THE CONTRACT

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(As part of Breaching the Contract: Breaking Free from the Emotional and Ideological Prison of Renaissance Masterpieces)

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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.
Abstract

In this practice-led research project I examine specific Renaissance icons as creating and cementing Visual Contracts. These contracts imposed on women patterns of thoughts, social and political conventions. I argue that Renaissance art created depictions of women which are controlling, framing and forcing women to be submissive and imposing a concept of an ‘ideal woman’ that persists today.

I aim to examine and breach these Visual Contracts with my artworks; videos, sculptures, photographs and installations made from the point of view of a 21st century mother and woman. My works offer new narratives, challenging these emotional and ideological prisons for women, which continue to exert an undeniable effect upon women’s psyche and the way they are perceived by others. The term Visual Contract comes from the etymological Hebrew root of נ-מ-א, which has different meanings; artist, art, belief, agreement and loyalty. These meanings centre the theory and practice of this research. The term also comes from the Civil Contract of Photography, a book written by Ariella Azoulay, which introduced the concept of visual content as a contract.

My works aim to reposition women and mothers as “real” rather than “ideal”. In doing so, they raise questions about the representation of women throughout art history, allowing for a new discourse which goes beyond religious and geographical borders.

I use Iconography, Iconology, Iconoclasm and Iconophilia as my academic methodologies (Warburg, Panofsky) and photography, video, sculpture, and installation as methods of material practice. Working with the UCL Chemistry I researched new materials to reveal air pollution levels, the invisible killer of our time.

I install my works in art institutions such as galleries, museums, public spaces and churches. Viewers find themselves confronted with new questions and disturbing ideas, which aim to sabotage patriarchal narratives and dogmas.
Impact Statement

My mission in researching the representations of women and particularly mothers in Renaissance art, reveals a gap between the idealised mother as she depicted in the Renaissance art and what a real mother experiences. While using feminist practice and theories, I examine these masterpieces, paintings and sculptures today, as Visual Contracts, crossing generations, borders and beliefs, creating emotional and ideological prisons made by the great masters.

The impact of this research varies from the very small scale of my subjective experience as a mother-artist, to the very large scale of the public sphere, while exposing large audiences to new imagery which is questioning what I suggest as Visual Contracts. Within the academic world, this research crossed disciplines; art making, art history and new materiality made in a collaboration with the Chemistry department of UCL. Exhibiting my works in galleries, museums, public art projects and churches around the world including; Norway, Washington DC, Italy, France, the UK and Israel, made an impact beyond the academia.

Religious Icons, as this research shows, have a strong impact on their spectators. I use this power to subvert old dogmas into a new imagery which questions themes such as the Crucifixion. For example, my work *Crude Ashes* deals with this theme through a video installation which deconstructs the symbol of the cross to be made of a mother and child. Installed in Temple Church, London, this work makes the spectator, believer and nonbeliever, rethink the necessity of the social concept of ‘the sacrifice’ through this new cross.

In a large-scale project commissioned by the b-side Multimedia Art Festival in Portland UK, I asked the Chemistry department of UCL, which is located in one of the most polluted areas in London, to create a pollution sensitive material which will transform the invisible enemy, air pollution, to a visible substance I could use for my art. With this
material I painted and printed on 200 Portland stones portraits of my son, depicted as a Renaissance Cherub, soundlessly shouting from within the stones. Using this image of an innocent child, my child, created by pollution made the spectators think about the next generation in relation to the problem of air pollution. Later these polluted stones were sent to be rehabilitated by the sun and fresh air of Portland, making the invisible air pollution visible, both physically and metaphorically. Installed for nine days at an abandoned military battery base, the audience could witness pollution on the stones and their rehabilitation thereof, when the images slowly disappeared from them. The symbiosis between science and art made an enormous impact on their respective discourses, and of course on visitors and the media, which still features this project in various publications and magazines.

In the future, I aim to create more works revealing the ‘dangerous’, ‘swiped’ and under-discussed subjects dealing with injustice and inequality, while pushing the boundaries of medium, materiality and the interdisciplinary approach as a leading tool for a change.
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For Yali
For Yali, my son.
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**Introduction**

Through my artwork and this Report, I will debate, argue and question women’s role in society through the continuity of iconography from the Renaissance to today. I will do so through my life experience as an Israeli woman, an artist and a mother of a son. I will do this through the prism of a woman’s role in the Holy Land, my home, a place of war and fear in which I was born and raised.

This research goes back into the history of Renaissance art: there I confront spectacular masterpieces. However, instead of adoring them, I read them as Visual Contracts, instruments that shape our free thoughts. The term ‘visual contract’ came from the etymological Hebrew root of נ-מ-א which gathers the theory and practice of this research. This Hebrew root brings together several words with different meanings which are all relevant to my research, supporting the idea of Visual Contracts and also the breaching of those contracts:

- Artist
- Art
- Belief
- Agreement or Treaty
- A Loyal person

Each of these words, has a significance meaning in my research.

- Artist = is the creator
- Art = is the means, the form with which I express my doubts
- Belief = is the motor, the generator of narratives
- Agreement or Treaty = is the way artists translated their belief
- A Loyal person = is the reason this contract is so hard to breach

Is it loyalty to old forms of belief, the physical interpretation of belief, that prevented artists from breaching the Visual Contract of the great Renaissance Art?
The term also came from the *Civil Contract of Photography*, a book written by Ariella Azoulay\(^1\); there she argues that photography provides a space of citizenship for disadvantaged groups, mainly Palestinians and women. She argues that there is a civil contract between a photographed person, the photographer, and the viewer of the photograph. This contract enables the viewer to take an active part by reassuring the citizenship of those deprived groups.

I would like to continue the idea of Azoulay who suggests taking a visual document such as a photograph, and to read it as a contract. However, instead of dealing with photographs, I will read the great masterpieces of Renaissance art as Visual Contracts. I will try to open up the possibility of thinking about the emancipation of women by creating new artworks and placing them alongside the art of the Old Masters, the patriarchal canon of art. A confrontation between the new and the old, between female and male dogmas, aims to allow for a new discourse around women’s roles and their social and political contexts.

Through my research I ask if Renaissance art created a set of Visual Contracts, and I hypothesize that its legacy continues to control our social, political, and religious behaviour to this day. Is it possible to challenge representations of women that have been dictated by male artists and their patrons since the Renaissance era? Are we able to break the silent contract that was imposed on mothers first by the Church and later by the State out of the exclusive religious context? How could we challenge the iconography of the ‘obedient bereaved mother’?

I re-contextualize those questions through Israeli society where bereavement is part of collective identity. The concept of bereavement is entangled with the notion of being Israeli. In Israeli colloquialism, soldiers can also be interpolated into sons. Following the same logic, I as a woman, become the mother of each and every son who died in war. The role of the bereaved mother in society is similar to Mary’s role in Christianity in this singular respect: she must perform her grief and claim her role as the ultimate mother under the set of rules that was written for her by the State.

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I argue that Renaissance art created masterpieces, Icons, which imprisoned women in ideas and concepts rather than in physical places. The concept of the ‘ideal’, ‘obedient’ and ‘perfect’ woman becomes a non-physical prison. Renaissance artists made iconic masterpieces that cemented these concepts in images and created, maybe unintentionally, Visual Contracts between women and the church, male and female, and mother and son. These Visual Contracts instantiated not only the Christian narrative, but also those of other religions beyond European cultures and geographic boundaries.

