

WEAVING MOTHERHOOD

by


Brandy Bembry

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art


Thesis Advisor: Will Sawyer

May 2024

Copyright 2024, Brandy Bembry

 _____ 5/6/2024 _____
Will Sawyer Date
Thesis Advisor

_____ Carlee A. Bradbury _____ 5/6/2024 _____
Dr. Carlee Bradbury Date
Committee Member

 _____ 5/6/2024 _____
Stuart Robinson Date
Committee Member

ABSTRACT

Weaving Motherhood is a heartfelt reflection of my journey through motherhood, encapsulating themes of place, identity, and values. Over the course of thirteen years, I've navigated the complexities of parenting amidst adversity, chronicling the highs and lows in a visual diary of profound significance. Through the lens of domestic disarray, divorce, death, and mental health struggles, this series captures the intricate interplay of resilience within my family unit. Rooted in Appalachian values, our collective strength and unwavering determination have propelled us forward, illuminating the universal human experience of overcoming obstacles and embracing life's endeavors. Each piece in this series serves as a testament to the power of love, family, and resiliency. The choice of materials plays a significant role in conveying the essence of the narrative. Clay, with its inherent qualities of strength and fragility, emerges as a metaphor for the complexities of the journey. Woven into the clay are additional materials, symbolizing the tireless efforts of repair and perseverance. Drawing inspiration from the beautiful Blue Ridge mountains, the materials and glazes ground each piece within the Appalachian landscape. Enriching the narrative are the individual representations of family members through the texture of crocheted doilies. These soft, intricate pieces embody rich material culture, tenderness, and stability. Furthermore, their flowing nature speaks to the growth of each family member within the broader tapestry of motherhood. Together, these elements come together to form a deeply resonant portrayal of the human experience, offering inspiration and a reminder of the resilience in us all.

Brandy Bembry, M.F.A.

Department of Art, 2024

Radford University

DEDICATION

To my mother and grandmother, thank you for instilling values that have guided me through my life. You have made me into the woman I am today.

To my family, thank you for your inspiration, love, and support. This dream wouldn't have been possible without you.

In loving memory of the ones who left an impact on me forever.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Title.....	1
Abstract.....	2
Dedication.....	3
Table of Contents	4
List of Figures.....	5
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	6
Chapter 2: Textiles	9
Chapter 3: Installation Art	16
Chapter 4: Conclusion	20
Figures	24
Bibliography	26

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1- Brandy Bembry, *Rebirth*

Figure 2- Brandy Bembry, *Deceived*

Figure 3- Brandy Bembry, *Noah*

Figure 4- Brandy Bembry, *For the Generations*

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Appalachian region consists of 423 counties, one of which is nestled in the foothills of Virginia. Patrick County is a quaint area known for the Blue Ridge Parkway and its scenic landscapes. It's also "home." Here, community thrives, where familiarity is the norm, and neighborly bonds are deeply woven into daily life. I've experienced firsthand the vital importance of community; it feels like an extension of our own families, and family is imperative. Whether extending a helping hand to a neighbor, offering a service, championing local initiatives, or taking part in events at one of the seven schools, citizens of this county prioritize fostering connections. Patrick County native and NASCAR legend Leonard Wood emphasized his love for our county because of its supportive environment.¹ Through acts of camaraderie and interconnectedness, individuals forge bonds that enrich lives in multiple ways.

Our community's supportiveness stems from the deep-rooted values ingrained in our heritage. Appalachian scholar Loyal Jones outlined a spectrum of beliefs and traditions that made up the cultural values in Appalachia. They included independence, self-reliance, pride, neighborliness, familism, personalism, religion, humility, modesty, love of place, patriotism, sense of beauty, and sense of humor.² The interplay of our internal and external environments intricately shape the establishment and implementation of values throughout the course of life. Among these values, familism is the most prominent in Appalachia, serving as the foundation that nurtures the development of other associated ethics. However, the structural dynamics within a family can be a determining factor in the formation of traits, behaviors, relationships, and

¹ Patrick County Chamber, *The Family Tree*.

² Loyal Jones and Warren Brunner, *Appalachian Values*.

opportunities. It's essential to recognize the diversity of circumstances within Appalachian families, as different households may prioritize certain values over others.

