

# **BREACHING THE CONTRACT**

Breaking Free From the Emotional and Ideological Prison of Renaissance Masterpieces

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UCL  
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Research Degree in Fine Art  
2019

I, Leni Diner Dothan confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.  
Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has  
been indicated in the thesis.

*For Yali*

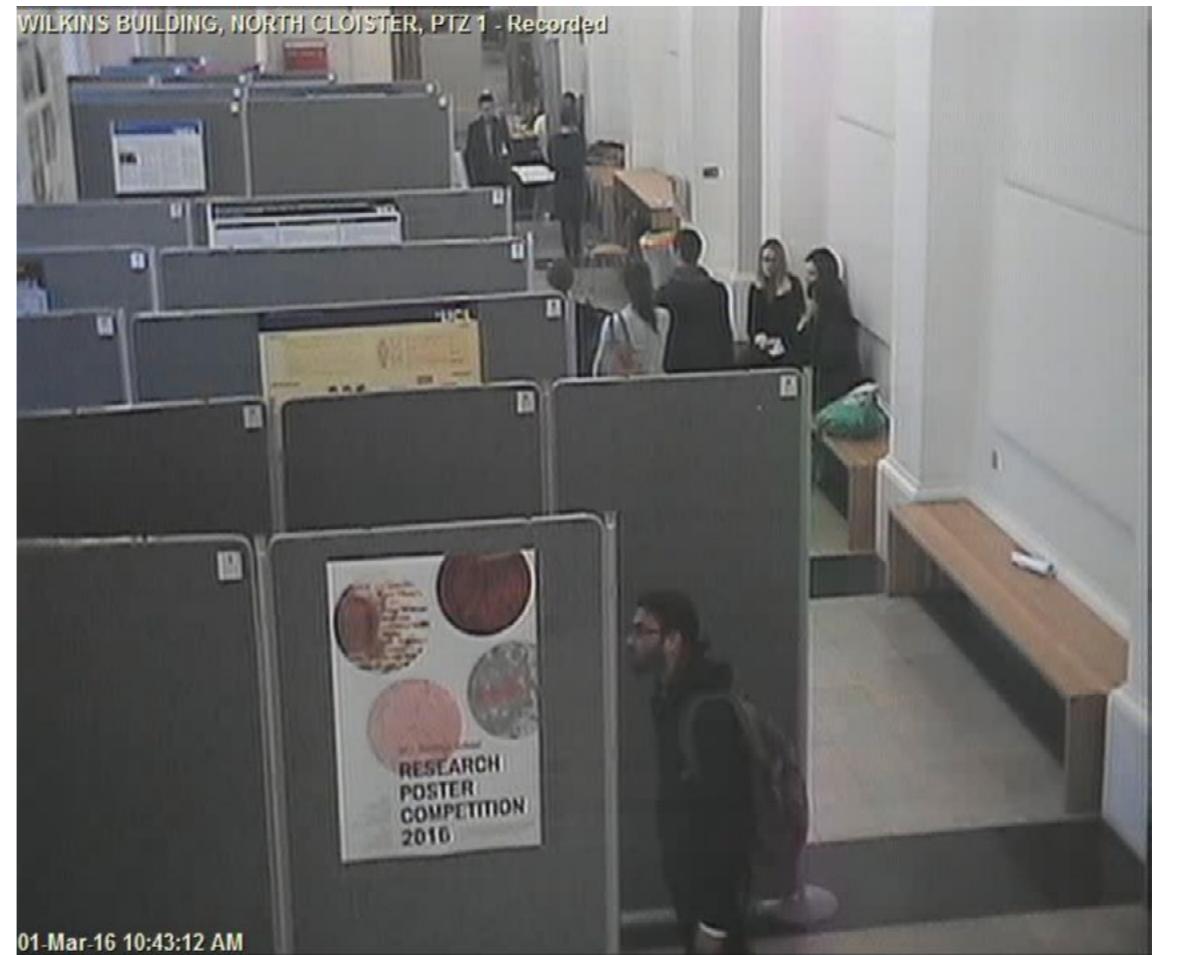
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## PROLOGUE

I would like to begin this volume with a story about a strange incident related to a poster I made for UCL's Research Poster competition in 2016. It happened on the day of the competition.



Competition's installation view, 2016, (fig. 1)

The aim of this competition was to allow researchers from across UCL to introduce their research to the entire UCL community in a poster. Below you can see how the competition looked. Each poster was numbered and had an individual wall.

The idea as stated in the competition's guidelines was '...to attract passers by, to stop and take an interest, make a good impression, enable the viewer to remember key details of your research, encourage viewers to contact you for more information about your research.'<sup>1</sup> I found this formula highly reminiscent of the rules of religious icon making that I encountered in my research on Christian iconography.

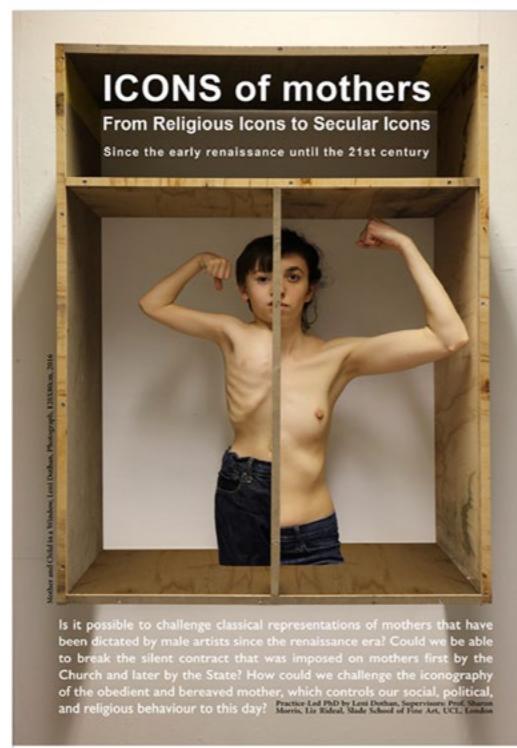
For this poster I used my work Mother and Child In a Window, that I had made earlier in 2016. A new being, half mother /half child, half male/ half female, make a gesture of strength. The research title was: 'ICONS OF MOTHERS: From Religious Icons To  
1 Doctorate School Website, UCL, 19.2.2019 <http://www.grad.ucl.ac.uk/comp/2018-2019/research-poster-competition/>



Winner

Leni Dothan, Slade School of Fine Art

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The Doctoral School page features the winning poster (fig. 2)



CCTV recording a man, looking at my poster, 10:43:12' (fig.3)

Secular Icons since the Early Renaissance until the 21st century'. At the bottom of the poster I placed the 3 main research questions:

"Is it possible to challenge classical representations of mothers that have been dictated by male artists since the Renaissance era? Could we be able to break the silent contract that was imposed on mothers (and I will add now, mothers and women) first by the Church and later by the State? How could we challenge the iconography of the obedient and bereaved mother, which controls our social, political, and religious behaviour to this day?"<sup>2</sup>

Two interesting things happened before and after the competition. The first was that the poster won first prize, and the second was a strange incident which happened 15 minutes before the start of the competition.

In the CCTV photos below, one can see a man looking at my poster between 10:43:12' to 10:43:41'. In a matter of 29 seconds, he processed what he saw, made a decision and stole/ took/ tore the poster down from the wall, folded it in two and left the campus. He did all of this in just 29 seconds.

This incident keeps haunting me. I have no clue as to the motivation for this person's decision and action. Did he like the poster so much that he could not resist his urge to have it for himself? Did this poster upset or offend him to the extent that he wanted to sabotage it?

Whatever brought this person to do what he did, this action instilled in me a deeper understanding of the power that images and more specifically icons have on their spectators. This power or impact, is almost immediate, in the case of my poster it took only 29 seconds for the attack to be executed. Seeing this attack on CCTV left me extremely hurt but also very curious, eager to further explore the impact of my works in the public sphere, to explore the crucial seconds from the moment one sees a new icon, to the moment one makes a decision influenced by what one has seen.

For The evolution of Icons as Visual Contracts see ('The Contract' p.28)



CCTV recording a man, leaving the campus with my poster in his hands 10:43:41' (fig. 4)

## **MOTHER AND CHILD IN A WINDOW**

*Mother and Child in a Window* is a site-specific installation commissioned by the Jewish Book Week in King's Place, London. A breeze blocks structure was fused with a duratran print carrying an image of my son and I posing and representing "strength", as one creature. Half-woman half-man, half-mother half-son. Here, I examine the creation of the perfect Renaissance mother-child relationship. I challenge the spectators to rethink classical masterpieces, moral codes and unchallenged conventions by reshaping, rebuilding and re-framing these age-long visual contracts. (See 'The Contract' p. 73)



Leni Dothan, *Mother and Child in a Window*, Mother, child, wooden structure, photographic image, flexibly size, 2016 (fig. 5)

Next page, detail, installation view, Jewish Book Week, King's Place, London, 2016 (fig. 6)



## MIDDLE AGES

If the work *Mother and Child in a Window* presented a frontal glimpse into the life of an unbeatable strong creature made out of mother and child, the narrative entirely changes when looking at them from behind. The mother in this work seems vulnerable. She is no longer the nurturing figure, she is now the one who needs the support of her child. The classical roles of Mother and Child are now being redefined. The child seems to be taller than the mother, he is not only physically taller, his maturity is visible in the way his arm covers his mother's shoulder in a gesture of reassurance. Even though they are roughly similar in proportions, the child can still be read as a child. Flesh to flesh, flesh to wood, this image seems almost monochromatic.

The darkness seen from their window is a mesh of dark times, future, past and present from the middle ages through to the present and into the future. My work Middle Ages also implies the middle point in between the mother and the child, their average, the place in which they both meet as equals. (See 'The Contract' p. 75)

Leni Dothan, *Middle Ages*, duratran print in a wooden structure, 190 x 70 x 35cm, mother, child, wooden structure.  
Installation view, Roaming ROOM, London, 2017 (fig. 7)

Next page, detail, Roaming ROOM, London, 2017 (fig. 8)





## CRUDE ASHES

In the circular space of Temple Church, I installed a video sculpture. Into the big concrete tube sculpture, I projected a mother and son silently and constantly revolving in a non-space. He is shown in profile, she is frontal. The palms of her hands are open waiting for, or fossilized from, the moment of potential sacrifice. The infinite movement of the two contains all the possible narratives and cancels them at the same time. The mother and the son are being captured in a liminal state in between death and life, death and resurrection.

At the foot of this iconic build-up, and, or, falling-apart human cross, five sculptures of homeless people lay on the floor. They are the margins of society; they are at the bottom of the hierarchy of sacrifice, half dead half alive, waiting for their own resurrection.

This installation is part of 14 exhibitions around London made by 14 different artists. Each exhibition investigates a different stop in Jesus's narrative. *Crude Ashes*, is the 14th stop, Jesus in the Tomb. My journey in this installation leads me to explore the 3 days and 3 nights of the liminal state of Jesus and his mother Mary, while he was in the tomb half dead and half alive before his resurrection.

The 3:00" minutes looped rear projection of the video, turns "with time" from one side of the installation and "against time" from the other side. The endless movement of the mother and son, together with the "dual time", create a 360 degree spectrum of possibilities in between life and death. The potential sacrifice of the child is not determinate like it is in the Pietà. This installation is part of my ongoing research of and debate with the Christian theme and iconography of the Pietà as a visual contract (See more in '*The Contract*' p. 34).