In order to challenge these non-physical prisons, I use the method of making artworks as a contemporary ‘Icon-Maker’. My icons examine the complex relationships between Male and Female, Mother and Son, Woman and State as originally shaped by the Old Masters and the church. I strive to create artworks comprised of semi-familiar, Icons and scenes. I use concrete, steel, wood, photographs and videos and also air pollution-responsive material, a new medium created especially for my works. My artwork resonates with both religious spaces and concrete bunkers under attack. They look as though they were taken from Renaissance art, they use the same qualities; choices of colour, light and symmetric compositions, that all resonate with this already familiar iconography. My Icons suggest a new, challenging discourse about social and political conventions. Instead of repeating the conventional iconography of the ideal woman, I fail to fulfil the roles expected of me; I’m strong when needed to perform tenderness, shattered like a classical statue when expected to show strength. These are my methods for ‘breaching the contracts’ which I identify and define in this research. I challenge the concept of the ‘correct’ posture of bereavement as exemplified by the Pietà. While Mary in the Pietà accepts her destiny, my contemporary Icons of bereaved mothers will run, shout or die, but will never sit down quietly.

This research is divided into two volumes: The Contract and Breaching the Contract. These can be read separately as two independent books; ‘The Contract’ is my research into Renaissance art history and the way I read iconic masterpieces as Visual Contracts. In this volume I create timelines for each Visual Contract and in doing so I reveal the effect of these themes on our social and political thoughts and behaviours to this day.
*Breaching the Contract*, is an artist book that functions as my portfolio, gathering the works I have made between 2015 and 2019, the years of my research as part of the doctoral program at the Slade, UCL. My works respond to the contracts I identified during my research and suggest alternatives that will allow for new questions to be asked, aiming to breach these historical Visual Contracts.

The reader may choose to read the research linearly, however, it is recommended to follow my suggestions in the body of the texts and move in between the two volumes and read them in a non-linear manner.
Personal Statement

As an Israeli of the 3rd generation after the Holocaust, I grew up on western traditions, those that my grandparents and great grandparents brought to Israel from Poland, Russia and Austria. I grew up with heavy art books depicting the stories of the bible through European eyes, in European settings. The story of Jesus happened in the land I know so well, my home. I physically come from the land of the bible. I am not a pilgrim or an outsider to the story. I follow in the footsteps of many Jewish and Israeli artists who examined what is known in Israel as the story of the most famous Jew - Jesus. As a woman and a mother of a young boy, my interest lies in re-reading the story of Jesus’s mother, Mary, and the way she was depicted in art.

The linkage between west and east, between stories and religious representations, mainly through Christianity and Judaism, are all constantly mixed in Israeli art. For example, recently, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem presented a comprehensive retrospective that explores representations of Jesus in Israeli and Jewish art. This exhibition presents the greatest Israeli and Jewish artists from Marc Chagall through to Reuven Rubin, Igael Tumarkin on to contemporary Israeli artists such as Adi Nes and Sigalit Landau. The exhibition reveals the undisputed relationship between Israeli and Jewish art, dealing with the life, character and representations of Jesus.

Some of the artists above relate to the symbol of the ‘ultimate tortured’, ‘the outsider’, ‘the individual who fights the establishment’, while others use the image of Jesus as a visual bridge between the two once hostile religions, Christianity and Judaism, with an emphasis on Jesus being a Jew. In Israeli and Jewish eyes, Jesus was the ultimate symbol of western art, the church and anti-Semitism, but at the same time, he represented the longing for Europe, which was once home to many of those artists.

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This exhibition included three charcoal drawings entitled *Jesus/Tree* made by my great grandfather, the artist and architect Leopold Krakauer. In these drawings Jesus’s character appears to be interwoven with an olive tree, a tree which is perhaps ‘the’ symbol of locality; no European artist that I know of ever depicted the crucified Christ on an olive tree. Krakauer’s Jesus seems as if he grows out of the olive tree, or is being digested by it. In his later work, Jesus is depicted as a Thorn broken at the foot of a Judean hill. I know that my great grandfather, who lived in Jerusalem, identified with Christ’s suffering and death through his own grief after his sisters were murdered by the Nazis in Austria.

Like my great grandfather and other artists in the Israeli and Jewish tradition, I
investigate Christian representations and try to understand them with my own set of tools. Unlike the grandparents’ generation who dealt with the private suffering of the Holocaust and the image of the Jew as a victim, my generation is the first to question the sacrifice. Do we need to sacrifice our sons and daughters for the sake of God and country?

As an Israeli woman, what intrigues me most is the portrayal of Mary, the way she is presented in the history of art as the ultimate signifier of proper grief. It is this image of the bereaved mother that I wish to challenge and it is my original contribution to knowledge. It is the core, the centre around which many of my works revolve. Are women still affected by the religious and geographical contexts of this unnatural positioning of Mary by male Renaissance artists? Can the image of the annunciation, where Mary is told of her pregnancy and the fate of the child, be reread and rewritten? Can the Pietà where Mary sits quietly with her dead child in her arms be challenged by creating alternative female art?

I believe that there is a place and an urgency to expand on this seemingly ever-passive role and create new representations of women. Here, I also learn from Feminist practice and theory, which strives to create a place in history for women’s lost voices by creating new representations of women made by women.
Methods and Methodologies

In order to argue with conventions that were formed during the Renaissance, I use different types of methods and methodologies. I use art historical approaches such as: Iconography and Iconology, Iconoclasm and Iconophilia, and suggesting another method, which I call Iconowlogy (pronounced icon-now-logy). These enable me to decode traditional Icons and later to reconstruct them as new Icons in the form of works of art.

I use Iconography, a thematic study of symbols, colors and attributes of Christian iconography, as a method. Through Iconology, I decode those images and understand what makes them Icons rather than just beautiful images. Panofsky defined the term “Iconography” as “that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form”. I use this research as raw material to create new Icons that refer to old themes but offer different narratives that challenge existing conventions. I take the ideas and visual images that I have learnt and use them to create my own Icons. The aim of my imagery is to create a dialogue with religious Icons and contemporary art around what I perceive as Visual Contracts, which created unchallenged conventions.

I use Iconology, ‘the study of “logos”, (the words, ideas, discourse, or “science”) of “icons” (images, pictures, or likenesses) (...) A study of what images “say”- (that is, the ways in which they seem to speak for themselves by persuading, telling stories, or describing)4 in order, as Erwin Panofsky suggests, to study how different components of Icons implicate culture, moral codes, and political and social behaviours. Panofsky proposes “iconology” as another way of reading Icons. With this method, he reads Icons as symptoms for something else. A specific Icon may help us to understand the artist’s personality but also more importantly, the civilization and era in which this artist lived5. In using the science of Iconology and its findings, relevant to my research, I use this analysis to create my own Icons.

I also use the approaches of the Iconoclast and Iconophile and embrace them today as Post Iconoclast and Post Iconophile. Iconoclasts and Iconophiles use contradictory approaches that oppose and support the existence of Christian religious Icons. When Icons were first created in the 4th century and became part of the everyday life of the Christian believers, the Iconoclasts were against the idea of cementing concepts of the religious sublime through visuals.

Iconoclast whitewashing icons in a large pile, drawing made by Iconophiles, 9th century (fig. 2)

Iconoclasm is an ancient act based in theological concepts which can be witnessed from ancient Egypt through to the Roman Empire and the Reformation era. In the old testament God says: ‘You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.’ Or in Hebrew

This command led to the concept of Iconoclasm in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. ‘Sabotaging’ is an Iconoclast methodology for destroying beliefs that are not aligned with the ruling ideology. For example, over the last 8 years of Islamic fundamentalism in Syria, terrorists demolished sculptures in archeological sites, which for them represented illegitimate beliefs.

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7 נמעת ב, כ.
Around the year 730, Byzantine Emperor Leo III banned the production and the use of icons in churches. Iconoclasm became the official dogma of the orthodox church. Iconoclasts were aggressive towards any kind of existing icon. The most popular expression and evidence for this aggressiveness was the sabotaging of the faces of martyrs and saints in any kind of medium; reliefs, wooden paintings, frescos and sculptures.