In Appalachia, it's often the matriarchs who bear the responsibility for instilling values. These women have been steadfast pillars for generations. Through their work in and out of the home, these women hold a world of responsibilities. They have displayed the importance of providing and preserving their household by any means necessary. "The truth is that the South is a matriarchy, relying on the labor of women to keep families together."³ With each generation, the values of the matriarch have been exemplified and passed down. Their strength, resourcefulness, and unwavering commitment serve as a testament to the enduring spirit of Appalachian womanhood and motherhood.

As for the women in my family, our values have served as our guiding light through times of adversity and scarcity. Raised by a single mother who inherited her strength from generations past, I learned early on the resilience that defines our Appalachian heritage. My grandmother, a widow and later a single mother herself, imparted invaluable lessons of perseverance and resiliency to my mother, who in turn passed them on to me. It was almost inevitable, given my lineage, that I would encounter challenges in my own domestic life. Marrying at eighteen and becoming a mother shortly thereafter, I faced trials of divorce and nearly widowhood by my mid-twenties. Despite enduring further trauma in a subsequent relationship post-divorce, I emerged as a single mother. Becoming a single mother and sole parent fundamentally altered my life, yet it was the enduring examples set by the women before me that provided a roadmap for navigating these challenges. My children, too, exemplified strength beyond their years, fostering reciprocal

³ Summer Conley, "Opinion: Appalachia is a Matriarchy."

exchange of solace and empowerment during tumultuous chapters of our lives. In them, I witnessed a resilience that seemed almost innate.

The backgrounds and narratives woven throughout Appalachian generations are not to be condemned or pitied; rather, they stand as testaments of Appalachian perseverance. It is a choice everyone must make whether to allow their past to define them or to forge their own path forward. My own determination to thrive and set a positive example has been instrumental in guiding me through the challenges of life, facilitating both personal growth and the provisions for my family. One of the most significant outcomes of this determination has been my pursuit of higher education, a lifelong aspiration. However, it was the mere fact of being a mother that prompted me to pursue this ambition. I needed to set an example—providing for them financially and having the flexibility to give them the time and attention they deserved. I made this into a reality by attending Ferrum College and Radford University. Being a family driven endeavor, my work in ceramics has also reflected this. Whether a pastime or memory, I have created pieces and installations that honor the many aspects of Appalachian culture and the values we hold.

As I navigate the complexities of existence, I am continually reminded of the inherent strength that resides within me—a legacy passed down through the generations and honed in through hardships and triumphs. This recognition has prompted an in-depth exploration of my experiences, as reflected in my thesis, titled “Weaving Motherhood.” My series of work is a heartfelt reflection of my journey through motherhood, encapsulating themes of place, identity, and values. It’s a visual diary that chronicles the highs and lows of my life throughout the past thirteen years as I have navigated parenting amidst adversity. From the turmoil of domestic upheaval to the challenges of divorce, loss, and mental health battles, this series bears witness to the intricate tapestry of resiliency woven within my family’s narrative.

Furthermore, “Weaving Motherhood” inspects the domestic sphere, examining our profound connections to the materials and objects that populate our everyday lives. After inquiry, it has illuminated the complex dynamics of familial bonds. It captures the transmission of cherished values from parent to child, the traditions that shape our identity, and the legacy of resilience that defines our Appalachian heritage. Moreover, it speaks to preservation of memory within the domestic sphere—treasured heirlooms and mementos that serve as tangible markers of our shared history and collective experience. Each object becomes a vessel for nostalgia, carrying familial lore and the stories of those who came before us. Lastly, the domestic environment appears as a sanctuary—a haven of solace and refuge in the face of adversity. It is within our homeplaces that we find comfort, support, and a sense of belonging. The vessels of this series not only serve as individual representations of experiences and people but also the embodiment of Appalachian culture through textiles and installations.

Chapter 2: Textiles

Our sense of self is deeply intertwined with the domestic sphere, where close-knit interactions within our families, homes, and daily routines shape the narratives of our lives. It’s within these familiar confines that we learn the beliefs, traditions, and values that define us as individuals and as members of a larger community. Moreover, it is where we negotiate the complexities of relationships, navigate through joys and sorrows, and forge our own paths forward. Objects and materials within this realm have the ability to transcend their physical composition, embodying narratives, memories, and emotions. It’s in our domestic environment that we can find inspiration for creative expression and reinterpretation. Women, in particular, contribute emotionally resonant work within this sphere, reflecting their heritage, values, and

personal experiences. Through their creations, women become commemorated, providing a glimpse into the historical and familial tapestry of womanhood. This act of preservation not only safeguards history but also preserves cherished familial memories. Materials within this domain hold significant emotional weight, and by delving into the origins of textiles and their constituent fibers, we can reconstruct their unique language. Through this exploration, identities are not only revealed but also forged anew, connecting individuals to their heritage in profound ways.