Leni Dothan, *Crude Ashes*, installation view,  
00:03' min. video in a concrete tube 230cm,  
Temple Church London, 2017 (fig. 9)

*Crude Ashes*, installation view, 00:03' min.  
video in a concrete tube 230cm, Temple Church  
London, 2017 (fig. 10)

*Crude Ashes*, installation view with a sculpture,  
Temple Church London, 2017 (fig. 11)







## THE 13<sup>th</sup>

### Visually Preaching For New Narratives

The 13<sup>th</sup> was an installation in St. Cyprian's Church in central London in 2016. For this installation I used 13 of the existing unique chairs of the church. Instead of people, I placed my new Icons into box-like frames on the chairs, creating in this way a human presence.

The works, reminiscent of Christian relics, are installed at the centre of the church and surrounded by the original Christian painted glass iconography. My works intrude onto the existing structure of the church so that a new discourse becomes possible at the physical and conceptual gap between the installation and the religious narratives. This act of placing my works in the context of the church itself reshuffles the cards and allows for new rules and interpretations.

In this documentation, I stand on the pulpit and visually preach the narrative of the Pietà as I understand and represent this through my work *Double*, 2016. In response to hundreds of years of fostering the mother's image as a predetermined professional mourner, I have created this work that propose an alternative to the iconic depiction of bereaved mothers. I decided not to accept the acceptance of the bereaved mother and offer mothers and parents, other narratives. For this exhibition, the life-sized three dimensional object that I built in 2015 for a parent and a child, became a framed photographic image, showed an asymmetrical heart, a wooden double coffin for an adult and a child embedded into a concrete wall. In a continuation of my earlier work *Nightmare Wall #001*, the mother dies together with her child. She cannot accept either his or her destiny.



Leni Dothan, *Nightmare Wall #001*

photograph, breeze blocks, cement, 200X120X20cm, 2014

(fig. 12)

Leni Dothan, visually preaching for new narratives, St. Cyprian's Church, 2017 (fig. 13)



The child is young. This double coffin functions as if it was a mark on a doorframe in a family home, a mark that counts months and years of growth. This work, which I consider to be an alternative Pietà, marks the moment of the death of an innocent young child. The structure becomes a replacement for dd/mm/yyyy, the date of death. This coffin appears to be a custom made structure, made to fit the size of a particular mother and child. However, this is an empty Pietà, it is a genderless Pietà, that is quietly waiting for parents who can not even bear the thought of sacrificing their children, not for God, not for the state, not for anyone.

After the 9/11's terror attacks in New York, Judith Butler asks "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives?" And, finally, "What makes for a grievable life?"<sup>1</sup> She argues that some "forms of grief become nationally recognized and amplified, whereas other losses become unthinkable and ungrievable".<sup>2</sup> She argues that some aspects of mourning are supported by nationalistic ideas and the state, while others sabotage and challenge the idea of nationalism. I continue this thought through art and create a civil Pietà, one that intends to form a new relationship between mothers, parents, and the state. (See David Grosman and his book *The End of the Land, The Contract* p. 85).

This work is part of my ongoing mission to discuss the grief of the bereaved mother and isolate it from the sometimes painfully cynical national lexicon, which uses the personal pain for nationalist and political matters. A lot had been written in the last two decades on this cynical usage of national trauma in the Post-Zionist discourse (for example (Shlomo Sand's "When and How the Jewish People Was Invented"). With my work I wish not to take a stand but to reflect and re-feel the authentic grief of a mother from any background, nation, and geographic place, as an attempt to reconcile political disagreements, contradicting interests and beliefs with the hope that more parents will rethink the sacrifice of our children in the current world.

Butler's goes on to write, "To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource of politics, is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself. The disorientation of grief - 'Who have I become?' or, indeed, 'What is left of me?' 'What is it in the Other that I have lost?' - posits the 'I' in the mode of unknowingness."<sup>3</sup> This empty civil Pietà attempts to answer Butler's questions by leaving a void in the shape of an asymmetrical heart in the solid space of this reality. (See more in '*The Contract*' p. 34).

Leni Dothan, *Double*, wooden structure in a concrete wall  
183 x 110 x 45cm, photographic image 2017 (fig. 14)

Next Page, *The 13<sup>th</sup>*, Installation view, St. Cyprian's Church, 2017 (fig. 15)

Pages 32-33, studio shoots, 2017 (fig. 16)

1 Butler Judith, *Precarious Life the Power of Mourning and Violence*, Verso, London and NY, 2006, p. XIV.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid; 30.







## **BIRTH & DEATH**

Birth & Death is a solo exhibition in Hå Gamle Prestegard Gallery, Norway, 2017. In the gallery space I created a huge structure within the existing architecture of the gallery; an installation intended to harbour my works which are all in reaction to what I refer to as 'Visual Contracts' (See The Contract p.12), painted and sculpted by male artists, as my research on religious iconography reveals how Renaissance works control and subjugate women even today.

In this Norwegian gallery I created a labyrinth in which spectators were led through my own version of the Via Dolorosa, my reaction to the story of this journey of life and death and the mother's role in it. For this installation I recreated icons that I made between 2011 and 2017. The physical shape of the installation reacted to the classical architecture of churches and homes and to the Visual Contracts, paintings and sculptures which adorned them.

The two non-white-cube spaces of the gallery, which were old wood and stone barn, characterised by low ceilings and 12 wooden pillars, led to a labyrinth-like installation where I added another 73 pillars to the main space. These pillars functioned as see-through walls, barriers, and a grid upon which the works were attached differently to the pillars. This approach further blurred the already blurred border between the different media; photography, sculpture, video and live performance, which I often tend to fuse within the individual works.

The walls of the main space, as a shell, are free from works, they are only there to define this free-standing installation. The installation imposes on the viewer a physical journey; instead of the natural linear architecture of the barn, the viewer is led by the see-through walls. These walls however, also allow for a multi-vision experience and the development of nonlinear narratives as the viewer is able to see several works simultaneously.

The installation was mostly created during the residency at the gallery's workshop prior to the installation of the exhibition and specifically for the gallery. All but 5 of the works were created before the PhD programme, in this chapter I will elaborate on those which I created from 2016 onwards. I will also discuss the earlier works but in relation to the context and the interrelationships between each work and the others. It is important to say that I use and reuse my works in different installations as if they were bricks with which I build different structures. Each installation is unique even though I reuse imagery accumulated over the years.

Outside the gallery on the stony beachfront I create a site-specific work called the Nordic Eve project which I worked on during the year, with three visits to the site, one of which was a 2-week residency at the gallery and the gallery's workshop.

A Test of print on marble, Hå Gamle Presegard, Norway,  
2017 (fig. 17)



## **Nordic Eve**

### **Prehistoric Myth About The First Woman on Earth Made in 2017**

*She was born in the Norwegian sea. As soon as her foot touched the land, she picked up a boulder and began building. She was the first woman on earth, she had no role models, no concepts or understanding of her role. She had no need or desire for a man, she did not know about the option of a masculine version of herself. Like all other animals, her nature was simple. She was gifted with the gift of building. This was the only difference between her and the rest of the animals, she knew how to choose the right stones and build. Although her limbs were thin and unproportionally longer than her body, she was quite strong; the Norwegian Sea made her tough, resilient and fearless.*

*Her being was captured by technology, a reflection of her's was enshrined in the boulder forever, telling us about her, the first woman on earth. Dark worried eyes were captured on the prehistoric rock.*

*The boulder she is holding is her baby. The boulder is the world. She doesn't know anything about motherhood or the world. She is an animal. Yet, she is better than other animals, she is a superior breed, she is the Nordic Eve, the first woman on earth, the great builder of all times.*

*For thousands of years she lived in the rocks harmoniously, she didn't know hunger, pain or loneliness. She positioned one stone against the huge rock and made a chair. Gradually she built a shelter, then a road, a village and a city. She was a builder and perfect in all aspects.*

*One day a grain of rock-dust penetrated her body. She felt unwell and fell asleep immediately. The grain grew in her, as if she was a mother of pearl and with time they became a living fossil. She changed, her body changed, her instincts changed. She was captured again by technology, heavy stone body, the rock merged with her stomach, she became a figurine.*

*She didn't want to become a stone figurine, if it was up to her, she was building her world forever. Not only did her world change, humankind changed. Her baby-boulder was pushed out of her body, they became two. She thought he was perfect. He thought she was the world. Two ideal primary objects.*

*As time passed he wanted from her and she made mistakes. A huge crack tore them and left them vulnerable, naked in front of each other, no longer ideal objects but two subjects facing imperfection, birth, death and everything in between.*

-Leni Dothan, *The Myth of the Nordic Eve*, 2018

Boulders of Nordic Eve, Hå,  
Norway, 2017 (fig.18,19 )



My work is influenced by my geographical location, I cannot ignore the context of my works. When I was first invited to visit the Hå, Norway in January 2017, it was freezing cold, -3 degrees. Hå is the windiest point in Norway. It is situated on the south-west coast of the Norwegian Sea. There are huge prehistoric boulders along this particular seashore, right in front of the gallery. This was our first face to face meeting after few months of digital dialogue. I arrived on Friday afternoon to Stavanger Airport where Kari Meek, the curator, was waiting for me for a 45 min drive to the gallery, with a stop at the local supermarket so I can buy food for the weekend; the gallery is in the middle of nowhere.

As I didn't know the place, I thought it would be good to have equipment with me in order to document the gallery space as these materials would assist my planning work back in London. I brought a tape measure, a camera, a tripod and a tiny portable projector.

They accommodated me at the lighthouse, which is also under the gallery's management and 30 minutes walk to the gallery along the seashore or 20 minutes on the narrow road. As we arrived at the gallery, we had a small welcome gathering with director Eva Wante, Kari and the technicians. Soon after that, everyone left for the weekend, not before they equipped me with a huge torch in case I wanted to go out after the sunset. I asked if there were bears around, they all laughed at me and told me that I would survive without answering my question. As it was out of season, I was all alone in one of the 5 rooms at the foot of the lighthouse. Afraid of the vacuum of the lack of people, the rough powerful Norwegian sea, and the bears that might come up looking for food, I fell asleep exhausted on the sofa surrounded by my equipment.

In the morning, happy to find myself alive and in one piece, I boiled some water for tea. While pouring the water into the mug, I noticed the steam playing with the light and air, moving, dancing like I have never seen steam before. Staring at this phenomena, I tried to understand how I had never seen steam so crystal-clear before. The only answer I could give myself was that the air must be cleaner here and therefore clearer in Norway. With this thought I left the lighthouse for a walk along the seashore towards the gallery.

When I arrived in London, after leaving my country, family, friends, and language, I felt that I was alone in the world, but I was surrounded by 8 million Londoners. When I was walking in the freezing cold, jumping from one boulder to another, and my phone had died from the cold, I felt a different intensity of being alone in the world.

This experience was very powerful, I felt as if I was in a Romantic painting by Friedrich, the tiny man who stands in front of infinite nature. I started shouting at the sea. My voice disappeared very quickly in the wind. I was fearful and grateful at the same time. I felt like the first woman on earth. I started to shout "Adam Adam Adam" hoping to find an Adam to take my fears away and to share this experience with. Am I programmed to want an Adam next to me? When I realised that I am completely alone, I placed the tripod in front of one of the huge boulders, I took my clothes off and looked around me. There was nothing but stones. Rounded, eggs-like stones. I turned on the self timer and lifted one of the stones, at that moment I was the only woman on earth. I felt the need to record this

woman. Not Friedrich's man who is standing in front of nature, but a woman standing as part of nature.