There was also Iconoclast violence against icons through drawings made by Iconophiles. Both sides agreed that icons were powerful and they had a huge impact on their contemporaries. Eventually the Iconoclast era was crushed in 843 when the church declared that attacking icons was heresy. Since then, icons have been used in public spaces and private homes. Robin Cormack discusses some of the controversial questions around the role of icons during the early period of Christianity: ‘It is difficult for us to understand today what thoughts went through the minds of the first viewers of these early icons. The common experience of this audience also involved the veneration of martyrs’ bodies and relics… Did they think that the immortal souls of the saints, or even that of the virgin, were somehow inside the icon? Or was the image
rather a memento of the saints’ lives on earth, before they entered paradise at the moment of death?⁸

The deeper I dig into the world of Icons, the more I am exposed to the huge impact that Icons have on one’s thought. The Iconoclasts’ fear of the impact of Icons seems to still be relevant to our lives. In a way, the Iconoclast, as in Judaism, resisted the formation of the visuality of religious concepts: it seems to evoke questions about the philosophy of Christianity⁹. On the other hand, the Iconophiles fought for the creation and existence of religious Icons, as the Icons served well the formation of the Christian dogma. They knew how important and how powerful Icons could be to Christian believers. These fears of icons, as manifested by both Iconoclasts Iconophiles, created representations of martyrs, Jesus and Mary “which were not ‘real’ compared to works from classical antiquity.”¹⁰ Martin Kemp writes on the early iconography of the Madonna and Child: “She does not look like us; she is not in our realm; she is not of our time or of any time; her spirit is effectively present, if not exactly in the image but transcendentally discernible through it.”¹¹ Artists and their patrons felt less like sinners when they created unrealistic representations of the Madonna and Christ. In doing so they didn’t cross the lines of the old testimony’s commandment which prohibited the creation of any representation or idolatry of other Gods and any kind of images or sculptures resembling humans.

Renaissance art made a shift: “painters and patrons alike were fascinated by the idea that art could not only be used to tell the sacred story in a moving way, but might serve to mirror a fragment of the real world.”¹² Mary and Jesus became human although they didn’t lose their sacred symbolism and attributes. Artists used the already familiar narratives and themes, however, the human representations were aligned with the new technologies of the time and discoveries of perspective.

My practice invites a confrontation between the two opposite doctrines of Iconoclasts and Iconophiles. As I consider myself a Post-Iconophile, one that supports icons

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⁹ Ibid.
¹¹ Ibid.
beyond their narrow religious context, I continue the tradition of “icon making” through the understanding of the importance of art as a mediator of ideas and narratives, however, I am not a traditional ‘Icon Maker’, one who creates Christian icons for religious purposes. I also define myself as Post-Iconoclast, I resist old patriarchal Iconography. I make interventions into the tradition of religious Icons, which could be perceived as acts of violence against patriarchal ideas.

In this context, it is also important to understand the concept of the “master”. According to the canonical art historical narrative, HE was an artist (male artist) who was invited by various patrons or the church to create commissioned artworks. These masters usually had schools where they taught the younger generation their technical manners, style, philosophy and agenda.\textsuperscript{13} When E.H Gombrich speaks about the “masters” of Renaissance art in his canonical book the \textit{Story of Art}, he rarely mentions the women artists of the time. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, elaborated on the phenomena of ignoring and excluding the “Great Mistress” from the narrative of art history. In their book \textit{Old Mistress}, they gave the stage to women artists, aiming to bring about more awareness and equalise women’s fantastic works of art over the course of history.

Meaningful relationships between patrons and artists were formed during the renaissance period. “\textit{Patrons now collected not only antique sculptures but also works by modern artists. Works of art were no longer solely valued in terms of their material cost but were also praised for their lifelike qualities, for their intellectual content or complexity in iconography and design}”.\textsuperscript{14} Private wealthy, powerful, political patrons or the church were made famous by artists’ works. In return, the patrons payed the artists regular salaries. With these relationships the artists lost some of their artistic freedom, “\textit{Intellectual advisers drew up iconographic programmes for painters to execute}”\textsuperscript{15}. Needing to constantly negotiate their artistic visions and agendas, artists’ works had to conform to their patron’s agendas and philosophy. Were the ‘Great Masters’, imprisoned under a set of rules themselves or did they create these rules with their artworks?

\textsuperscript{13} E.H Gombrich, \textit{The Story of Art}, Phaidon, London and NY, 2016, p. 184
\textsuperscript{14} Hollingsworth Mary, Patronage in Sixteenth Century Italy, John Murray, London, 1996, p. 3
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid p.4
I consider my works to be ‘new Icons’; in some works, I create new secular narratives, these works depart from private moments and stories that I consider as holding the potential to evoke universal narratives and make viewers reflect. In other works, I create a specific dialogue with traditional Iconography such as the Virgin and Child, the Sacrifice of Isaac and Judith and Holofernes. This dialogue begins in the title and the theme of the work, and continues with the body’s proportion, colors and light. Together, these components make my work ‘new Icons’. For example, Mary falling asleep while breastfeeding her baby in the work ‘Sleeping Madonna’ (see Breaching the Contract p.76). When the viewer approaches to read this new Icon, their subconscious is already filled with imagery of the traditional Madonna and Child’s iconography. As I create such a new Icon, I maintain the tradition of Icon Making, therefore my practice can be called ‘Post-Iconophile’ and at the same time, I use Post Iconoclasm as a guerrilla terrorist act, to conceptually sabotage rather than physically sabotage historical Iconography. The Madonna rejects her role as the perfect and ideal mother, she becomes human, she dares to fall asleep.

I go back into art history and face the Renaissance Icons; I argue with them and challenge them by using their language, symbolism and themes, changing their original meanings and narratives in a non-physical violent mode. (For example see Breaching the contract p.60) It is essential to differentiate between violence towards art, and works of art which deal with human violence, as some of my works do depict and discuss violence, or potential violence, such as the work Mine, 2012 where I hold a knife to my son (See ‘Breaching the Contract’ p. 76).

I would like to expand the discussion around the term “non-physical violent mode”. The Renaissance masterpieces cemented conventions through beauty and perfection rather than in acts of violence. It is harder to understand the volume of those actions as there are no scars or physical traces left on the woman’s body. It’s harder to accuse them of violence against women when no physical torture is being witnessed. This is a sophisticated way of enforcing a social order covered by an “innocent” and “harmless” facade.
Iconowlogy

Four different approaches to Icons were used in the past study of art history; Iconography, Iconology, Iconoclasm and Iconophilia. Each of those four approaches sought to educate spectators and debate the meaning of Icons and what they symbolise. Icons were viewed as serving the ideology of their creators, and the religions establishments. These approaches required the viewer to understand Icons from the artists’ and the artworks’ context, depending on the climate; cultural, religious and social structures in which the Icons were made.

In the 21st century, the world changed dramatically with the appearance of new technologies and economies. These changes led to a digital revolution where information can be transmitted in a matter of seconds and even less. Flights became affordable due to the emergence of low-cost airline companies, which have allowed people to physically and easily move around the globe. Easily crossing between cultures, people physically and digitally transmitting, consuming and creating content based on their very personal experiences in “real time”, has produced the fluidity of knowledge known as ‘Multiculture’.

‘Multiculture’ offers an endless variety of products and images, a lot of everything and as fast as possible. The pre-digital viewer’s cultural exposure was limited to the time and place they were born and only a few had the privilege of travelling and consuming far away cultures. The contemporary viewer however, has the ability to fuse and layer images, cultures, and media. These new ways of perceiving, transmitting and processing information created contemporary art, and also contemporary viewers. In the light of the super-fast, self-educated and exposed viewer of the 21st century, the approach to Icons needs to be calibrated. We now need to also look at Icons the way they are perceived by the contemporary viewer, regardless of their historical context. What is the impression Icons make on the contemporary viewer in a flick of a second, now? I would like to dare and suggest a new way of dealing with the study of Icons and their meanings - I call it the fifth way, Iconowlogy, and suggest it as a new prism, a new original method, that will bridge the gap of the predigital era and today.
Iconowlogy is a term I want to introduce into the realm of art, art studies and art history. It adds the layer of the ‘here and now’, the private ‘now’ of the viewer, to the methods of Iconography, and Iconology, used in the study of art. Iconowlogy does not take into consideration the context in which the Icon itself was created or its initial meanings as Iconography, Iconology, Iconoclasm and Iconophilia do, but rather the context of the contemporary individual reader and reactor who views an Icon in a specific and personal time on their private timeline. Unlike Iconography or Iconology, which are based on set of agreed symbols and attributes aiming to unify the human understanding into shared meanings, the research of Iconowlogy is dependent on the spectator’s individual reading. Reading Icons from the subjective ‘now’ point of view allows for multiple individual readings, and as a result, individual responses to Icons created in the past. These create multiple new narratives and new possibilities to exist. It enables the story of the Icon to be one with many paths and different endings.