Textiles possess a unique capacity to evoke emotion, drawing upon its tactile qualities, visual appeal, and cultural significance. In *Emotional Textiles: An Introduction*, scholars of diverse backgrounds, including historians, museum professionals, and academics, examine the intersection of material culture and the history of emotions. Through meticulous research, they uncover the evolving emotional significance of objects, employing various methodologies to decipher their material language. By scrutinizing an object's history, provenance, textual references, personal emotional responses, and public reactions, scholars gain insights into its emotive properties.⁴ Artists are increasingly drawn to these inquiries, grappling with questions of lineage and identity. It can be a process of self-discovery and reinvention within the context of material culture. Lineage is far from a straightforward narrative that is filled with gaps that invite alternate interpretations and resonance. Sensitivity to the objects involved is paramount, requiring meticulous readings of artifacts, research into production methods, and comparisons across a spectrum of examples. This investigative process not only sheds light on the emotional responses elicited by objects but also into the creation and extraction of their meanings over time.

Artists seize upon these gaps as opportunities to not only question, but to challenge and reimagine the narratives that shape their identities. Within these spaces of ambiguity, abstraction

⁴ Alice Dolan and Sally Holloway, "Emotional Textiles: An Introduction."

emerges as a powerful tool, offering artists a way to explore connections in a deeper way. Rather than rendering their subjects in a straightforward manner, artists evoke aspects of life and history through the materials they employ and the symbols they choose to depict. Abstraction liberates artists and allows them to infuse their work with layers of meaning and symbolism. This approach invites viewers to engage with the work on multiple levels, prompting them to contemplate the broader themes and connections that lie beneath the surface. Abstraction serves as a bridge between the tangible and the intangible, offering artists a means of articulating the complexities of lineage and identity in a language that transcends the bounds of traditional representation. Through their abstract explorations, artists create new pathways of understanding and connection inviting viewers to join them on a journey of discovery and interpretation.

Andrea Packard, a notable artist, has incorporated themes of lineage and interconnectedness within her artistic practice. One of her compelling mixed media pieces, titled “Inheritance,” serves as a vivid exploration of the history of rug making. Through a blend of representation and abstraction, Packard weaves together strips of fabric, carpeting, paper, and yarn to evoke not only the rich tradition of rug making but also the complexities of personal experience and familial ties. In “Inheritance” and several of her other works, Packard’s choice of materials is deliberate, each element carrying its own significance and history. These materials serve as conduits through which viewers can engage with the artwork on a deeper level, drawing upon their own associations and connections to similar objects in their lives, such as quilts or textiles. What sets Packard’s work apart is her skillful use of abstraction and texture to convey the essence of history as a visual journey. Rather than providing a literal representation, she invites viewers to immerse themselves in the layers of meaning embedded within the artwork. In

doing so, Packard's art transcends mere representation, offering viewers a profound and transformative experience that resonates on both an intellectual and emotional level.

Louise Bourgeois, known for her sculptures and installations, explored many themes that encompassed the intricacies of the human experience. From reflections on selfhood and family dynamics to explorations of domesticity, childhood, gender, trauma, motherhood, and memory, Bourgeois's work serves as a testament to the complexity of life itself. Throughout her career, Bourgeois's artistic vision was shaped by the various movements that swept through the twentieth century. Influenced by surrealism, abstraction, feminism, and psychoanalytic theory, she deftly synthesized these diverse strands into a cohesive and deeply personal artistic language. Her forms and use of color were imbued with symbolic significance, offering viewers the chance to unravel their meanings. One of Bourgeois's most iconic works, "Pregnant Woman," epitomizes her ability to suffuse objects with layers of meaning and emotion. The sculpture—a headless, armless female torso, visibly pregnant—was crafted from pink terry cloth repurposed from the artist's own domestic linens. This choice of material not only lends the piece a tactile intimacy but also invites viewers to make a personal connection with both the artwork and its creator. Symbolically charged, "Pregnant Woman" evokes themes of strength (embodied in the spine), fertility (represented by the child in utero), and femininity and happiness (manifested through the pink terry cloth). Through this powerful synthesis of form and meaning, Bourgeois invited viewers to contemplate the complexities of the human condition.