Caspar David Friedrich,  
*Mountaineer in a Misty Landscape*,  
oil, 95 cm x 75 cm, Kunsthalle  
Hamburg, 1818 (fig.19)

I had to stop my work when I couldn't feel my feet and fingers anymore. I quickly dressed, somehow managed to pack my equipment, and began walking. Every movement was painful and difficult, I was freezing and still far from the gallery. I started thinking of my son and that I might die in the rocks and no one will find me. That I might become a fossilized woman that archaeologists will find in hundreds of years time. Maybe they will be able to recreate the digital file from my camera, probably not. Maybe I will be found by the dog of one of the nearby farmers. The story will be covered in the news: "an artist found dead between the rocks in the freezing January cold". They will blur my face but my son will see his mother dead in the rocks.

As part of my exhibition *Birth & Death*, I created a site-specific work called *Nordic Eve*. This work is a new interpretation of the biblical story of Adam and Eve. *Nordic Eve* creates a new mythical narrative of an independent woman, needing no man, she is a builder, the mother of rocks. This final photo was taken in several stages; first I took a self portrait photograph with the boulder in the background, then I projected this photo at night on a different boulder, just outside the gallery, with a long exposure and photographed the projection. Later I experimented printing this final image on Italian Carrara marble with different types of polish using an Arizona printer to print onto the marble. Only when we found the right polish, were we able to print on the full scale marble, sized at 120cm x 180cm. We then leaned the marble against the prehistoric boulder outside the gallery space where I previously projected the image and photographed it.

*Nordic Eve* also symbolises a shift in my work. The contrast between the clean air of Hå and London's pollution, and the raw nature of Hå and the city's artefacts, confronted me with new concerns. A dialogue towards a collaboration with the Chemistry department of UCL developed after this experience in Norway.

Next page, *Nordic Eve* printed on marble as part of the landscape, Hå, 2017 (fig. 21).

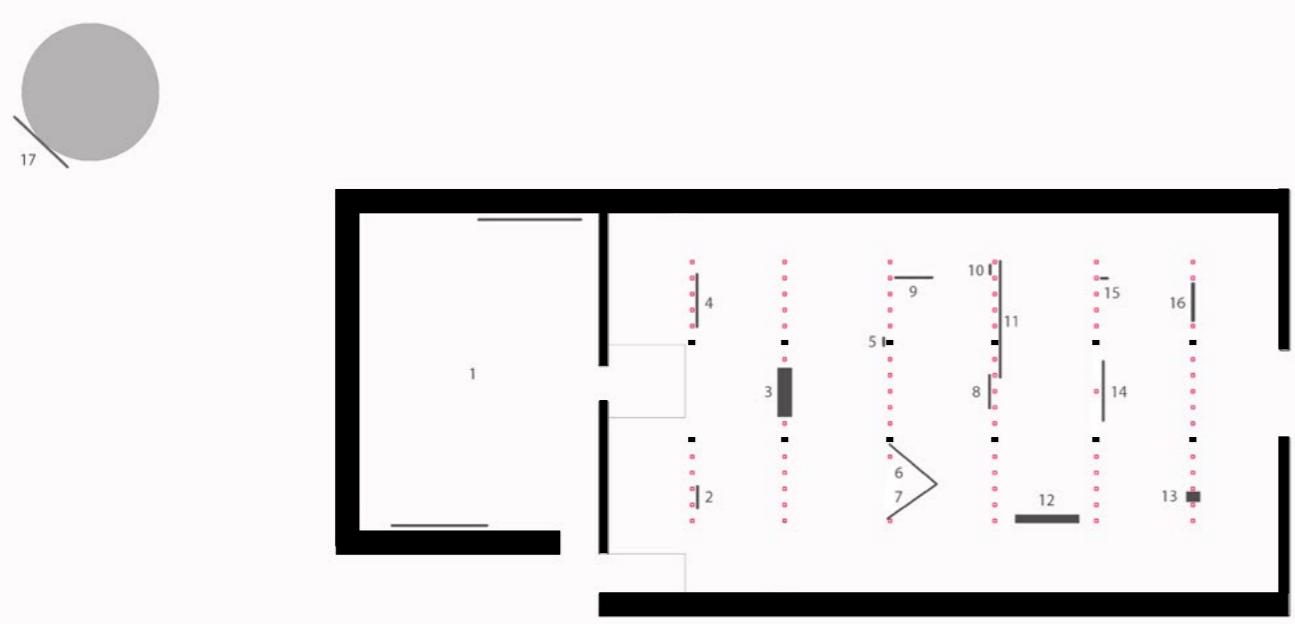
Pages 42-45, Leni Dothan, *Nordic Eve*, photographic image made out of several exposures. (fig. 22, 23)



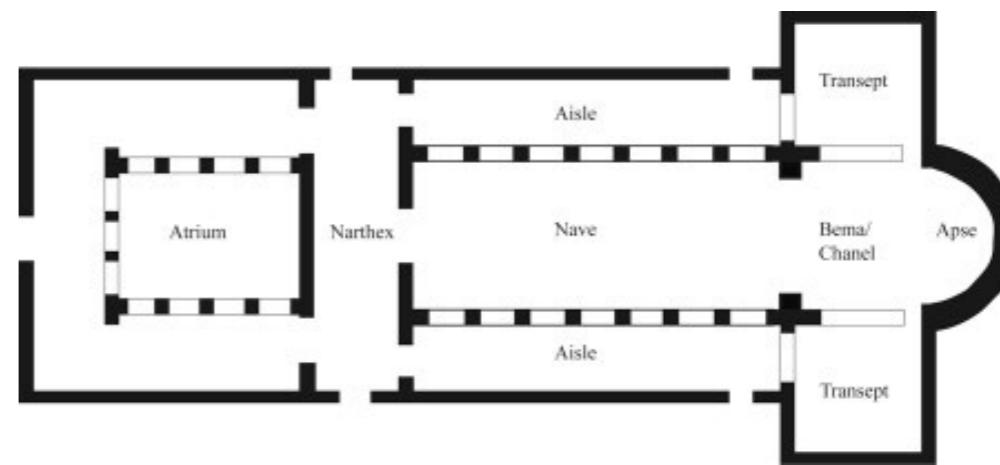




Exhibition Plan - Birth & Death (fig. 24)



Basilica - scheme (fig.24)



1. *Crude Ashes*
2. *Birth & Death*
3. *Double*
4. *Young Woman With Hearing Aid*
5. *Binded*
6. *Sleeping Madonna*
7. *Mine*
8. *Less*
9. *Mother and Child in a Window*
10. *Sight Specific*
11. *We Kissed and Then We Died*
12. *Jesus of the Jeans*
13. *Captured in Perfect Proportions*
14. *Jesus of the Jeans*
15. *Middle Ages (Mother and Child)*
16. *Hanged*
17. *Nordic Eve (outdoors)*

Here, side by side, a Basilica's scheme next to my exhibition plan. In my 'Atrium', the work *Crude Ashes* welcomes the viewer. Then, instead of the familiar linear space of the church, my labyrinth-like deconstructed place of worship. telling the story of a mother in between Birth and Death.

Pages 48-55, installation views, *Birth & Death*, Hå Gamle Prestegård, Norway, 2017 (fig. 26, 27, 28, 29)

10



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11



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I found an empty bench and sat on the side  
my better ear.

### Object of Research

*Jesus of the Jeans* was created in 2012, when we were still a family, a small Israeli family living in downtown Tel-Aviv in a neighborhood called Florentin, or in English - Florence. The work references Italian Renaissance art and the Christian theme of Crucifixion. For this work I built an object made of timber that I found on the street at the other side of the neighborhood and carried it back home, practicing my personal Via Dolorosa. I was the mother bearing and preparing the cross for the son. Then I measured my son and created little stairs, not too easy to climb on, but challenging ones, and a tiny altar for him to stand on. Standing in our bedroom, wearing only jeans, this family modelled a potential ultimate sacrifice in front of the camera, not for God but for the State. (See The Contract p.34, 54).

In 2017, for this exhibition, I placed the photo of *Jesus of the Jeans* from 2012 (150X100cm archival print in a wooden frame), next to a vertical box (220X110X50cm) that I had built to host viewers, families and individuals who wished to be photographed in a similar manner to the structure I created for my work back in 2012. This box or "set", which I also call an Object of Research, was an open invitation to participate in this artistic research exploring the effect of icons on viewers and their willingness to adopt new iconography. This 'Objects of Research' method became part of my practice.

The interior of the box was painted in deep blue, reminiscent of Giotto's blue in the Arena Chapel. In the centre of this life size "set", I rebuilt the same wooden object which I used in my work *Jesus of the Jeans*. I then asked viewers to come into the set and inhabit the it in whatever way that they chose.

The *Jesus of the Jeans* image and the Object of Research, were installed at an angle that allowed viewers to make a visual and conceptual connection between the two. It seemed like the icon of *Jesus of the Jeans*, was imprinted in them, as can be seen in the results. Like in the traditional role of Christian iconography educating the believers to certain moral codes, the viewers acted almost naturally when they saw the set empty and waiting for them; they immediately and willingly fitted themselves to the set, my object of research, in front of my camera. I had no specific guidelines, each family used the object as they understood it. I also asked each one of them to fill and sign a document saying that they allowed me to use their photo in my future work and that I would send them one edition of the photo that they appear



Leni Dothan, *Jesus of the Jeans*, father, child, mother, wooden structure, photographic image, 2012 (fig 30)

in. By accepting this offer, they become propagators of this experimental rendition of the story of the Crucifixion. Have they thought about the meaning of the Icon of which they are now part of? Have they questioned me as an authority? Are they worshipers of a new secular god shaped in their image? I'm not sure. But I do know that from now on, the icon of *Jesus of the Jeans*, is spreading around the world in many variations, thanks to these viewers who are the new carriers of this new icon.



Object of Research; Family 1, grandmother, mother and a daughter, 2017 (fig. 31)



Object of Research; *Family 2*, mother and a daughter, 2017 (fig. 32)



Object of Research; *Family 3*, mother and a daughter, 2017 (fig. 33)

### Less

This is an image that I first made in 2015 of the figure of a woman standing on a podium like a statue. One hand holds a decapitated head while her other hand is missing; only traces remain. Although there is no sword, the viewer completes the familiar image of Judith beheading Holofernes (See '*The Contract*' p. 63). This image has been embedded in the western collective imaginary through endless paintings and sculptures that I have seen throughout history in museums and art books.

In *Less*, the act of beheading is fused with images of classical sculptures which were not beheaded at the time of their creation, but became beheaded over time. (See '*The Contract*' p. 71) In the work, two types of cuts can be noticed. One is sharp and clean as if the man's head were decapitated with a sharp instrument, while the woman's head and arms seem as if they decayed over time.

The nudity in this work is taken from the classical world of ancient Greeks and Romans, who adored the beauty of both male and female nudes. In *Less*, the viewer can't find the seductive act common to the depiction of Judith and Holofernes in paintings from the Renaissance, such as the Artemisia Gentileschi's painting (See '*The Contract*' p. 64). In her painting, we can see Judith's bosom almost bursting from her dress.