Iconowlogy describes my own working method in this research and could be a working method for other artists, using personal knowledge and experience as the main tool to redefine or recreate Icons conceived throughout history. Iconowlogy does so by creating new Icons that add a new layer to the reading of art history. A layer dedicated to re-examining Icons created by Renaissance masters. Iconowlogy asks questions about Renaissance art such as; why do the mother and child keep playing the same role repeatedly? Does she never feel tired or upset? Or why is the role of the mother, Mary, depicted in Michelangelo's Pietà, as so reserved and silent while holding the body of her dead son in her arms? Iconowlogy does not meet the demands of iconoclasts to destroy all icons of faith. It opens a new layer of viewing the past. An intimate, highly personalized dialogue with art by researchers/artists.

I have added Iconowlogy into my Icon reading and Icon making practice research. My works will be therefore an outcome of all the 5 different methodologies as they are my main tool in breaching the Visual Contracts devised by artists and the clergy in the Renaissance era for the entrapment and passive acceptance of the woman’s role at home and in society. Iconowlogy in particular is the foundation and the core of my art and practice.

This fifth new method allowed me to read Icons as Visual Contracts. I look at Christian
Iconography and biblical narratives as they are portrayed in Christian Iconography from the Iconowlogy prism. This allows me to make connections between the endless number of images which are fused into my mind every day through my travels, the media and the web, creating cross cultural, interfaith narratives, personal stories from the Holy Land, my homeland, with western codes. From this mesh of visual information and personal background, alongside the traditional four other approaches, “Visual Contracts” shine out, compelling me to try and make a change. My works are a direct response to Visual Contracts such as the Visual Contract of Mother and Child, the Visual Contract of Bereavement, the Visual Contract of the Sacrifice and the Visual Contract of Beheading.

I am not a Christian, not even a European, and I still experience these Visual Contracts and icons, and so I feel the urge to explore and breach the contracts by creating my own very personal icons and placing them alongside the old ones, allowing for a new reading of art history, icons and the depiction of the woman’s role. Iconowlogy, presents a personal reading that opens up questions rather than offering absolute knowledge. It can be found in the crossroads of this research; first, volume one - The Contract - is my research into art history, which in reading specific themes in art history, is intertwined with my personal experiences, knowledge and maternal subjectivity. Later, Iconowlogy can be found in the nonlinear reading of the two volumes of The Contract and Breaching the Contract. Iconowlogy naturally thrives in the gaps between knowledge, practice and theory. This gap also invites the reader to create his or her own Iconowlogies to my suggested narratives.
Icons became an important part of Christian religious practice at the start of the 4th century. These were mainly paintings on wood depicting the stories of Christian saints and martyrs. The religious “icons culture” was, and still is, both public (at church) and private (at home). Since the first Christian icons, the word ICON has expanded and accrued more cultural meanings outside the religious context. Icon has become a word that refers also to music stars, TV idols, urban architectonic landmarks, and other symbols related to the glamorous world, as well as all interactions in the digital interface.
In the past, religious icons enabled people to maintain stories that they heard maybe once in their lives from a professional storyteller. As a result, icons established relationships, hierarchies and power relations. This leads me to investigate the hidden motivation for the creation of icons and ask, what and who do those Icons serve?

The more I examine the impact of classical icons, the more I understand that the visual effect of an icon on one’s visual memory and mind is irreversible. I am particularly concerned with the creation of icons of women. In order to better understand Renaissance icons, I am looking at pre-Renaissance and ancient artefacts. I begin this exploration with the Venus of Willendorf figurine.

Venus of Willendorf, limestone, approx. 25,000 BCE, Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria (fig. 5)

This female figure, dating back to 24000 BCE, was found in what is now Austria by the archaeologist Szombathy, who named it “Venus” in 1908\(^1\). This figurine is the very earliest artefact discovered so far to represent women, in the entire history of

humankind. The importance of women in the Paleolithic era is measured by the amount of findings of female figurines with respect to male figurines, and the amount of effort in producing such a complex object. Her hair is plaited, she is full with sex, femininity and fertility, therefore, it is possible to interpret this as an image of the ideal woman of the Paleolithic period.\textsuperscript{17}

The archetype of Venus transmigrates and is reinterpreted in different cultures, yet, the performance of the Great Mother in both societies - Matriarchal and Patriarchal - seems to be very similar. Erich Neumann writes on the symbolism of women as vessels: “woman = body = vessel = world”. This is the basic formula of the matriarchal stage, i.e., of a human phase in which the Feminine is preponderant over the Masculine, the unconscious over the ego and consciousness.\textsuperscript{18}

Thousands of years later, leaving the ancient world behind, which duplicated the concept of the symbolic, fertile mother, I examine the evolution of Venus. I then look at ‘Venus’ of Botticelli,\textsuperscript{19} by using Aby Warburg’s research. Warburg, a German art historian and cultural theorist who researched the influence of antiquity in Renaissance art, describes and points out the relationship between the Antique world and the Renaissance. In his essay \textit{Sandro Botticelli’s Birth of Venus and Spring, An Examination of Concepts of Antiquity in the Italian Early Renaissance},\textsuperscript{20} 1893, he traces evidence from antiquity; poems, reliefs, coins, to support his desire to fill the gap between antiquity and Renaissance art. Warburg outlines conceptual migration of the antique from classical Greek and Roman culture to the Venus of Botticelli. He demonstrates how classical literature, thoughts and visuals, were reformed in Botticelli’s paintings as a case study of Renaissance style. However, Venus as a symbol of motherhood, conception, birth protection, nature and fertility, had long gone and had been replaced by the mother-goddess\textsuperscript{21} and later by Mary, a mother whose pregnancy was announced by an angel, the far opposite of the first figurine.

\textsuperscript{17} A. Stav, \textit{My Fair Lady: the ideal of feminine beauty in western culture}, Tamuz, Israel, 2013, P.21.
\textsuperscript{18} Neumann Erich, \textit{The Great Mother}, Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, London, 1955, p.43
\textsuperscript{19} Sandro Botticelli, \textit{The Birth of Venus}, tempera, Uffizi Gallery, 1484-84
\textsuperscript{20} Warburg Aby, \textit{The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity}, Los Angeles, 1999, p. 90-112
Icons are detailed and complex and yet, simple and abstract. Icons can be understood as a tool for implanting thoughts and ideas of small but powerful groups of elite people over common people. In this research, I look at how icons managed to enforce and create social, national and political power systems. I call them Visual Contracts, following the idea of Ariella Azoulay, an Israeli theorist of photography. In her book “The Civil Contract of Photography”, Azoulay suggests that photography provides a space of citizenship for disadvantaged groups, mainly Palestinians and women. She argues that there is a civil contract between a photographed person, the photographer, and the viewer of the photograph. This contract enables the viewer to take an active part by reassuring the citizenship of those deprived groups. She sees photographs as a physical space of existence. She argues that dealing with a photograph as a physical space is a political act. I would like to work with this concept in relation to my thoughts about Renaissance paintings as Visual Contracts and emotional prisons.
In earlier centuries, when most of the population was illiterate, sculptures and paintings of narratives from the New Testament constituted visual mediators between the holy text and its believers. These images functioned as moral tales that educated followers. Photography however, changed the rules of these Visual Contracts. Photography, like painting, is highly subjective. The photographer makes choices similar to those of a painter; both choose their subject matters, both crop, frame and impose a restricted, even ideological point of view on the viewer. However, unlike in painting, which is perceived purely as a representation of life, photography is perceived as ‘real life’ – a crop of life itself. By default, photography is seen as more ‘real’ due to the technique and process of making, therefore, it is often perceived as a documentation of real life rather than a manifestation of ideological and political decisions. The camera and the photographer witnessed and documented, and in doing so, they verified the existence of events such as wars and personal life. I wish to explore the possibility that Renaissance art and icons educated women to accept their destiny without any anger or loss of self-control.