By delving into the realm of textiles and weaving, I found a connection to my own experiences as a mother. The tactile nature of textiles allowed me to express the emotional depth of my journey, while the act of weaving became a meditative practice through which to explore and process my thoughts and feelings. Additionally, the use of textiles and weaving techniques allowed me to incorporate elements of tradition, heritage, and cultural symbolism into my work,

adding layers of depth and meaning to each piece. As an abstraction, my series of work does not have a literal rendering of a particular textile or medium. Rather it is a combination that builds up my sculptural forms.

Seen through the lens of domestic disarray, divorce, loss, and mental health struggles, clay becomes not just a medium but a mirror of these challenges. Clay has inherent qualities of durability and fragility that speaks to the nature of my familial unit, further representing motherhood in its various states. In addition to clay, glaze adds depth to the narrative. To root my pieces in the cultural context of Appalachia, I use earthy glaze combinations that are inspired by the Blue Ridge Mountains. Through crystalline and specialized glazes, bursts of chaos emerge, representing upheaval and change, while sparse, muted colors depict struggles and the permanence of scars.

With stoneware clay as my foundation, I create my pieces in three distinct styles: weaving clay bands exclusively, weaving textiles within the clay bands, and utilizing textiles for texture on clay. To begin, all the pieces are built upon my children's toy balls ranging in various sizes. Having an object from my children's collection of toys made this series special from the ground up. Rather than covering the whole ball, I only utilize half of it, to create a woven cradle as a means of support. To get the shape of my cradles, a slab of clay is cut to size. There are two distinct ways in which to do so, clay bands or organically cut circles. Before placing a slab of clay upon the toy ball, texture is applied. For clay bands, wooden modeling tools and metal ribs are used to create various lines. For circular slabs, crocheted doilies are used to leave an imprint.

For the first style, clay bands are exclusively woven together as they are laid down one by one. The ends of the clay are left to dangle in an ununiformed manner. The clay bands are tightly woven with no space in between and are representative of me, individually. My piece,

“Rebirth,” symbolizes a new chapter in my life, particularly from my mid to late twenties. The textured exterior of the piece reflects the complexities of life— its physical, mental, and emotional aspects. Within lies a brighter, lighter space, symbolizing progress and achievement. Throughout this journey, I’ve had to mend my own wounds, become resilient, and persevere. The tightly woven bands represent my commitment to holding myself together and being accountable, not just for my own life but for the lives of my children (fig. 1).

In the second style, the clay bands are laid down with distance in between the clay bands. It allows for additional textile materials to be woven through the spaces. Materials consist of raffia, jute cord, twine, twigs, yarn, and basketry reeds, which are representative of the resourcefulness that was instilled in me and the active pursuit to repair and persevere for the sake of my children. “Deceived” embodies the naivety and vulnerability of youth, symbolizing the experience of being deceived by life’s promises. It represents the journey of marrying and starting a family at a young age, putting personal aspirations on hold to prioritize marriage and motherhood (green glaze). Despite the commitment and sacrifices made, the piece reflects the eventual disillusionment as the marriage ends in divorce (crystalline bursts in the glaze). It portrays the struggle of trying to hold everything together amidst the challenges and uncertainties that arise (reeds, twine, and yarn). Through “Deceived,” I aim to convey the complexity of this experience, capturing the emotions of hope, disappointment, and resilience intertwined within the narrative (fig. 2).

Lastly, the third style only consists of the clay body. Remaining solid from the cut slab, texture is applied in two ways. Various styles of crocheted doilies from my family’s collection are rolled onto the clay, leaving its delicate imprint behind on the interior of the piece. The texture on the exterior is added with sponged slip. Rather than leaving the edge of the clay body

to its own device, it is pulled out by the delicacy of the fingers and water. This leaves behind a flowy edge that resembles a flower. There is not only a contrast in texture but also glaze. The interior of the pieces are glazed with personalized colors representing my children while the exterior glaze is representative of me. “Noah” is a piece that serves as a tribute to my firstborn son. Its design takes inspiration from the structure of a flower, symbolizing not only his youthful energy but also his resilience and growth. Within the piece, the interior is adorned with crocheted doilies, providing a textured surface that speaks to the nurturing environment of his upbringing and the stability he finds within it. The choice of orange glaze was personally selected by Noah himself, reflecting a color that holds significance for him. On the exterior, the piece represents my role as his mother. Its tactile texture, deliberately not smooth, symbolizes the ruggedness of life’s challenges that I’ve navigated alongside him. The choice of a dull glaze signifies the passage of time and maturity, contrasting with the vibrancy of youth represented by the interior. Through “Noah,” I seek to capture the intricate bond between mother and son, celebrating both his individual journey and our shared experiences of growth and resilience (fig. 3).