The fact that the sword is absent in *Less*, points to the body and bodilyness as the main subject matter. It is no longer the act of beheading that is the core for understanding male and female relationships. It is not a reversal of roles. It's a new lose-lose situation with no loser or winner hierarchy and therefore no hierarchy between the sexes. This is a state of painful equality. Unlike Renaissance art depictions, the position of the decapitated head is not frontal to the viewer and the body itself is missing, the sexual identity is not certain. For a moment, despite the two different styles of cutting, it can be viewed as if the woman has beheaded herself. The blood raises some questions, who is bleeding? Is it feminine menstrual blood or is the decapitated head that bleeds? A tension builds up between the fresh menstrual blood, temporary and renewing, and the decaying woman's body resonating with a lifeless marble sculpture.

In this new version of the work, made for this exhibition, the figures are cut-out of their surroundings and mounted onto a life-sized custom-made wooden frame. The gap, which is the thickness of the photographic paper, is filled with a filling material which is often used to fill holes in walls. This very fine sculptural gesture turns the figures into an object in the space, reminiscent of coloured, oozing blood, life-like sculptures from the middle ages, and onwards. This brutality, recognized in the iconography of Judith, pushes me to further research the need for human kind to depict moments of horror, blood, cruelty and suffering.

Leni Dothan, detail, *Less*, headless woman, bodiless man, cut-out photograph mounted on wood and filler, 210 x 70 x 8cm, image, 2015, new version, 2017 (fig. 34)



Susan Sontag wrote about the “Iconography of suffering”<sup>1</sup> in the context of war, conflict and pain using the medium of photography. She ascribes the term ‘Ultra Familiar’<sup>2</sup> to photographs of war, horror, ruins and pain. These kinds of photographs visualise the accumulated suffering of wars. The pain of the ‘other’ becomes visual and accessible to everybody, almost as if they were present in the battlefield.

Unlike the Renaissance idea of “painting as a window to reality”, photographs are often perceived as “real” or as “evidence” - documentations of reality. Despite the fact that photography and photographs represent the highly subjective point of view of the individual behind the camera, the medium itself can sometimes confuse the viewers into considering the photograph as a representation of real life. Paintings will always be perceived as subjective, the painter makes a painting while the photographer takes a photograph. “But the photographic image (...) cannot be simply a transparency of something that happened. It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude.”<sup>3</sup>

In my work, I use photography to tell stories. When I perform in front of the camera, the documentary aspect of photography reveals a personal and “real” narrative alongside the historical reference. As Sontag said, “the camera and the photographer captured ‘real’ life. They witnessed and documented and in doing so, they verified the existence of events such as wars and personal life.”<sup>4</sup> The medium of photography can be deceiving as it is often confused with reality itself. For example, when I held a knife towards my son in the work *Mine*, 2012, referencing the biblical narrative of the Binding of Isaac, the work was not read as art, but rather as a real abusive act towards my child. The same happens here when this violent act of beheading is depicted in a photograph. I was often asked about how I made the work *Less*, whether this is a real head that the woman is holding, or how did she lose her head. Even though the full image has surreal characteristics, blood, missing limbs and body parts, the viewer perceives it as real. I believe this is the medium of photography that influences the reading of the image as a documentation of reality rather than art.

Sontag writes about wars, pain and death through the medium of photography, a medium that deals only with the past, with the “death of the subject matter” which is captured on the negative at a specific moment. As a woman, I want to identify with the strength Judith represents. I want to shed temptation and just be strong. In many Renaissance paintings Judith is depicted as if she is disconnected from the violent act of beheading. This gap represents a visual contract, in which it is almost impossible for a woman to act in a “man’s” manner. However, I wish to go beyond the discourse of male and female roles, I do not wish to define what the roles of a woman or a man are; in order to break these definitions I need both woman and man to be on the losing side. Therefore, *Less*, is a departure point for a new equality between the sexes.



Leni Dothan, installation view, *Less*, headless woman, bodiless man, cut-out photograph mounted on wood and filler, 210x70x8cm, image, 2015, new version, 2017 (fig. 35)

1 Sontag Susan, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Penguin Books, 2004, p.36.

2 Ibid; 21.

3 Ibid; 42.

4 Ibid; 41.

Next page, installation view, *Less, Mother and Child in a Window, Hanged, Binded*, 2017 (fig. 36)



### Hanged

Going back to the main space of the exhibition *Birth & Death* and its multi-narrative nature, the work *Less* is in a constant dialogue with other works. At the rear of the space, the work *Hanged*, 2015 was also remade for the exhibition. In this version, which was printed in London on two different films, one printed in black and white, and the other in colour, I 'crucified' the prints in between two pieces of timber which I found on the seashore when I walked from the lighthouse to the gallery during the residency. Later I 'crucified' the whole work again on the wooden pillars of the installation.

The cross is a repeating motif in this work. The wooden T-shaped structure, supported by a ladder, is holding the scene of a beheaded male and an upside down hanged woman, who is held by the man. The male, partly naked, reveals his muscular and strong body with the physical effort of holding the woman in this complicated position.

Ladders were often depicted in the Deposition of the Cross showing the act of taking Christ down from the cross. Who is the victim here? How did the man and the woman get into this situation? Did he climb up on the ladder, while taking his role as the "strong" person? Did she climb after him and take the position of the "dependent" person? And why did they do it? It all remains unclear. These questions are the issue in my work. They intend to shake the dogma of victim and aggressor.

Resonating with Christian Crucifixion, the answers to the questions of who is the victim, or who is being sacrificed, is ambiguous. Usually in the artistic Christian depiction of the Crucifixion, Jesus seems to be either dead or about to die, alone on his own cross. He doesn't have a dialogue with the wooden structure of the cross. How could he have? The cross is a functional, still structure. In the work *Hanged*, I attempted to create two structures, the wooden structure and the human structure. The man and the woman are sharing an act on the wooden structure. The unclear human structure can either be interpreted as a power dominating relationship or as a trust-based relationship.

In this work, again the male is beheaded, however, he is not beheaded by someone but by a crop of the frame. As a result of this decision he functions as "male" only. He is not identified as a specific person, he is a "generic" male, an "ideal" one. The woman loses her identity because of her unnatural position and because of her swollen face, caused by the flow of blood down into her head. However, together, they tell a private story alongside the iconographical narrative of the Crucifixion.



Fra Angelico, Deposition of Christ, 176x185cm, tempera on panel, 1432-34, National museum of San Marco, Florence (fig. 37)

Leni Dothan, *Hanged*, installation view, woman, man, wooden structure, 2017 (fig. 38)



### **Young Woman With Hearing Aid**

The artworks I make strive not to create “perfect” or “imperfect” Icons, they strive to create a new dialogue with the Renaissance, a time when these values were not at the centre of the discussion. Instead, a new archetype of relationship is being formed in a non-hierarchical order. Male and female are being challenged and confronted with the two opposite conventions of “perfection” and “imperfection”, serving as a suggestion to discuss and question old models and beliefs.

My work, *Young Woman with Hearing Aid* from 2016, investigates the boundaries of what is perceived as perfect or imperfect beauty. This photograph of a young woman seen from the back, reminiscent of ‘classical sculpture’, reveals the young woman’s hearing aid as a natural organ of her body or perhaps an ornament.

This work strives to create another ideal or model for female beauty, an alternative to the classical “perfect” one. Wishing to visually challenge the concept of perfections, I use the shape of a classical sculpture in order to plant this image of a new kind of an “ideal woman” back into the past of art history. This act subliminally fuses the idea of imperfection together with ideal classical beauty, while positioning them together on the same pedestal. (See *The Contract* p.78 and the work of Marc Quinn, *Mother and Child*, 2008)

This is also a self-portrait that reveals to the viewers, for the first time, the fact that I am hard of hearing and that I use hearing aids in both ears. For some years now I have been searching for my own model of beauty in Renaissance icons. Having realized that back in the classical world of beauty I could not find what I’m looking for, I decided to create a generic new beauty model. Not only for myself but for any woman who does not fit the perfect-in-every-way-woman, which dominated Renaissance art and dominates the way women look and are expected to behave today. (See ‘*The Contract*’ p. 71)

Leni Dothan, *Young Woman With Hearing Aid*, installation view, woman, hearing aid, archival paper in a steel frame 2017 (fig. 39)

Next page, Leni Dothan, installation view, *Young Woman With Hearing Aid*, Double, Crude Ashes, 2017 (fig. 40)





### We Kissed and Then We Died

*We Kissed and Then We Died*, 2015, subtitles seven stories that I wrote either ending in “and then we kissed” or, “and then we died” told in Hebrew in my manipulated voice often used in Israel to protect women at risk of domestic violence while being interviewed.

*We Kissed and Then We Died* touches two extreme and intimate moments of life and death, which are the core of the entire exhibition. With this work, I create icons by using text, each story offers a viewer / listener an opportunity to translate my text-based icons into one’s own visual image. This video was projected on two narrow wooden pieces screwed to the lower part of the pillars as floating subtitles in this installation’s three-dimensional world. The short stories move in between fantasies and nightmares and constantly intersect with the other works in the installation, shading light on the reading of the other work in the context of these two extreme poles of life and death. Having these overlapped narratives makes the subtitle effect dual; first, the act of translation from one unfamiliar language to another, and at the same time this work becomes a subtitle for the entire exhibition. The viewer is only experiencing this duality once they wear the headphones and hear the heavy metallic, inhuman voice telling these very personal horrific, beautiful and private moments.

*I drank Camomile tea in the studio. Surprisingly, it was pretty sweet. I walked between the studios, on the upper floor someone sat and drank Cola from a can while working on the computer. He placed the Coke on the table, I saw his footprints marking the can. I knew the Coke was cold. I sat on his lap and then we kissed.*

*We went down on the Oxford street escalator. Many people were there. It's quite common during rush hour. Everyone stood in the queue, crowded in the underground tunnel. No one pushed or trodded on us. Before I understood what happened a heatwave burned us, and then we died.*

*They brought me his body, it was still warm. I kissed him and then we died.*

*We were at the beach, the water was half clear. A black plastic bag clung itself to me. I turned into half human half plastic bag. And then we kissed.*

*I crossed the road toward the park, I found an empty bench and sat on the side of my better ear. I looked at the desolate park, just before I began my day. I took out my Iphone, and added another 7 tasks to my ToDo App. I felt someone approaching. “Do you have a lighter?” “No, but maybe we'll kiss before you'll find one” and then we kissed. We were sitting at home. Shelling from all over. The house trembled and we trembled with it. Planes above us, beneath at the street moments of hysterical tumult and then stillness of death. We held each other tightly, became one, a living fossil. We kissed and then we died.*

*We kissed and then died, so we kissed and died.*

*We spent the afternoon at the minefield near our home. In between the high weed there were plants with thin and long stalks. He ate Hummus with Pita bread, took off his shoes and disappeared in the thicket high weed. I sat on a little flowered pique blanket that I once sewed for him and ate President cheese with berries. It was a strange sirocco. Out of nowhere he jumped over me. I tickled him and he asked me to crawl with him in the thicket. We looked for spiders and bugs and then we died.*

Leni Dothan, *We Kissed and Then We Died*,  
installation View, text 2015, installation, 2017 (fig. 41)



## ***Sleeping Madonna | Mine***

### **Loss of control versus taking responsibility**

The *Sleeping Madonna*, 2011, and *Mine*, 2012, were created a year apart, both depicting a very private moment responding to two different Visual Contracts: the *Madonna and Child*, and the biblical story of the *Binding of Isaac*. *Sleeping Madonna* is an earlier work confronting the Mother - Child contract (See 'The Contract' p. 64, p. 48).