Here I wish to explore the deeper levels of icons as emotional prisons through a research into myths. In his book “The Myth of the Eternal Return”22 Mircea Eliade distinguished between two different “times”, the profane and the sacred. 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 the myth again and again. He expands this idea and says “one re-lives the myth in the cyclical time as if it was the first time.”23 Joseph Campbell24 also traces the journey of the 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 with a cyclical journey which all the heroes went through. This cyclical journey contains three stages: departure - initiation - return.

Levi-Strauss also deals with this phenomena as even though myths were meant to be unique, many commonalities were found in different cultures around the globe.

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23 Ibid.
“Mythical stories are, or seem, arbitrary, meaningless, absurd, yet nevertheless they seem to reappear all over the world. A ‘fanciful’ creation of the mind in one place would be unique—you would not find the same creation in a completely different place. My problem was trying to find out if there was some kind of order behind this apparent disorder...”

The cyclical nature of myths as Eliade, Campbell and Levi-Strauss describe, reveals the impossibility of questioning certain themes in art history. The loop results in an inevitable repetition; I therefore understand the loop as a powerful tool for creating and cementing concepts which eventually affect the reality. (More about the loop can be found in ‘Breaching the Contract’ p. 76)

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PIETÀ
The Visual Contract of Bereavement

A. BETWEEN

Mother

AND

Church

B. BETWEEN

Mother

AND

State
Michelangelo, Pietà, 1498/9 (fig. 7)
The visual history of the Christian Pietà is the history of the formation of the worst possible moment in the life of a mother; the moment in which she receives the body of her dead son and holds it in her arms. The main character in Christianity is Jesus and the second most important figure is Mary, his mother. These two figures are the most depicted characters in western art history in many different forms.

According to Christian belief, Jesus, a Jew whose Hebrew name was יושע (Yeshua meaning salvation), was born in Bethlehem to the Virgin Mary by Immaculate Conception. In this work I discuss the last part of the mother and son relationship. Mary, is depicted holding her 33-year-old dead son in her arms after he was brought down from the cross. This mother-son scene is not described at all in the New Testament. This scene is visually formed and brought to Christianity for the first time in the 14th century. Earlier versions of the Pietà are known from the 13th century, this theme called ‘Lamentation’, I will elaborate on this theme later in this chapter (p. 38).

Women saw the Virgin Mary as a role model for all women and mothers. This image soon swept the western world and today I ask, whether Mary has become an unshakable icon for the correct conduct of bereaved mothers world-wide, crossing borders and nationalities, beyond the western world where it was first created.
Catherine E. King writes about what she calls the "ideology of conduct". In her book "Renaissance Woman Patrons", she reveals that during the renaissance period, handbooks about women’s (wives or widows) proper conduct were written and studied: "There are few direct statements about how women might control or present images and buildings from this period. However, some guide as to what the rules were is given in the series of treatises on the correct behavior of maidens, wives and widows, written by men."26 The conduct handbooks, which we draw on are variegated group of texts. While some were addressed to women, with a relatively conciliatory tone, others were written for men, with stern advice for keeping women in order."27 There were no books for bereaved mothers, therefore Mary in the Pietà, in the Visual Contract of Bereavement, functions like the guidebook for the bereaved mother. She is the model of what to do or not do when one faces the moment of sacrifice. Should you cry? Should you be angry? Should you be acceptant? Should you sit? Should you stand? Should

27 Ibid p.21
you speak or stay silent? The Pietà becomes ‘the bible’ of the bereaved mother and any other expression of grief is not accepted. Other expressions not aligned with the narrative of the church/state, may result in serious implications such as social bullying and stigmatization.

Not unlike the way Mary held Jesus when he was a baby, the Pietà describes Mary holding her dead son after he was taken down from the cross. This theme is one of the most known themes in Christian art. I look at the depiction of this moment as it appears in Michelangelo’s Pietà (1498/9). This sculpture seems to form and finalize the clauses of this Visual Contract between bereaved mothers and the church.

Michelangelo’s marble sculpture of the Pietà is slightly smaller than human size. The body of Jesus is poised in such a way that one can almost feel its weight, Mary’s face so small within the endless length of cloth wrapping her. Mary’s figure is divided into two sections: the ‘realistic Mary’ found in the upper part of the body, while the ‘abstract Mary’ is at the lower part of the sculpture, where her dress is disproportionately long and serves as a display podium for Jesus’s body. Earlier versions of the Pietà, such as Giotto’s Lamentation depicts the scene divided into earth and sky. On earth, Mary, the mother, is hugging Jesus, she doesn’t seem to be angry, falling apart or losing her mind, she is merely holding him with love. Jesus is lying on Mary’s lap, the convention of the Pietà’s image, Mary is looking at his face from a close distance, almost kissing his lips. The intimate scene is wrapped in human warmth. Jesus is clean from blood; his body seems loose and relaxed. When one looks at the sky, the angels dramatically express their sorrow, and Mary’s role becomes clearer. She is the ultimate bereaved mother, the keeper of the existing order of faith. Someone else will fall apart instead of her, the angels in the sky above. The divine creatures have a bird’s eye view and they are the ones who see the full picture and therefore cannot stay indifferent.

They are devastated by the son’s death, and it is portrayed in their physical reactions, which can be described as hysterical; one of them is tearing his hair out, the other is

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28 For example The Small Cowper Madonna, 1505 Oil on panel, 59.5 x 44 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.
29 A depiction of Mary and her son surrounded by other characters and still not isolated to the known mother and child Pietà.
desperately crying into his cape. Each one of them is immersed in a state of deep mourning. They are allowed to show their sorrow. Mary is not.

Giotto di Bondone, *Lamentation*, 1305, (fig. 8)

The Arena Chapel in Padua hosts this scene together with other scenes of the life of Jesus, his death and resurrection: all of the frescoes were made by Giotto. All of these scenes include large areas painted in immersive deep blue.

In the essay *Giotto’s Joy*[^30], Kristeva ties the color blue in the Arena Chapel to the perception of ‘I’. She brings in Johannes Purkinje’s law, which states that “in dim light, short wave-length prevails over long ones; thus, before sunrise, blue is the first color to appear”. Later she says “…the ‘self’ (perceived at the mirror stage between the sixth and eighteenth month) - comes into play after color perceptions.”[^31] Therefore blue, the first color that is seen, is woven into the first notion of the ‘self’.

[^31]: Ibid.
Kristeva continues, and argues that by using this blue, Giotto created a non-linear narrative of “the opposite side of the norm, the anti-norm, the forbidden.”\textsuperscript{32} “It seems as if the narrative signified of Christian painting were upheld by an ability to point to its own dissolution; the unfolding narrative (of transcendence) must be broken in order for what is both extra- and anti- narrative to appear: nonlinear space of historical men, law, and fantasy.”\textsuperscript{33} She claims that this overwhelming blue creates a non-linear narrative. She perceives the “blue” as a rebellion and ideological act which goes against the “formal painting” and the norm of Christian linear narrative.

Looking at Giotto’s blue, together with these scenes, raises the possibility that the artist created a physical, emotional and educational experience, whereby “I” and “blue” have the same meaning. In this experience, the viewer/ visitor at the Arena Chapel is forced to embrace concepts and ideas because this experience shapes a physical interaction between the eye, the brain and the body.