The intimate realm of the domestic sphere, alongside the insights of artists such as Andrea Packard and Louise Bourgeois, serves as a rich source of inspiration for my practice. Drawing from the everyday experiences within the home, I have explored themes of domesticity, personal identity, and family dynamics in this series of work. Andrea Packard’s emphasis on experimentation and interdisciplinary collaboration has informed my approach to creative expression. My materials have been deliberately chosen to evoke emotion and thoughts. Meanwhile, Louise Bourgeois’s exploration of memory, emotion, and the subconscious has inspired a deeper examination of my own psyche and experiences through sculpture and installation. Bourgeois’s use of domestic objects and symbols have also influenced my exploration of gender, identity, and the feminine experience. These influences have truly

enriched my creative process, contributing to the depth, complexity, and meaning of my artistic endeavors.

Chapter 3: Installation Art

Installation art offers a fascinating segue from textiles as it can reaffirm the significance of material culture. Rather than presenting objects and materials in isolation, it is contextualized within an encompassing environment from which it was derived. In contemporary art, artists extend this concept by bringing the environment or idea of place to spaces like galleries or museums, transforming not only the physical space but also the viewer's perception and experience. This immersive approach challenges viewers to engage with both the artwork and the environment in a multisensory way. Often installations are site-specific as there can be history, memories, and emotions attached to the location. The domestic sphere being a prominent location, these elements can be interacted with on a larger scope. Installation art serves as a lens through which cultural backgrounds and aspects of domestic life can be explored and understood. It becomes a platform for multifaceted experiences, relationships, and values of women within the domestic sphere.

Through the curation of objects and materials, artists can evoke the intricate web of emotions, traditions, and responsibilities that shape women's lives at home. Spatial arrangements within installations offer insight into the dynamics of relationships between family members or partners, capturing moments of intimacy, tension, or solidarity. Installations alongside artworks can convey the values and beliefs that underpin women's roles and identities within domestic settings, whether through the celebration of caregiving, the subversion of traditional gender norms, or the exploration of personal autonomy and empowerment. By engaging viewers in

participatory experiences and contextualizing women's experiences within broader social and historical contexts, installation art becomes a catalyst for dialogue, empathy, and advocacy. It amplifies the voices and experiences of women within the domestic sphere.

Feminist artist Judy Chicago is celebrated for her groundbreaking installations in the 1970s, which placed a spotlight on the roles, experiences, and contributions of women. Among her notable projects was "Womanhouse," featuring multiple site-specific installations within an abandoned mansion in Hollywood. Collaborating with fellow artist Miriam Schapiro, as well as students from their feminist art program and local female artists, Chicago spearheaded the transformation of the mansion into a showcase of feminine artistry. Each room was filled with installations, performances, sculptures, and other forms of art, collectively creating an immersive environment. These artists converged to dismantle stereotypes of womanhood and share their personal experiences, often repurposing materials from traditional women's crafts to reclaim and redefine feminine narratives. "Womanhouse" emerged as a vital space for feminist discourse and creativity, leaving an indelible mark on the feminist art movement and paving the way for subsequent explorations of gender, identity, and representation in contemporary art.

Faith Wilding, a Paraguayan-American feminist artist, was also a part of Chicago's "Womanhouse." Within this installation, she transformed women's craft into a powerful artistic medium in her own exhibition called "Crocheted Environment," also known as "Womb Room." This installation featured a womb-like structure composed of intricate crocheted patterns of yarn and cord, inviting viewers to step inside and experience the space firsthand. By immersing viewers in a web of crocheted forms, Wilding evoked sensations reminiscent of being enveloped within the walls of a woman's body, akin to the experience of being in utero. Through the use of crochet and the creation of this womb-like environment, Wilding subtly alluded to feminine connotations. She also emphasized the traditions of needlework associated with women's craft,

challenging male dominance often associated with sculpture. In doing so, she shed light on women's maternal, domestic, and communal roles in society, inviting contemplation on the interconnectedness of female experience and creativity.