For the exhibition *Birth & Death*, I built a triangular space which allowed for an individual viewer to experience the two videos as a diptych. First, I will introduce the works individually and later I will elaborate about the meaning of the two works as a singular, contradicting unit. Both videos are looped, and by concept the loop is essential. The loop becomes a central method in my work and it has a dual meaning.

The first meaning deals with the physicality of the loop. It is created by using video, a durational-based medium, which runs short sequences in a loop. The loop highlights physical and emotional acts that were once hidden or trapped inside still images.

In Renaissance paintings, the *Madonna and Child* are poised forever in a still "perfection". In my video installation *Sleeping Madonna*, I created a sequence that expands on the perfect, classical still moment. This sequence allows for both the perfect and imperfect to coexist. Bergson writes about the duality of duration and space through the prism of concepts. "Concepts, (...) generally go together in couples and represent two contraries. There is hardly any concrete reality which cannot be observed from two opposing standpoints, which cannot consequently be subsumed under two antagonistic concepts."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This duality does not exist in Renaissance paintings, where we find one dimensional representations of ideas and concepts, ideologies that must not be observed from different points of view.

The second meaning of the loop deals with the mythical notion of the loop. Here I adopt and interpret mythical, cyclical narratives pertaining to the loop. In his book *The Myth of the Eternal Return*<sup>2</sup> Mircea Eliade distinguished between two different "times". The "Profane time" creates a linear known history, while the "Sacred time" is cyclical. The cyclical time of myth creates a nonlinear history, a loop, which tells a myth again and again. He expands this idea saying "one re-lives the myth in the cyclical time as if it was the first time".<sup>3</sup> Joseph Campbell<sup>4</sup> also traces the journey of mythological heroes (Osiris, Prometheus, Buddha, Moses, Mohammed and Jesus) showing how all those heroes are actually the same one wearing different faces. He calls this phenomenon "Monomyth" and demonstrates it pointing at the cyclical journey which all the heroes partook. This cyclical journey is comprised of three stages: Departure - Initiation - Return.

1 Bergson Henri, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Macmillan and Co., London, 1913, p. 34.

2 Eliade Mircea, *Myth of the eternal return : cosmos and history*, Princeton University Press, Oxford, 2005.

3 Ibid.

4 Campbell Joseph, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Princeton University Press 2nd ed. Princeton, 1968.

The tension between the mythical loop and the "now", allows for new political and social myths to exist within the mythical loop<sup>5</sup>.

5 Thinking of history and dealing with history today, ideas such as 'Parallel Universe', 'Parallel Time', 'Alternative History', 'What If', 'Sacred Time', 'Speculative reality' which already exist in the discourse of time and history, compel me to take a clear stand and clarify my position regarding the concepts of 'time' and 'history'. The new approaches to 'time and history', and 'classical history', are used as mapping tools for events and narratives that have some kind of reference to time. 'Classical History' will also refer to patriarchal history, history that was written by men for men. The Feminist movement, feminist historians, feminist art historians and feminist artists such as Griselda Pollock, Rozsika Parker, Linda Nochlin and Judy Chicago of the 70's, asked to distinguish between HISTORY and HERSTORY - FEMINIST HISTORY.

These feminists identified the lack of women's voices in the patriarchal timeline and discourse of history and art history. By using feminist practice they developed different methods to fight this injustice, one of the methods used archaeology not only as metaphor but also as an act which provided evidence and knowledge (education) of female narratives in history (Visibly Female FEMINISM AND ART: AN ANTHOLOGY, Edited and introduced by Hilary Robinson, Camden Press Ltd, London, 1987, p. 172, p. 200-201). They used archaeology to extract findings and evidence from history that proved and shed light upon the existence of female narratives and voices on the historical timeline.

Judy Chicago, in her work *The Dinner Party*, used excavation as a method. She saw the "educational importance of women learning their history so they could take charge of their future. (Ibid; 96) In this installation, she pulled forgotten female characters out of history and sat them together for a dinner party. Chicago follows the logic of Griselda Pollock and creates a feminist's timeline; this was her way of creating an alternative to well-known patriarchal history.



*Sleeping Madonna*,  
Mother, child, drawing  
on wall, video in loop  
02:46', 2011 (fig. 42)



*Mine*, Mother, child,  
knife, video in loop  
00:23', 2012 (fig. 43)

In the 2:46' video, a young mother breastfeeds her baby until they both fall asleep. Behind the two figures is a drawing of an arch. The almost still act of breastfeeding gives the video the qualities of a painting or a still photograph. In this video piece, the iconic mother Mary is placed in contrast with a real-life mother. She is weak and tired, unable to live up to her own myth. In Renaissance paintings, Mary's traditional red dress symbolizes the future, her son's blood and death, while a blue cloth symbolizes the church. *Sleeping Madonna*, made in the secular culture of Israel, is not part of the Christian religion or narrative. However, she sticks to the red dress, as she is still bound by a contract with the State. A contract in which she is being asked to potentially sacrifice her son for the sake of the country. This mother falls asleep, exhausted from her new role as a young mother and her part in this ancient, long lasting contract with the state.

The video *Mine* responds to the Visual Contract of Sacrifice (can be found in 'The Contract', p. 54). The biblical story known as the '*Binding of Isaac*', represents the ultimate sacrifice for God. Abraham is being asked to sacrifice his son in order to prove his total devotion, trust and belief in God. Abraham takes Isaac and nearly sacrifices him, however, at the last minute, an angel appears and prevents this act from happening. Unlike the Pietà, the sacrificer in this story is the father.

I have decided to respond to this theme from the female's point of view. In the video *Mine*, the mother holds a knife to her infant son. The mother is absent from the biblical scene, she has no "say" in this ritual or decision. In classical paintings such as Caravaggio's, Abraham is always in a superior position. He is strong, he grabs Isaac from the back. They are never eye to eye. Isaac is saved by a third force, the angel. The struggle takes place outside, in nature. In this work, the mother and child are looking eye to eye. This is a struggle between equals. There are no angels or miracles. The mythological child is always passive. This child takes a stand. He wants the knife for himself. They are not in nature. They hear no Godly voices. They compete with reality in their family bedroom.

In this exhibition, I place both videos together, as a diptych; on the left, the *Sleeping Madonna*, cannot control her physical need to sleep while on the right side, *Mine*, on the border of losing her sanity, eventually, she takes responsibility for her actions, saving both her son and herself.

I grew up with the idea that motherhood should be natural to me as I am a woman. The idea of a mother's love as an absolute and unquestionable emotion, brought shame, anxiety and depression when I found out that I faced a range of emotions, some of them unpleasant, unwanted, unacceptable in my mind. These emotions were not part of the 'motherhood lexicon' which I inherited from society, especially, but not only, in Israel, where the act of reproduction is part of a national effort<sup>6</sup>.

The boundaries were blurred between why I wanted to become a mother as an individual and why the way Israeli societal pressure encouraged me to become a mother, as children in Israel are seen as the promise and the proof for overcoming the challenges that the Jews had faced throughout history. There was another factor in this very private decision which I could articulate only some years later. It was the history of

6 It is worth mentioning that in the decade since I became young mother, postnatal depression, mixed emotions, and the difficulties of being a mother or a parent had become more discussed and acknowledged by the Israeli society.

our tiny family, when only few have survived. My ancestors' call was there, perhaps as part of my genetics as I didn't get to know most of my family who were murdered by the Nazis.

Hovering above all, were the beautiful masterpieces of the masters which visually reinforced what I had learned that motherhood was meant to be (See 'The Contract' p. 73). Through this diptych I ask what is natural in motherhood? And how can I depict motherhood as I feel it; extreme, polarised, complex, powerful and beautiful.

Rozsika Parker writes and defines this state of mixed emotions which is so familiar, however undiscussed, in what concerns motherhood - she calls it the "Maternal Ambivalence": "Ambivalence is emotionally difficult to believe in even if, intellectually many people recognise its inevitability. Accepting that hatred, resentment and hostility are unavoidable components of the full range of feelings for a child throws doubt, as I've said, on the reality of a mother's capacity for love in both her own and other's eyes"<sup>7</sup>.

She then elaborates on the concept of 'Natural', what society expects mothers to be. "The 'natural' is unnaturally associated with mother love, not mother hate, so ambivalence will not be part of 'natural' mothering at all"<sup>8</sup>. In the work *Sleeping Madonna* the mother loses control and she falls asleep while breastfeeding her baby. To me it was almost impossible to stay awake while breastfeeding my son, and the guilt I had every time I fell asleep, was unbearable. Falling asleep was a proof of not being a devoted mother, of not loving my son enough, of the abandonment of my baby or simply being selfish. Being the first to become a mother among my friends, I looked for other mothers in the books of my favourite era, Renaissance art, but I couldn't find any depiction of a sleeping Mary. Page after page, Mary after Mary, they were all ideal and perfect. Every Mary reflected to me how far I was from my role, I felt lost and thought myself a complete failure as a mother. This led to depression followed by two and a half years of psychological therapy.

The other half of the diptych is the work *Mine* made in 2012, a year after I began the therapy. This diptych is an opportunity to discuss my two approaches to making, the symbolic and the private, or the subjective - in this context often known as "maternal subjectivity". In her book *Maternal Encounter*<sup>9</sup>, Lisa Baraitser defines this term through the work of different theorists. 'Maternal subjectivity is a term used to refer to the ways "fantasy, meaning, biography and rational dynamics' inform how much woman takes up a position in relation to a variety of discourses about mothering (Featherstone 1997;7), acknowledging not only what we bring to mothering from within and without, but also how the relational dynamics of mothering itself has transformational potential in terms of both the self and the social fabric."<sup>10</sup>

Next page, installation view,  
2017 (fig. 44)

7 Parker Rozsika, *Torn In Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence*, Virago Press, London, 2005, p. 57.

8 Ibid; 69.

9 Baraitser Lisa, *Maternal Encounters The Ethics of Interruption*, Routhledge, Oxon, NY and Canada, 2009.

10 Ibid; 19.



## PRIVATE TIMELINE

### Archiving the Mother-Son Relationship

Six structures for mother and child is the centre of the Slade's 2018 installation. One structure per year of motherhood, one structure per year of childhood, these objects are lined up, free-standing in the space.

In this installation I placed six wooden objects which were all made to accommodate a mother and a child; *Jesus of the Jeans*, 2012, as a sacrificial altar object for a child and parents; *Double*, 2014, an empty double coffin for an adult and a child; *Mother and Child In a Window*, 2016, a structure for a hybrid half mother half child; *Middle Ages*, 2017, a wooden window showing a black void; *How Much Do You* (working title, 2018), a wooden instrument for measuring and comparing; and *Work In Progress*, 2018, a wooden box built to the specific height of a child of 137cm and a mother, (the manual for this work has not yet been made).