Perhaps, the visitor is being physically forced to become one with the linear and nonlinear narratives that Giotto created? And if so, is it correct to say that the Arena Chapel is a sophisticated Visual Contract that forces a total acceptance and identification of the concepts “I” = “blue” = “viewer”? Giotto was the founder and creator of the rules of the Pietà as a Visual Contract. He enforced this visual contract using the most primary sensation of the “self” and the ability to see.

\textbf{I. The journey from the Arena chapel to the first Pietàs in Germany}

Many recognize the Pietà as one of the most important scenes in Christian art. Today Mary is an icon of “the” bereaved mother, while Jesus is “the” ultimate victim. However, this bond between Jesus and Mary, which creates the Pietà scene, is not taken from the Gospels, like the crucifixion story for example. The deposition of the Pietà emerged later in Christian liturgy and became an integral part of Christian art in 14\textsuperscript{th} century AD.

The most interesting and clear example is a deposition in German art following the

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 215
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 214
Black Death epidemic (1347-1351) that killed millions of people in Europe. In Germany, the Pietà becomes an isolated scene where Mary holds her son, the dead Christ on her lap. The Pietà was created out of the chaos of the Black Death, while the streets of Europe were filled with tragic scenes of many dead children being cradled in their helpless mothers’ arms.

Following from the stories and images of my family who fled Europe and the Holocaust, is part of my personal interest in the Pietà. The icon of the Pietà, is very familiar for me, not just from the history of art, but also from the everyday life in the Middle East where mothers are either forced to sacrifice their sons in wars, or in guerrilla attacks.

German Gothic Pietàs are different to the Renaissance Pietàs because of the excess of blood that flows from Jesus and the tortured body. The pain can be seen traced on Jesus’s body, not only the suffering and tortured body but the final state of death. It is not the image in which Jesus is in a state of ‘sleeping-for-a-moment’ that typifies the Renaissance Pietàs: in the German Pietàs Jesus is dead. First of all the stiff bleeding body and its open mouth unmask the state of death itself and portrays its full manifestation. The second motif is the size of Jesus’ body. He seems to be smaller than an adult, resembling a child or baby. Mary seems to hold her baby son Jesus, once again. The German sculptures are out of proportion. They are not at all realistic as we will later see in the Renaissance Pietàs. Despite the unrealistic description, they do describe a state of total death, something that also changed when this scene travelled from Germany, where it was called “Vesperbild”, to France and then on to Italy where it was given its Italian name “Pietà”. 
Looking back at the beautiful Pietà of Michelangelo, Mary doesn’t cry. Jesus lays on her lap, his hands bare showing the symbolic holes made by the nails that attached him to the cross. His body is shapely and delicate and no signs of pain or suffering are to be seen. Whereas 14th century German predecessors of the Pietà depicted the blood oozing out of Jesus; he was stiff and dead, here, Michelangelo’s Pietà depicts Jesus sound asleep and saved from anguish. I look at his face and read in it an expression of pleasure from being on Mary’s lap. Mary seems to be very young, around Jesus’s age or maybe even younger. Surprisingly Mary’s gaze is turned to the direction of her son’s penis. An observer unfamiliar with the ethos of the Pietà, could perhaps conclude that this is not a scene of mother and son, but that of a young couple.

This sculpture allows me to see the power of beautiful masterpieces and the impact it has on both individuals and society. I would like to suggest reading this sculpture as if it had gathered the canon of the Pietà and standardized the complex relationship between bereaved mothers and the religious establishment, and later with the secular
establishment, the state, to create an emotional and ideological prison for bereaved parents.

II. Domestic Pietà

Unknown Photographer, Memorial Photos, Victorian Era (fig. 10, 11)

The legacy and impact of the standardized representation of the Pietà can be seen in these post-mortem photographs which came into being with the invention of photography. Describing dead children lying on their mother’s lap, just as in classical paintings and sculptures, these photos reflect the essence of the Pietà. However, here, the photographs show the actual dead body of the child on his mother’s lap, and not a representation of death.

With the invention of photography in the middle of the 19th century, memorial photographs became quite common. In those times most of the families had suffered the loss of a child due to the inability of medical practice to heal diseases. These photographs were the answer to the families’ need to eternalize their dead children and so they became household objects.

With the invention of the camera, documentary photography gave way to Pietà
photographs which were completely faithful to the visual iconography of the religious Pietàs. In those images there is a mother with a dead child’s body, gazing acceptingly into infinity. These classical Pietà paintings and sculptures aspired to capture the moment as part of the idea of the painting as a window to reality. But perhaps, they were actually a collection of educational gestures freeriding on Mary’s and every mother’s most private moment?

With the invention of photography, the term “catching the moment” got a different, fuller interpretation, and the moment was captured using documentary methods. But even this new, truer to reality moment was influenced by the limitations of technology and the emotional aspects that created a staged element. The photographer used to ask the photographed individuals to sit in front of the camera, without moving for a prolonged period of time in order to catch the exact details on the relatively insensitive negative. This was perhaps the only way, in those days, to take a focused picture of a child, only when they were completely still, that is to say only when they were dead. For example, in this “still-life” photograph below, two siblings stand near their dead sister. The difference between “still” and “life” is very dramatic. (fig. 12)
III. Pietà in photojournalism

In the summer of 2014, daily newspapers across the world, presented this image of Suha, a Palestinian bereaved mother (fig.13). She is holding her cellphone and shares with the world a photograph of her dead son. The posing of the image suits perfectly one of the rules of the Renaissance Pietà: the mother is sitting and holding her dead son on her lap. In this 2014 Pietà the mother doesn’t hold her son’s physical body. The son is projected to the viewer in the small screen of her smartphone.

Regularly, I see photos of bereaved mothers in newspapers and media from different parts of the world and I read them as an evolution of the Pietà.

Following the canon of the Pietà, they sit frontal to the viewer and show no emotion while holding photographs of their dead children, instead of holding their son’s bodies. Perhaps because there was no body left from the battlefield, or maybe because photographic representation is an integral part of our social being. Furthermore, death
in our postmodern epoch has become less domestic and more often reserved to hospitals. I cannot imagine an image presenting a staged photograph of a bereaved mother sitting in her living room while holding the body of her dead son on her lap as we saw in the Victorian era or Renaissance paintings and sculptures.

The icon of the Pietà becomes the frame into which Suha and many other women fit themselves, or find themselves being placed by photojournalists. The frame and its rules are always there and within this unchanging format, the images of a specific mother and her child keep changing. In this model, the mother unconditionally accepts the destinies of both her son and herself as an eternally bereaved mother.
These are photos of bereaved mothers from all over the world, revealing the extent of this multicultural and cross border evolution of the Pietà (fig. 14)

My aim is to explore the evolution of the Pietà as an ideological place for bereavement. I try to separate the Pietà from its religious context and approach it as a secular and civil Pietà, one in which there is no role for God or faith. The civil Pietà takes a primary role in socio-political civil structures. The civil Pietà is the bereaved mother, usually the one who lost her son in the war.
The discussion of personal sacrifice for the sake of society is fundamental when it comes to borders, nationality, protection, defending the homeland and war. The Civil Pietà, outlines the rules between the woman and the state. Those rules can be completely secular and yet religion, be it Christianity, Islam or Judaism, might be woven into this civil contract, as Azoulay calls it, in times and places when fundamental powers take control of the state. The Pietà, representing the ultimate sacrifice of mother and son, seems to be a basic condition for a functioning national system during times of conflict and war.

These photos of bereaved mothers, holding the photographs of their dead children which became icons to their families, also reminds me of The Crucifixion by Rogier van der Weyden. In this painting (fig.15), Mary is holding the cross while Jesus is still on it. Van der Weyden describes the scene using typical Dutch realism. Mary is crying, her face full of sorrow and tears. This is definitely not the way Mary is supposed to act according to the codes of Italian Renaissance painting. Above her in the sky are the angels; they appear as threatening shadows full of sadness and grief. On the right of the triptych is Saint Veronica, holding a white fabric with the image of Jesus’s face on
it depicted as though he was alive. Veronica and the seemingly living Christ hold the answer to this shift in Mary’s behaviour pattern.