My installation, "Weaving Motherhood," invites viewers into a transformed gallery space reminiscent of my own home. Upon entering, the overall ambiance immediately envelops them, hinting at the intricacies lying within. Initially, the sculptural vessels remain subtly concealed, drawing the viewer in to explore finer details. Before they can venture further, the viewer encounters a captivating display along the hallway titled "For the Generations" (fig. 4). A rustic wooden accent table and rug invites guests to pause and make themselves feel at home. It's a place for cherished keepsakes and conversations. Like any accent table in a country home, family photographs are an essential element. Positioned on the table's bottom rack are photographs spanning generations of women from my family, chosen specifically to honor their role in shaping my values.

At the heart of the table lies a crocheted doily, anchoring the display and serving as a focal point. Atop the doily rests a current family photo and a guestbook, inviting interaction and engagement. Guests can peruse my artist statement, gaining insight into my work, and contribute their own notes or signature to become part of the installation. Adding to its allure, handmade ceramic plates and baskets adorn the table alongside dedication letters to my family and a postcard from the Blue Ridge Mountains. Above the table, an array of photos captures pivotal moments in motherhood, from pregnancy to single motherhood and becoming a stepmother. Completing the display, canvas paintings created by each of my children personally add a touch of authenticity and intimacy. In its entirety, "For the Generations" serves as a tribute to my family past, present, and future.

After being welcomed and introduced into my familial space, viewers are naturally drawn to the center of the floor, where a diverse array of sculptural forms await their exploration. Each piece holds its own unique narrative, akin to wandering through different rooms of a house, unveiling the stories they hold within. Beneath the surface of each piece the viewer is greeted by a crocheted doily. The doily acts as a unifying element, providing a sense of cohesion and continuity amidst the diverse array of pieces in the installation. By grounding each piece upon it, the doily creates a visual and conceptual link, reinforcing the overarching theme of family and heritage that permeates my work.

As they navigate the space, viewers gradually make their way to the hallway at the end of the house, where individual representations of my children await. Each piece is dedicated to a specific child, distinguished by their personalized glaze colors. Embracing both aesthetic appeal and the ethos of resourcefulness rooted in our environment, barnwood frames crafted by my spouse encase photographs of our children, spanning from their earliest years to their present selves. Arranged in chronological order according to age, rather than the sequence in which they entered my life, these dedicational pieces stand as a testament to the passage of time and the growth of our family. Concluding the journey through our metaphorical home, the exhibition culminates with two final pieces and accompanying photographs of myself and my spouse. Here, the focus shifts to our relationship and our shared commitment to nurturing our family and imparting enduring values to future generations.

Following in the footsteps of Chicago and Wilding, my installation aims to foreground the experiences of women, particularly within the domestic realm. Their work has prompted my own introspection of what defines femininity, motherhood, and identity. Looking upon my own experiences as a woman, mother, and artist, my installation explores the complexities of domestic

life, inviting viewers to contemplate the roles, relationships, and values that shape women's lives at home. By including personal anecdotes, family photographs, and symbolic objects and materials, I have been able to create a visual and emotional diary of the many layers of female experience. The installation becomes a site of empowerment, celebrating the resilience, creativity, and agency of women.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Kate Fisher is an artist and mother whose aim is to foster connections with people through her artwork. Drawing inspiration from everyday objects found within the home, such as toys and tools, Fisher's creative process is intimately tied to the ever-changing landscape of her domestic space. In a podcast, titled "The Red Clay Rambler," Fisher shared her insights on navigating the realms of motherhood and artistry. She compared the early stages of motherhood to the process of firing a wood kiln, where there are constant shifts and a meticulous tracking of input and output, akin to caring for a newborn.⁵ Fisher elaborated on this analogy by highlighting the practice of observing and recording her child's preferences and reactions, much like tending to a kiln's fire.

During the discussion, Fisher was prompted to reflect on how she reintegrated into a routine after becoming a mother. She challenged the notion of returning to a routine, suggesting that her pre-motherhood routine had instead taken a sabbatical.⁶ By questioning the implication of "going back," Fisher underscored the undue pressure placed on women to revert to their pre-

⁵ Kate Fisher, "Motherhood, Making, and Endurance Sports."