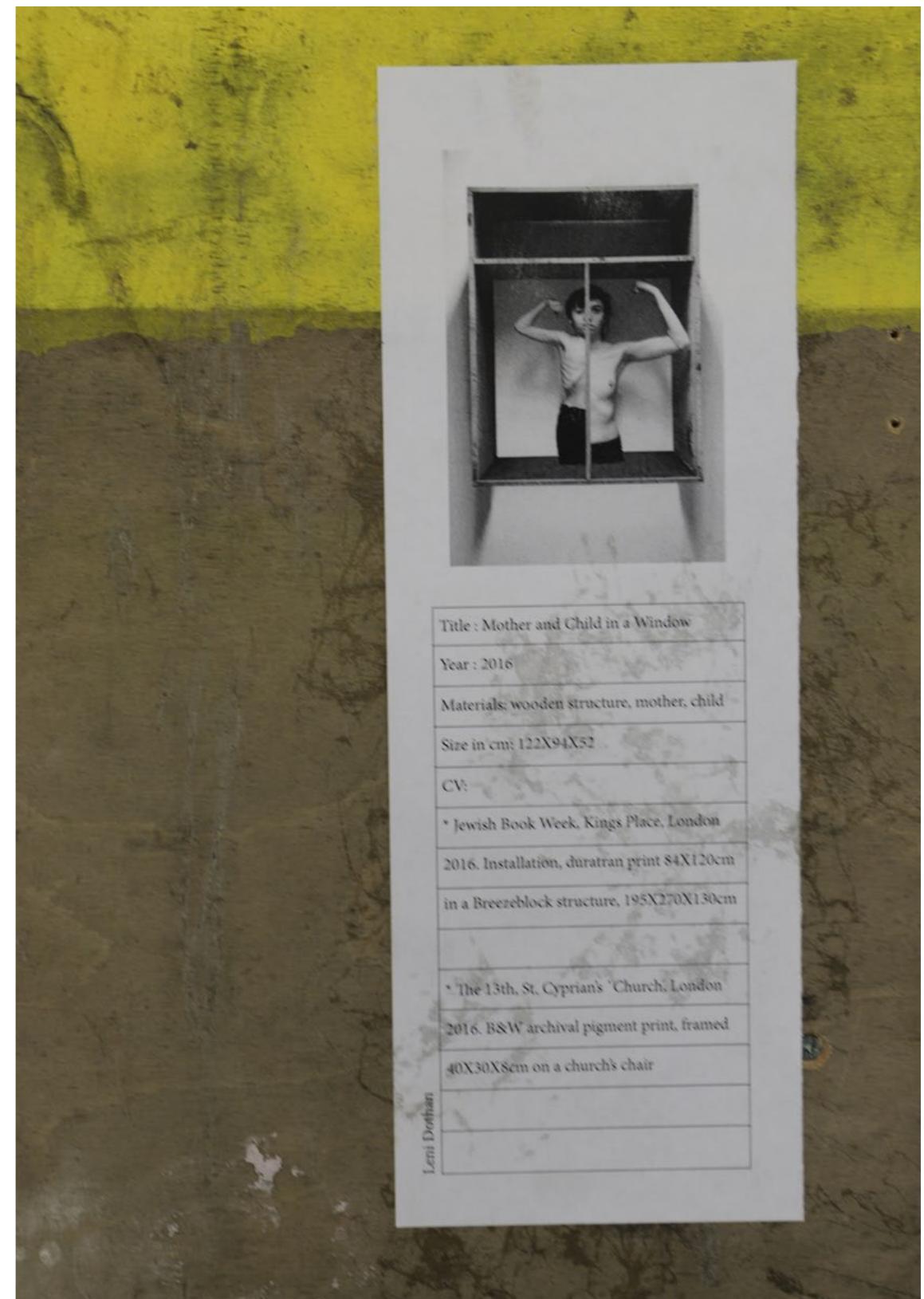
On each object I have mounted a note, my archival reference of the object which includes a black and white photo of the Manual, title of the work, year, materials, sizes and a CV of the work; where, when and in which format the work was presented.

Each object once inhabited a mother and child's private moment, and is now exposed to the viewers. Those objects were built as complementary physical structures for psychological situations. Each structure was built for a particular moment on the mother and child's personal timeline. This private moment we usually capture using a self timer. This is also my archive, which I disassemble, store and reassemble for the installation. This is the 'behind the scenes' but also the scene itself. Screws, rough cuts and quick joints are revealed to the viewer for the first time.

Over the course of this installation, I discovered an interesting reaction to my works. I have witnessed more than one viewer stepping into my objects and thus bringing them to life or perhaps, activating them. Below, one can see two of the viewers on the opening night who spontaneously decided to inhabit the object *Double*. These two viewers broke the gallery codes as they physically stepped into the objects. They also asked another viewer to take a photo of them while they were occupying the object, perhaps in the same way they learnt from the mounted labels on the objects. In their double act of inhabiting and photographing themselves, they subverted my artwork from functioning as an Object of Research, in the same way as I intended in *Jesus of the Jeans* in Norway.

It is interesting to mention that *Double* is the only empty object which is completed without having a Manual attached to it. This is the only object whose use I refuse to demonstrate, almost as it is a talisman to ward off death. After seeing how fast icons can be responded to in the Research Poster incident, I decided to create a new method of research in my practice. In this method I create objects and their manuals, these are an expansion of my already existing imagery and installations.

During the course of the PhD this process of developing objects and manuals has become a more important method of my practice-led research. I create objects for my new narratives. Until this exhibition, these objects had never been shown. In Christianity,



Leni Dothan, detail, *Mother and child in a window*, wooden structure, 2016 (fig. 45)

relics generate belief through the distribution and circulation of images such as pilgrim souvenirs. My images are a kind of equivalent, however, in this work, I present the actual objects. Unlike the 2-D frontal photograph, the viewer can physically enter into the work that is of human scale. These are made from a woman's perspective.

Pages 82- 85, installation view, Slade Show 2018 (fig. 46,47)





## PORLAND STONE REHABILITATION CENTRE

### Making the invisible visible

This work, *Portland Stone Rehabilitation Centre*, was prompted by the invisible enemy of air pollution. Together with the Chemistry Department of UCL, I began creating a massive work of art using London air pollution as my paint brush and 200 Portland stones, which were hauled to my London studio to be canvases. The Portland stones that have been exposed to London's air pollution carry upon them images of a child's face held in his mother's hands. The stones have now been returned to Portland's fresh air to heal.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters".

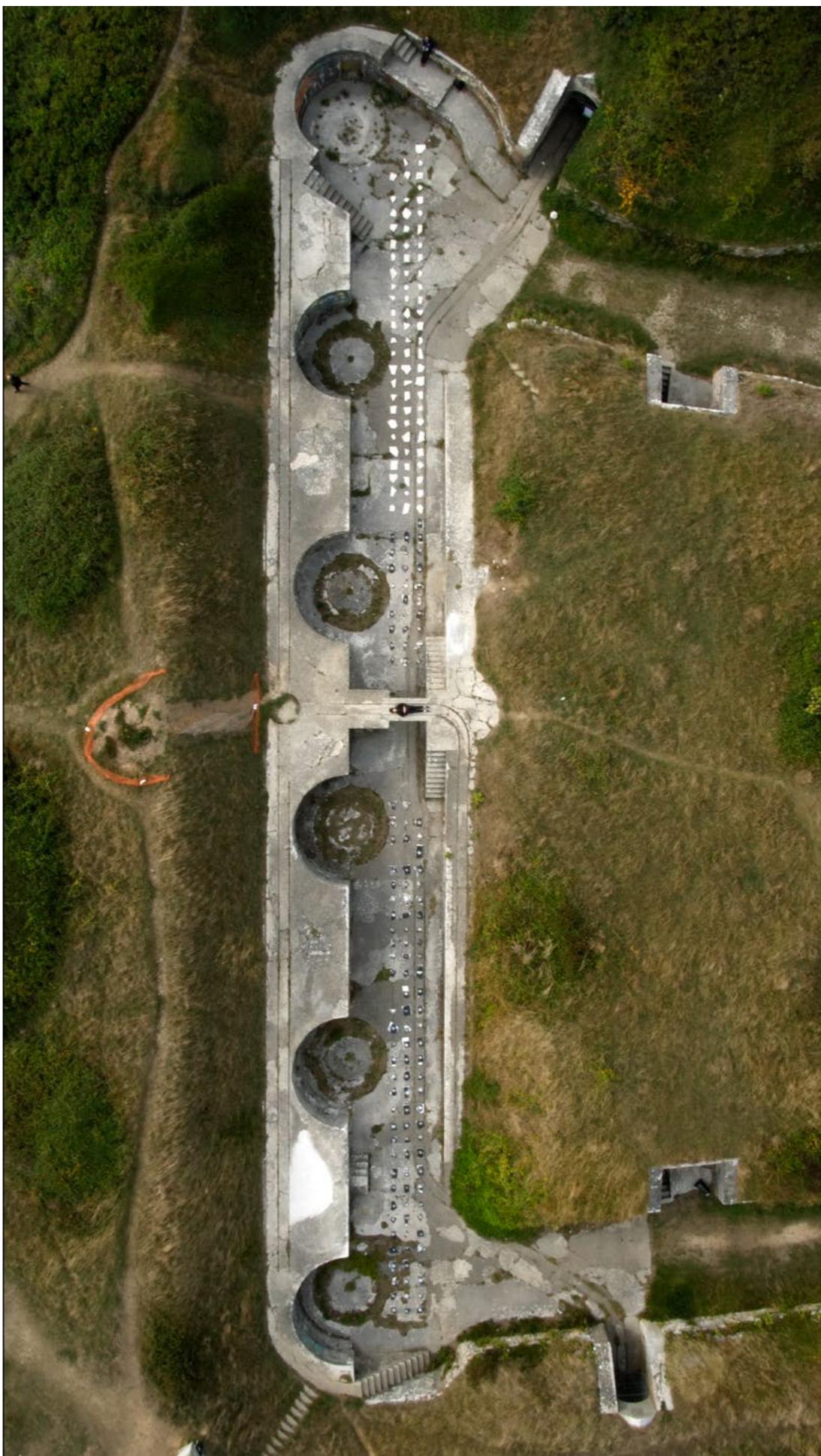
"א בראשית, ברא אלhim, את השמים, ואת הארץ. ב והארץ, קייטה תהו ובהו, וחשך, על-פני תהום;  
וְרוּם אלhim, מרחפת על-פני המים."

Last night I read the book of Genesis in Hebrew, my mother tongue. Not many people can read Hebrew now, only about 7 million can speak and read it. The first part of the book describes a world in which only chaotic matter exists. No human beings, animals or plants inhabited this world. This state is called in Hebrew - *תוהו ובוהו* - tohu va vohu: tohu is an empty place, vohu can refer to a place of desolation. In Hebrew the words together have two meanings either utter chaos, or wonderment. The translation is always open to interpretation.



Tohu vavohu, The Stone Firm Quarry, Portland 2018 (fig. 48)

There was a delay at Ben Gurion airport (Tel Aviv), the airplane landed in Luton 2 hours later than expected. At 4 am I crashed into my bed. It's now 9.30 am and I'm on the way to Portland. It's a four hour ride door to door, London to Portland. This is the reverse of the journey that so many stones have taken on a daily basis since 1666. Since the Great Fire of London, when the traumatised city decided not to build wooden buildings anymore, red bricks and Portland stones took over the new urban landscape of the city.



Installation view, *Portland Stone Rehabilitation Centre*, High Angle Battery, Portland, 2018 (fig. 49)

I arrived at the quarry around lunchtime. When I say quarry, I mean the factory, where they cut the stones to size. The quarry is inaccessible to the public and cannot be even seen from the sky. They mine the stones underground. No one can get permission to visit due to "health and safety" restrictions. It all sounds a bit strange, and a red warning lamp lights up in my mind. When I walk in London's streets, almost every single building around me has Portland stone elements, alongside a huge amount of buildings that are explicitly made out of this stone, typical of London's buildings, including UCL, the home of my studio and research. I can't help but wonder if it is a political decision not to let the public witness the geological and ecological tragedy of the isle of Portland, a small island which has been, and continues to be, exploited by London's architects and builders for hundreds of years.