![Image of Rogier van der Weyden, Crucifixion Triptych, 1440–45 (fig 16)](image)

It is in her story and its depiction that we find the reason why Mary was allowed to grieve. Veronica was a woman from Jerusalem, who met Jesus on his way to Golgotha Mountain where he was crucified. Jesus was sweating and Veronica offered him her handkerchief. Jesus accepted her offer and when he gave her back the handkerchief, she saw that his face was imprinted on the fabric with his sweat. The image stayed on the fabric and the kind Veronica became a Saint. She is symbolized in Christianity in the form of a woman holding a fabric with Jesus’s face imprinted on it. The attribute appears as a motif in different paintings, sculptures and stained-glass art.

Jesus’s face in the fabric doesn’t stop there, I find a new link between the scenes in Rogier van der Weyden work and the way mothers hold the images of the dead sons for the world to see. I also point out a new meaning for Veronica as she takes the role of the perfect mother, a position formerly reserved for Mary. In this painting Mary is depicted expressing the human reaction of sorrow to the loss of her son. This reaction contradicts Mary’s usual role that would be depicted in a Pietà. Instead, in
Van der Weyden’s triptych Veronica is the one fulfilling the role of the ideal mother. She becomes a pedestal or perhaps flag bearer, an object in the story of Christ. (See ‘Breaching the Contract’ p.26)

Could it be that Van der Weyden allowed his Mary to be realistic, emotional, devastated and weak, collapsed at the foot of the cross, because he had assured that through Veronica’s posture and role, the viewer still receives the message, the right educational point of view? This comes in the form of Veronica who, standing distant from Mary, demonstrates to her and to the viewer how an ideal mother in a Pietà should behave. Humbly accepting.

If we isolate Veronica’s part of the triptych and exhibit it as a solo piece, the cut-out image would look exactly like a Pietà should, and did; like a perfect repetition to the canon of the Pietà that we very often see in modern media, a woman holding a photograph of her dead son killed in battle. Here the depiction of Veronica in Mary’s role is a code, a generic name and icon for a bereaved mother. The gap between 1440 and 2019 seems smaller than ever.

I go on to present a selection of images from contemporary visual art and culture, depicting the Pietà. These images interpret the Pietà in a different manner than when it was first created; in one Pietà both Mary and Jesus are women; the other presents a self portrait of the artist as Mary and Jesus as is his father. Male and male, old woman with young man, woman and woman. However, all those images repeat, duplicate and continue the visual contract of the iconic Pietà despite the change in the gender role or in the subject. The main motif of total acceptance of the sacrifice as a concept, is common to all images. Here I argue, that even though the subject matter of the iconic Pietà might change with time, the Visual Contract is still valid. The concept of sacrifice is not being challenged. (See ‘Breaching the Contract’ p. 20 - 33)

Then I ask again, why do artists choose to maintain this visual contract throughout the generations? Does this depiction imply that ‘we’ as a society cannot control our social behaviour? What is the role of the artists if not to reflect, challenge and point out faults?
Left: Guerra de la Paz, *Pietà*, recycled clothes, 2006 (fig. 19) Right: Clare Bottomley, *Pietà* (fig. 20)

Left: Sam Jinks, *Still Life (Pietà)*, 160x123cm, silicon, paint & human hair, 2007 (fig. 17) Right: David LaChapelle, *Pietà with Courtney Love*, photograph, 2006 (fig. 18)
In this chapter I traced the historical timeline of the Pietà. This was constructed as a result of an Iconological study – a partly educated research and partly personal associative journey that included the mixing and matching of visuals and media from different geographic places, cultures and religions into a coherent and linear argument, formulating what I call the “Visual Contract of Bereavement”. In this conclusion, I wish to go back to Michelangelo’s work and examine two Pietàs he created 65 years apart. One Pietà marked the beginning of the artist’s career and the other, the end of his career, both Pietàs were considered masterpieces. Looking at these two sculptures made 65 years apart, I would like to suggest that they represent ‘The Contract’ (Pietà, 1499) and ‘Breaching the Contract’ (Rondanini Pietà, 1564).
Michelangelo created his most famous Pietà when he was only 24 years old. In this research I read this sculpture as a visual contract, which created a horrific emotional and ideological prison for mothers; the mother must be perfect, submissive and beautiful. The implications of Michelangelo’s Pietà as a Visual Contract, as I understand them, were enormous, and created an almost irreversible damage for the next generations. This sculpture is the ultimate Pietà, when one wants to describe what a Pietà is, the first example will be this sculpture of Michelangelo. Weeks away from his 89th birthday and only few days away from his death, Michelangelo worked on his last piece, a work in progress which he never completed, named Rondanini Pietà. Unlike his earlier version of the Pietà which was perfect and ideal, this work is rough, unfinished, unpolished, imbalanced, imperfect, the opposite of his earlier work.

The Rondanini Pietà is made out of a single piece of marble, Jesus seems to be inseparable from Mary’s body; he was carved out of his mother or she was carved out of her son. Jesus seems to simultaneously be born and die as part of his mother’s body. The double death of Mary and Jesus as it is reflected in the Rondanini Pietà, resonates in the double coffin for mother and child (See breaching the contract p. 26). Is it Mary that holds her son, or is it Jesus supporting Mary? At once, Jesus seems to support his grieving mother with his death, can a death be a pillar in a mother’s life? Have they both become a silent pillar with Jesus’s death? Supporting an invisible universe of mother and child?

Both Pietàs are related to the private story of Michelangelo who lost his mother when he was only 6 years old. The mother-child narrative was engraved in the stone in one way when the artist was a young man; there he fossilised the heroic death of the son and the idealised mother who is forever able to submissively contain death itself. This work, as I identified as the Visual Contract of Bereavement, created an emotional prison, visually and conceptually shaped in the form of the idealised Mary and Jesus. Michelangelo’s interpretation of this narrative changed entirely as his own death approached. He then understood the mother as human rather than an ideal woman, he then understood the child’s death as a private tragedy rather than a heroic moment to publicly fame.

The mother and child in the Rondanini Pietà are broken and missing, but are made out of one piece, one broken and missing body. This body made out of mother and child, has three arms and three heads. Fighting with himself to find the right way to express his emotions while facing his own death through this theme, Michelangelo worked on this
sculpture for several years. In an earlier version, Jesus had an ‘extra’ polished arm, loosely connected to his dead body. Like a snake, towards his own death, Michelangelo is freeing himself from the concept of ‘The Contract’. He is shedding his old beautiful and ideal death, to the rotten, consumed body. Mary has two heads, perhaps her conscious and subconscious. Like a long exposure photograph or the futurist Umberto Boccioni’s sculpture (Unique Forms of Continuity in Space, 1913) exploring human movement, Mary’s head gesture says ‘NO’- no to the known narrative imposing the death of her son, no to her creator dooming her to be submissive, no to the stone that asks to be polished, no to the viewer who is hungry to admire perfect heroes, no to the Visual Contract of Bereavement.

Michelangelo signed on this work-in-progress stone before he died. He signed on this ambivalent and rebellion state, on Breaching the Contract. With this imperfect, broken, rough, imbalanced, Pietà Michelangelo breached his own contract. I see this sculpture as an apology letter to all dead children and mothers. This sculpture tries to sabotage and reverse the rules of the Pietà that he had created 65 years earlier.

Even though this sculpture is considered a masterpiece, it is tired, it is powerless, like death itself, this sculpture has no means to compete with the beautiful and ideal earlier Pietà. The Golem Michelangelo created in his youth became stronger than his creator. Does it mean that it’s impossible to breach the Visual Contract of Bereavement? Has the Rondanini Pietà breached the Visual Contract of Bereavement? What was it in his 65 years of love, jealousy, hatred and fear that changed Michelangelo mind?