⁶ Kate Fisher, "Motherhood, Making, and Endurance Sports."

motherhood selves, emphasizing the need for acknowledgment and acceptance of the transformative journey into motherhood. As a mother, she grappled with a sense of isolation to some extent. Given that ceramics is a male-dominated field, most of her mentors were men, which made it challenging to find understanding and validation for her experiences as a mother.

Recognizing the need for a supportive community, she took the initiative to establish one herself. Fisher founded the “Both Artist and Mother Project,” aiming to foster dialogue among those who share similar dual roles. Through this project, Fisher actively challenges the prevailing notion that motherhood must be compartmentalized from artistic pursuits to be taken seriously. Her efforts extend beyond mere conversation; she actively participated in exhibitions such as “Crowns,” alongside fellow female artists, where the focus centered on maternal experiences. Each artwork in the exhibition served as a poignant reflection of the transition from artist to artist-mother, capturing the complexities of joy and pain inherent in modern motherhood. Through these pieces, each artist conveyed their unique physical and emotional journey, shaping their roles and identities as both artists and mothers.

Andrea O’Reilly’s article in the “Journal of the Motherhood Initiative” sheds light on a novel feminist perspective known as “matricentric feminism.” This approach advocates for a mother-centered feminism, aiming to distinguish between the roles of mother and woman as separate entities. It underscores that mothers exist not solely as women but as individuals with distinct experiences and perspectives shaped by their maternal identity. O’Reilly’s intention in proposing matricentric feminism is not to diminish the significance of traditional feminist theory but rather to address a gap in acknowledging the needs and concerns of mothers within feminist discourse. This perspective seeks to elevate the experiences of mothers and integrate them as a

central component of feminist theory and political empowerment, recognizing that their challenges and perspectives extend beyond conventional notions of womanhood.

Matricentric feminism diverges from ideologies or political movements centered on maternalism, focusing instead on amplifying the voices and addressing the concerns of mothers within broader feminist frameworks. This form of feminism aims to elevate discussions surrounding mothers and mothering on a scholarly level, empowering mothers by confronting the patriarchal structures that oppress them within the institution of motherhood. Central to this approach is a call for research and activism grounded in the diverse experiences and perspectives of mothers themselves, rather than solely focusing on the child. By acknowledging the intersectionality of these identities, this feminist perspective seeks to shed light on the varied and complex realities faced by mothers across different social contexts. Matricentric feminism aims to establish maternal and motherhood studies as integral components of academic discourse, providing a platform for the rigorous examination of maternal experiences and the exploration of avenues for empowerment and social change.

“Weaving Motherhood” seeks to underline the experiences of Appalachian mothers who have endured the trials of domestic upheaval, divorce, loss, and mental health battles. Through immersive storytelling, the installation invites viewers to confront the complexities and resilience in my personal journey. It shines a spotlight on the intimate struggles and triumphs within the domestic sphere, offering a raw and honest portrayal of the challenges that I’ve faced. Speaking for myself and women alike, “Weaving Motherhood” advocates for the recognition and support within society. It empowers mothers to rediscover their identities and support their needs despite the challenges of trauma and hardship. Through its narrative of strength, the installation inspires viewers to seek policies and resources that uplift and empower mothers who have faced similar struggles. It is a beacon of hope and resilience, honoring women’s courage and tenacity in the

face of adversity, and deepening appreciation for their invaluable contributions within society. Furthermore, it leaves behind a legacy that resonates deeply with my family, children, and society at large. Within my family, the installation becomes a cherished testament to resilience, strength, and familial bonds. Through its portrayal of the highs and lows of motherhood and the celebration of generational values, it imparts a sense of pride and heritage that will endure for years to come. It is my hope that the strength woven within our narrative will serve as an inspiration for others to navigate life's challenges with courage.

Figures

Figure 1. Brandy Bembry, *Rebirth*, 2023, stoneware clay.



Figure 2. Brandy Bembry, *Deceived*, 2024, stoneware clay, glaze, reed, raffia, twine, yarn.