They are now crushing the huge mound of off cuts. They sell the off cuts for £90 per ton. I need two tonnes of stones for my project. The bulldozer is working quickly and I'm standing in front of the mass of stone and machinery. Equipped with a fluorescent helmet and vest, I pile the stones. The manager of the site comes towards me "I'll ask one of the chaps to give you a hand." I say thank you and continue my work against time as the crusher comes closer to me. The man assigned to help me is strong, lifting huge pieces of stone and kindly asking for guidance; exactly which stones and sizes am I looking for. I need 200 stones light enough that I can lift them myself, but heavy enough to affect the landscape. Portland stone is actually very fragile and brittle, when I lift a huge piece and leave it to gravity, it breaks into perfectly sized pieces. This becomes my technique. It makes the work easier and faster. By 5pm I had 2 piles of stones weighing one ton each. This feels a bit like *tohu va vohu* re-shuffled.



Before (fig. 50) After (fig. 51)



Tohu Vavohu re shuffled (fig. 52)



Leni Dothan, *Messenger 1*, video, 01:41"min, 2015 (fig. 53)

The trolley, which only few hours ago carried my personal belongings was now loaded with 3 pieces of Portland stone which I want to take with me. The rest will be shipped to my studio later this week. I carry my 3 chosen stones on the bus to the mainland, then the train to London and the underground back to my flat. Throughout the journey, I feel their weight and my pain.

In the meantime in UCL's labs, the chemists, Dr. Raul Quesada Cabrera, Prof. Andrea Sella and Sana Ali are working on the formulation of the pollution reactive material which I'm going to print with on the Portland stone. The material is a mixture of two chemicals - Nedd and Sulfanilamide. Each one of the materials is transparent, however, when they are mixed together and exposed to air pollution, a chemical reaction transforms the color from transparent to Magenta.



Traveling with stones - Portland to London (fig. 54)



The stones arrive at UCL (Fig 55)



At the lab, Dr Raul Quesada Cabrera, Prof. Andrea Sella (fig 56)

5 am. I'm waiting for my stones in London. I have arranged for help to off-load all the stones from the lorry. The last time I carried such heavy loads by myself it caused irreversible damage to my body. These stones will be my babies, at the same time, there is nothing that resonates with death more than stones.

200 pieces of Portland stone now portray an image of a young boy soundlessly screaming into darkness. A woman's hands wrap his face, maybe as a megaphone, increasing his potential sound. The boy's head floats in the darkness in the wings-like woman hands, resonating the detail of a divine cherub in a classical painting. However, this messenger is a complete opposite to the classical one, he is not a chubby-dreamy-innocent creature, inspiring love on his surroundings. This messenger is uncontrollable, as if he had been captured in a nightmare.

These stones were sent to London, just like many other Portland stones that make this trip on a daily basis. I later painted and printed on these stones with two primary materials, a pollution-degrading material which is activated by sunlight and a pollution-reactive material. Inspired by the chemistry department, my studio at the UCL Slade School of Fine Art, turned into a lab where I divided the stones into 11 groups of research subjects and treated them differently. Each group tests the degradation of pollution differently. I designated a symbol to represent each material I used. Each stone was numbered and dated on its back, and a line of symbols indicated the order in which I had applied the materials on the stones. I also carefully mixed the chemists' materials with my own printing materials testing the potential degradation of the pollution (later I saw that the acrylic I had used was the slowest to degrade and the most difficult to purify).

In the installation itself, the sun-blocking material was what I called 'key stones', these stones were also Portland stones but they resembled narrow tubes, as they were different in shape. I then wrote the symbols I used for each research group on each key stone. The first stone of each research group was partly covered by this key stone which had

a double function, to block the sunlight so we could measure the contrast between 'before' and 'after' the exposure, but the key stone also communicated the different materials to the public. For the installation, I printed little cards with the symbols and their meanings. The invigilators handed these cards to the visitors, who could wander between the different groups and independently learn about the materials I used, and also peek under the key stones to check how much the sunlight together with the chemists' materials had degraded the air pollution.

Steel, timber, glass, and stone are my materials, as well as the human body. I don't believe in hierarchies between the human flesh and stones, between the naked body and a reclaimed piece of timber that I find in the street and later built a structure with. All are part of my artistic universe. My feelings for a stone or a piece of wood during the process of creation can be deep and even overwhelming. Therefore, when it comes to healing, the air pollution rehabilitation process seems as natural for sculptors made of stones as it would be for human beings. This is the reason why have I decided to create a rehab centre for sculptures.

The air pollution that I experience and suffer from in London is similar to the blackened Portland stone buildings that surround me. UCL, is made of Portland stone, it is the home of this project, my PhD, and is the place where scientists from the chemistry department captured air pollution in a bottle and made it possible for me to print and paint with on 200 clean stones, hand picked by me and brought to my UCL studio directly from the quarry in Portland. The stones went into a fast forward chemical procedure of becoming polluted by Bloomsbury air pollution in exactly the same manner as UCL's buildings, which are made of Portland stone. I must add that the local area of Bloomsbury where UCL is situated is one of the most polluted areas in London.

The power of such a collaboration between art and science enabled me to make the invisible visible. It allows spectators to witness pollution in a visual way and witness the degradation of pollution in the fresh air of Portland with the help of a chemical material which degrades pollution using UV light.



Stones at the Slade (fig. 57)

With this project, I also wish to bring about more awareness of the exploitative relationship between London and Portland. Since the great London fire in 1666, the little isle of Portland has constantly been mined, leaving it irreversibly wounded.

I think that people need to be more aware of the problem of air pollution. It is easy to overlook this problem as air pollution is mainly invisible, and therefore often ignored. While this is the vision of this specific project in a nutshell, it is also a metaphor for my entire research; to make the invisible visible and even undo the crimes of either air pollution or other taboos such as the role of the mother in society by turning back the clock. I later brought the polluted stones back to Portland, their place of origin, and made them the subjects: visible, purified and acknowledged - this is the objective of my Portland Stone Rehabilitation Centre and the objective of my wider research. The stones printed with air pollution, like my other works in this research, are made out of what is often overlooked, oppressed, pushed aside and delegitimised.



Above: Leni Dothan, rehabilitation process, Portland Stone Rehabilitation Centre (fig. 58). Previous page, pollution reactive material (fig. 59). Right: installation view, 2018







Left: Before - Polluted stone 83/200 painted and printed with London's air pollution (fig. 60)

Right: After- Portland stone after 9 days of rehabilitation and exposure to UV light. (fig. 61)

Next page, witnessing the difference, before and after (fig. 62)

Page 100, installation view (fig. 63)



△△△= \* PSRC

△△△= \* PSRC

100



## **POLLUTED BEAUTY**

In this project I will create a sculpture of mother and son printed in a special technique with a pollution-reactive material on Carrara Marble, as a continuation of my work Nordic Eve in Norway and Portland Stone Rehabilitation Centre. exposure to air pollution in UCL's main quad. This sculpture will be placed on the empty plinths in the main quad of UCL, inspired by the '4th plinth' project in Trafalgar Square. The work will welcome the, students and staff, stressing UCL's commitment to global and local grand challenges and UCL's 2034 vision of interdisciplinary research.

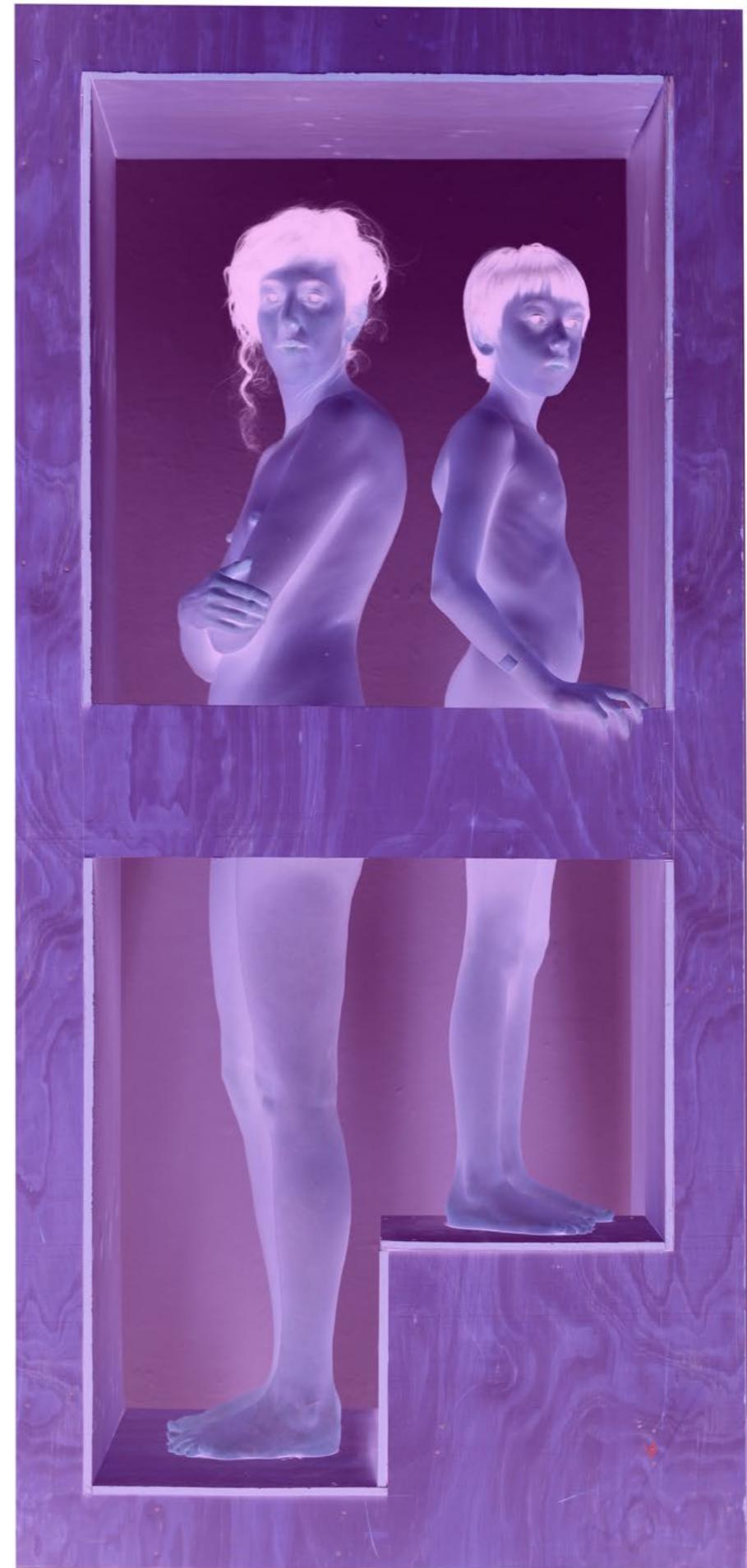
### **How Much Do You**

Mother and son are standing in a wooden structure. As part of the structure the son stands on a premade step for him, making him as tall as the mother. This step makes them equals. The middle point of this structure splits their bodies into two – an upper part and a lower part, and covers their intimate areas. The title of the work "How Much Do You", implies on a quantitative question. How much do you love? How much do you care? How much do you want?

