeal to a broad range of scholars, as will the unique perspective gained from a compilation of writing by both art historians and artists. There are many black-and-white illustrations throughout in addition to a section of twenty-three high-quality color plates.

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