Figure 3. Brandy Bembry, *Noah*, 2024, stoneware clay, glaze



Figure 4. Brandy Bembry, *For the Generations*, 2024, mixed media

Bibliography

- “About the Appalachian Region.” Appalachian Regional Commission, March 7, 2024.
<https://www.arc.gov/about-the-appalachian-region/>.
- Ahrens, Kami. *The Foxfire Book of Appalachian Women: Stories of Landscape and Community in the Mountain South*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2023.
- Asgary, Sholeh. “Down the Line.” *ARTnews.com*. June 8, 2022. <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/interviews/down-the-line-lineage-roundtable-1234628137/>.
- Bishop, Claire. *Installation Art: A Critical History*. London: Tate Publishing, 2019.
- Bourgeois, Louise, Paulo Herkenhoff, Allan Schwartzman, and Robert Storr. *Louise Bourgeois*. London: Phaidon Press, 2007.
- Carter, Ben. “276: Kate Fisher on Motherhood, Making, and Endurance Sports.” *Tales of a Red Clay Rambler*, October 20, 2022.
<https://www.talesofaredclayrambler.com/episodes/276kate-fisher-on-motherhood-making-and-endurance-sports>.
- Chicago, Judy. *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist*. New York: Authors Choice, 2006.
- Conley, Summer, “Opinion: Appalachia is a Matriarchy.” *The Breeze*. February 24, 2021.
https://www.breezejmu.org/opinion/opinion-appalachia-is-a-matriarchy/article_e9d160b276d2-11eb-8a1d-7b060cd2e9d4.html.
- Crissman, James. “Family Type and Familism in Contemporary Appalachia.” *Journal of Rural Social Sciences*, Article 4 (1989). <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jrss/vol06/iss1/4>.
- Dolan, Alice and Sally Holloway. “Emotional Textiles: An Introduction.” *TEXTILE* 14, no. 2 (2016): 152–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759756.2016.1139369>.
- Finley, Jean Turner. *Rib Baskets*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd, 2012.
- Gipson, Ferren. *Women’s Work from Feminine Arts to Feminist Art*. London: Frances Lincoln, 2022.
- Harris, Jennifer, Pennina Barnett, Julia Bryan-Wilson, and Amy George. *Art Textiles*. Manchester: The Whitworth, 2015.

- Helton, Lonnie R., and Shirley M. Keller. "Appalachian Women: A Study of Resiliency Assets and Cultural Values." *Journal of Social Service Research* 36, no. 2 (February 17, 2010): 151–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488370903578124>.
- Huber, Marissa, and Heather Kirtland. *The Motherhood of Art*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2020.
- Irwin, John Rice. *Baskets and Basket Makers in Southern Appalachia*. Exton, PA: Schiffer Pub., 1982.
- Jones, Loyal, and Warren E. Brunner. *Appalachian Values*. Ashland, KY: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 1994.
- Marchevska, Elena, and Valerie Walkerdine. "The Maternal in Creative Work: Intergenerational Discussions on Motherhood and Art." *Routledge & CRC Press*, August 1, 2021. <https://www.routledge.com/The-Maternal-in-Creative-Work-Intergenerational-Discussions-on-Motherhood/Marchevska-Walkerdine/p/book/9781032082196>.
- O'Reilly, Andrea. *Matricentric Feminism*. Bradford, ON: The Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Development, 2019.
- O'Reilly, Andrea. "Matricentric Feminism: A Feminism for Mothers." *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement*. Accessed May 2, 2024. <https://jarm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jarm/article/view/40551>.
- O'Reilly, Andrea. *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, Practice*. Bradford, Ontario: Demeter Press, 2021.
- Pascoe Leahy, Carla. "Maternal Heritage: Remembering Mothering and Motherhood through Material Culture." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 27, no. 10 (February 28, 2021): 991–1010. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2021.1893792>.
- Patrick County Chamber. "The Family Tree." *Patrick County Magazine* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2024): 22-28.
- Prown, Jules David. "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method." *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no. 1 (April 1, 1982): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1086/496065>.
- Spring, Jenny Moussa. *Unexpected Art: Serendipitous Installations, Site-specific Works, and Surprising Interventions*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2015.
- Stein, Lynne. *Shedding the Shackles: Women's Empowerment Through Craft*. London, UK: Herbert Press, 2021.

Stephenson, Sue H. *Basketry of the Appalachian Mountains*. New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1986.

Stratton, Shannon R. *Faith Wilding's Fearful Symmetries*. Intellect (UK), 2018.

Tod, Osma Gallinger and Josephine Breen Del Deo. *Earth Basketry: Weaving Containers with Nature's Materials*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2017.