This title has a double meaning in the context of the work. First it's the mother-son relationship which is being quantified. Then, both of them, as a unit, asks the public this question "How much do you". Their naked bodies, function as a raw material, just like the wood that holds them. They look at the spectators, they look at the two classical naked male bronze sculptures. They look at you. They are negative, their eyes are negative, made out of toxic pollution. They are neither friendly nor cute. Instead of amusing the public, they are the gatekeepers, the Oracles speaking bad omens. With their visibility and their presence, and using the air pollution to create the image, their role is to make sure that we are aware of invisible dangers. If they hadn't appeared on the marble, we would have been protected and safe. However, their appearance is reminiscent of a lighthouse on a foggy night, directing us to not crash into the ominous man-made cliffs of air pollution.

Leni Dothan, *How Much Do you*, mother, child, wooden structure, 2018 (fig, 64)

Next Page, *Polluted Beauty*, mother, child, pollution reactive material on marble, installation at the UCL main quad 2019 (fig, 65)

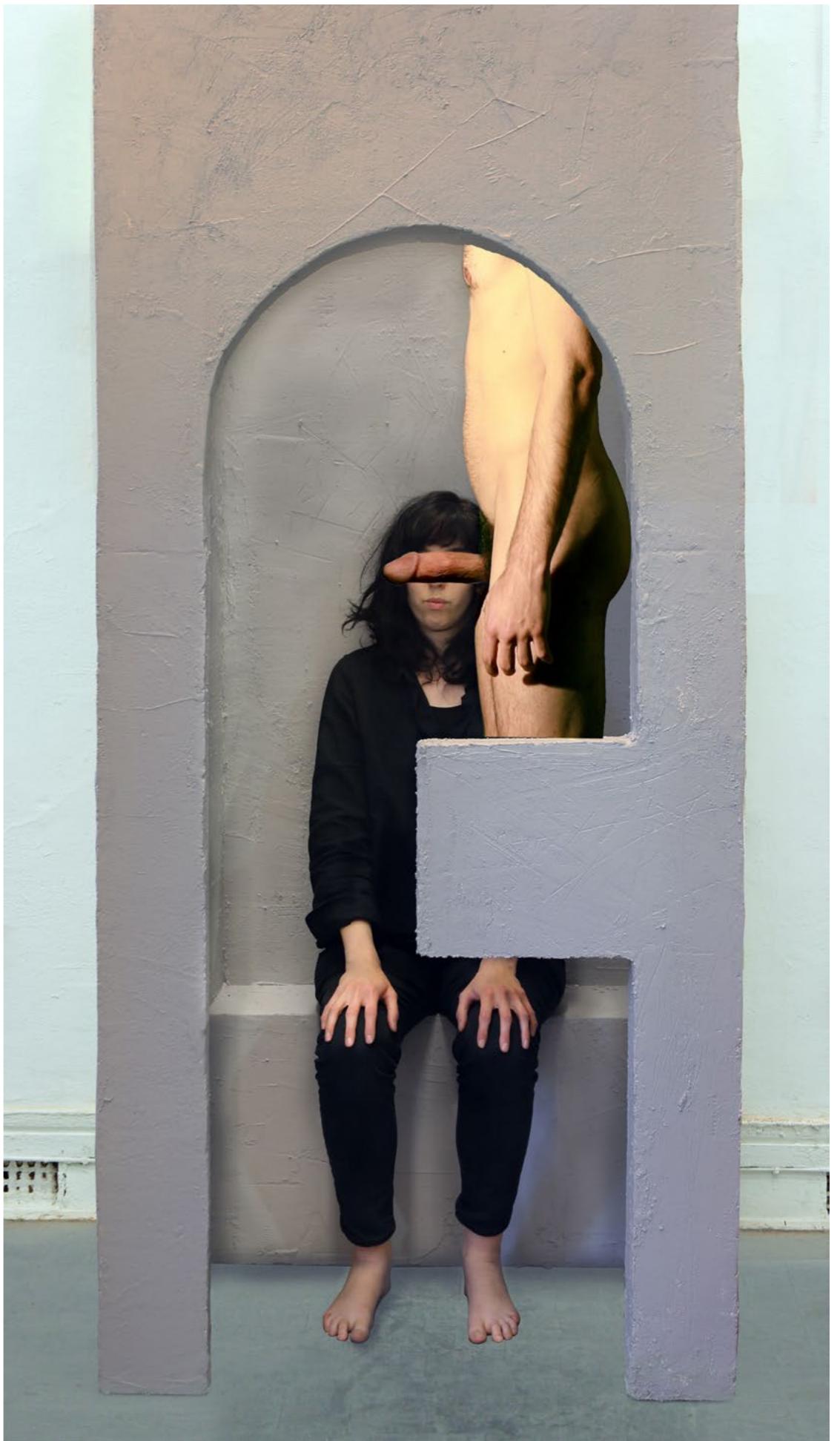




- APPENDIX -  
**SIGHT SPECIFIC**

See 'The Contract' p. 87

Leni Dothan, *Sight specific*, woman, man in a concrete structure, photographic image, 2015 (fig. 66)



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### **Solo Exhibitions and Projects**

- *MOTHERCHILD Machine No. 7*, commissioned by Procreate Project, King's College's Guy's Campus, London, UK (2019)
- *Portland Stone Rehabilitation Centre*, commissioned by b-side Multimedia Art Biannual, Portland, UK (2018).
- *Birth & Death*, Hå Gamle prestegard, Norway (2017).
- *Dead End*, Holy Congregational church, Washington D.C, USA (2017).
- *The 13th*, St. Cyprian's Church, London, UK (2016).
- *Mother and Child in a Window*, Kings Place - Jewish Book Week, London, UK (2016).
- *Crude Ashes*, Temple Church, London, UK (2016).

### **Group Exhibitions**

- *Matrescence*, Richard Soltoun, London, UK (2019)
- *Ruth Borchard Self-Portrait Prize* and exhibition, Judges Commended, Piano Nobile Kings Place, London, UK (2019)
- *The M Word*, One Paved Road Gallery, Richmond, UK (2019)
- *Mademoiselle*, Centre Régional d'Art Contemporain Occitanie à Sète, France (2018).
- *Messenger 1*, Christie's Education, London (2018).
- *You Can Do It and You Will Do It*, MAMbo museum of contemporary and modern art, Bologna, Italy (2018).
- *Desparate Artwives*, Leyden Gallery (2018).
- *Pinzeta 5*, Red House, Tel Aviv, Israel (2017).
- *FiliArt*, Institute of Education, UCL (2017).
- *Nasty Women: Architecture*, Anise Gallery, London, UK (2017)
- *The Intercontinental*, Roaming ROOM Gallery, London, UK (2017).
- *Art Below*, the Old Truman Brewery, London, UK (2016).
- *OFF Course*, Contemporary Art Fair, Brussels, Belgium (2016).

### **Symposiums | Talks**

- *Maternal Sacrifice in Jewish Culture*, conference, Cermom- Inalco university, Paris (2019)
- *Making Art In Times of Crisis*, b-side, Leni Dothan, Michael Pinsky and Sara Hudston in conversation, Portland, UK (2019)
- *Feminism and the Bible*, symposium, Birkbeck, London (2019)
- *Fast Forward Woman in Photography*, hosted by UCL (2018).
- *Maternal Attitude*, University of south Wales (2018).
- *Dead End*, Holy Congregational church, Washington D.C, USA, artist in conversation (2017).
- *Mother and Child in a Window*, Kings Place - Jewish Book Week, London, UK, artist in conversation (2016).
- *Arte Fiera*, Bologna, artist presentation with Academy Now (2016)

### **Publications**

- Image, *Motherhood - A Visual Contract*, photo essay and cover by Leni Dothan, 102 issue, Nov. 2019, USA, p. 25-33 (2019)
- Elephant Magazine, *Are We Secretly Disgusted By Female Uber Fertility?* Nov. 2019, UK (2019)
- Monopol Magazin fur kunst and Leben, *The Birth of a Mother*, Nov. 2019, Germany (2019)
- *Brushes with Faith -Reflections and conversations on Contemporary Art*, Aaron Rosen, Cascade Books, Eugen, Oregon, 2019, p. 76-80. (2019)

- *Straight Talk*, Interview by Marine Tanguy, Visualizing Pollution, Scart Magazine, December (2018)
- Stavanger Aftenblad, Trond Borgen, *A labyrinthine tragedy*, 19.10.2017, Norway (2017)
- Tenoua, Noemie Benchimol, N° 168 magazine, June 2017, Paris (2017)
- Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception Volume 14 - *Jesus*, De Gruyter, Berlin | Boston (2017)
- Saloona, Vered Fishbein, 26.10.2016, Israel (2016)

## **MOTHERCHILD Machine No. 7**

*MOTHERCHILD* Machine No. 7 is the last work I created over the course of this research, it was commissioned by the Procreate Project to be part of the second edition of the Oxytocin symposium, hosted at King's College's Guy's Campus and in collaboration with the Birth Rites Collection. This symposium questioned the iconography, cultural connotations and stereotypes associated with the word 'Mother/Mothering'.

As a response to the symposium's theme, and as part of my ongoing research, I ask whether a portrait of a mother and her child must be frontal, and present the subjects as a loving union capturing a 'Kodak Moment' for hundreds of years, while ignoring and delegitimising other facets of their relationship. To answer this question, I built the *MOTHERCHILD* Machine No. 7. This structure is the 7th structure exploring the relationship between mother and child, opening up possibilities for a different type of representation. This structure, allows the mother and the child to confront each other, to look at each other and have a private dialogue. The mother does not look down on her child, the child does not look up to his mother. The structure allows for an equal interaction between the two.

This work was installed in Guy's Chapel, and beckons a dialogue about the Christian iconography of the Madonna and Child (see The Contract p.73), which is an integral part of the chapel. Comprised of a video installation, a wooden structure and a live performance, the viewers (parents and children, but others too) were invited to explore their relationships and be photographed in the *MOTHERCHILD* Machine. A 200X200cm LED screen played a looped video, edited using three still images of a mother and her child (my son and myself) having a dialogue using the *MOTHERCHILD* Machine no.7 in my studio. The soundless flickering images created a sense of a gun fight, a game, and a way of expression which was, at that particular moment, central to our relationship. Between the shootings, we had conversations that remained private and inaccessible to the viewers. The performance was part of my Objects of Research method, researching the willingness of the viewers to experience and adopt new iconography. Similar to Jesus of the Jeans in Norway, here the viewers were asked to sign a form allowing me to use these images in my future projects and in return I agreed to send them one edition of the work that they took part in. I was available to leave the camera to my second photographer and perform together with people who wished to participate but didn't have someone to explore this machine with. I asked the participants to choose where they wanted to sit. This choice impacted both of our perspectives, either as the child or as the parent.

With this work I ask, must she always be loving, caring, perfect and ideal? Must he always be passive and assume the role of the victim? Can a portrait of a mother and a child depict a spectrum of emotions rather than only a singular feeling, the way the mother-child theme was narrated in classical iconography? What will be the impact on our society if the mother is allowed to have mixed emotions towards her child, and the child is allowed to play a role other than that of the victim?

Leni Dothan, *MOTHERCHILD* Machine No. 7, mother, child, wooden structure, video in loop, 2019 (fig. 67, 68, 69)