65 years past between the two contradicting Pietàs that Michelangelo created. However, his last Pietà, as this research argues, was not able to radically breach the Visual Contract of Bereavement. It has now been 520 years since his first Pietà and not enough has changed.
-Visual Contract -

BINDING OF ISAAC

*The Visual Contract of Sacrifice - A Mirror to the Visual Contract of Bereavement*

A. BETWEEN

Father

AND

Son

B. BETWEEN

Father

AND

State
Caravaggio, *The sacrifice of Isaac*, 1598 – 1603 (fig. 22)
Alongside Renaissance masterpieces depicting the Christian Pietà as the ultimate sacrifice of the son made by his mother, the biblical story that mirrors the sacrifice is the story of the Binding of Isaac. This is the complimentary story of the sacrifice, this time from the father’s point of view. (Unlike Mary in Christianity, in biblical stories the mother is mainly absent and undiscussed).

The biblical theme of Abraham and Isaac, represent 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.

In this visual contract, Abraham is in a superior position. For example in Caravaggio’s painting (fig. 22), Abraham 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, whereas the child is always passive in Christian iconography. (see ‘Breaching the Contract’ p. 76) the work Mine made from the mother’s point of view, when the child is active).

Alongside depictions of the Binding of Isaac in western culture, this scene is perhaps the most discussed and depicted in Jewish/Israeli art. Artists in Israel are driven by this theme as the sacrifice of the children for the sake of Jewish fate and its relation to the land is an everyday matter. In the catalogue for the exhibition ‘The Sacrifice of Isaac in Israeli Art’, Dr Gideon Ofrat, an Israeli art critic, art historian and specialist in Israeli art wrote: “In Israel, the Sacrifice became a national symbol which represents the tragedy of the Jewish people’s destiny, and particularly the destiny of the sons. Not once, do our Abrahams represent bereaved parents, while the Isaacs are the falling sons.”

The idea of calling warriors as collective sons comes from the bible when God says to Rachel: ‘שוע בנים לבנול’ - the English translation from Jeremiah 31:“Thus says Yahweh [God]: Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be

rewarded, says Yahweh; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your latter end, says Yahweh [God]; and your children\textsuperscript{35} shall come again to their own border.\textsuperscript{36} This biblical concept has been interpolated into the everyday secular and nationalistic Israeli terminology regarding soldiers. It is also interesting that first of all, this idea is addressed to the mother, Rachel in the biblical narrative, however the mother in the Binding of Isaac is absent from the narrative and from its iconographic depiction.

I would like to discuss the idea of national trauma and collective memory in Jewish and Israeli society through the Visual Contract of Sacrifice. From the Babylonian exile, through to European Christian persecutions, to the Holocaust in which millions of Jews were murdered by the Nazis (the most traumatic event of the modern Jewish and Israeli society), Jews have been persecuted for thousands of years. Holding the ‘neurotic stereotype’ Jews, and Israelis as a nation, do share a collective traumatic existence. I choose not to write about the Jewish/Israeli National Trauma here, instead I show the trauma as it reflects on the historical timeline of the Visual Contract of the Sacrifice. For further reading see Yehuda Bauer, Shlomo Sand, Haviva Pedaya and Ronny Miron.

Similar to the Christian calendar based on the birth of Jesus, the colossal event of the Holocaust marked a new unofficial Israeli/Jewish counting from the pivotal moment of the Holocaust onward; the first Generation after the Holocaust (my grandparents), the second Generation (my parents), the third Generation (myself), the fourth Generation (my son). Each generation tells and retells the traumatic story of the sacrifice of the sons from their own point of view. This generational storytelling of the trauma, resonates with the way Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is developed by those who are exposed to traumatic events. In PTSD, one experiences the trauma again and again, it is experienced as if the event is happening in the present even though many years may have passed between the traumatic event and the present (Dr. Liat Steir-Livny, the Open University). The Sacrifice of the Sons becomes a national symbol not only representing the past but also maintaining the continuous narrative of the present. In this research I’m concerned with

\textsuperscript{35} The Hebrew word נב has a dual meaning and therefore it can be translated either as children, or / and as sons.

\textsuperscript{36} Jeremiah 31, Hebrew: Modern World English Bible.
the Visual Contract of the Sacrifice, a reflector of this open wound. Immortal artworks visually pass the traumatic collective memory from one generation to the other, reliving the narrative from different point of views.

Ofrat, who curated the exhibition The Sacrifice of Isaac in Israeli Art, describes how the endeavours of Israeli artists over the short history of Israel have shifted from one character to the other. For example, after the holocaust, most artists were interested in Abraham and his suffering character, he was the bereaved father, he represented the suffering of the Jewish people. Later, the second generation in Israel researched the lamb because for them, it represented a symbol of hope and salvation. As a reaction to the Lebanon war between 1981 and the situation that endured until May 2000, the third generation of artists has focused on Isaac as a critic of the fathers who sent their sons to be sacrificed in wars.

Going back to timeline of this visual contract, the Jewish artist Marc Chagall, fuses both narratives of the Crucifixion with Binding of Isaac into one. (fig. 23) In the foreground of the painting we can see the biblical scene of Abraham and Isaac, while in the background we can see a man whom we can easily recognise as Jesus carrying his own cross, reminiscent of the Via Dolorosa. This painting, like many other of Chagall’s paintings, has interfaith narratives and symbolisms from both Judaism and Christianity. This particular painting conceptually crosses the narratives of the Christian Pietà and the biblical theme of the Binding of Isaac. I see this painting as the best representation for the Visual Contract of the Sacrifice, how mothers (Marys) and fathers (Abrahams) sacrifice their children, often sons.

Aaron Rosen, a specialist of religious thought and art, wrote about Marc Chagall’s interaction with Christian Iconography after he left Russia and moved to Paris: “By coming from outside the Western tradition, Chagall was able to write his own art-historical narrative. In this narrative, Jesus is no longer a messianic figure, as Chagall perceived him in the Orthodox icon tradition, but instead ‘a great poet’. The New Testament - and all the attendant Christian themes and references of Western art - became for Chagall not so much part of a scriptural or religious canon as literary and art-historical canon; one in which Christian stories and symbols signify less about the
Christian faith than they do about Chagall’s own position as a Jewish artist.”

Marc Chagall, *The sacrifice of Isaac*, 1966 (fig. 23)

Kadishman, one of the most well-known artists in Israel, was a shepherd in his youth. This fact shaped his professional life when he chose to devote his life to painting and working with sheep. He was obsessed with sheep, each sheep was different, each sheep could be read as a potential sacrifice to replace human sacrifices made for the sake of the country.

A series of works titled *The Binding of Isaac*, developed from his son’s military service and his mother’s death. For example, in this huge steel sculpture of the Sacrifice, Isaac’s head lays on the ground, above him positioned the lamb, ready to take the

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place of the human sacrifice (fig. 24). The lamb is the hero of Kadishman, while the parents, Abraham and Sarah stand on the side.

Menashe Kadishman, *The sacrifice of Isaac*, 1985 (fig. 24)

**Meeting the Knife**

**Wednesday, September, 6:15pm, Sheperd’s Bush, West London, Iconowlogy.**

I saw the knife reflected in his 9 years old eyes as we left our new local shopping centre. His happy gaze changed in a fraction of a second to be full of horror. Only yesterday we moved in to our new flat and neighborhood, today was already the first day of school, welcome to year five! Excited to return home, we stopped at the shopping centre on the way to buy few more things for our new flat. As we left the centre, I had to push my son to the side of the pavement to protect him and us from a teenage boy running for his life, almost running at us, while 4 other teenagers chased after him. As I checked to see if my son was hurt, he turned his head to look at the situation. I turned my head as well, saw the boys punching each other, measuring our own safety distance as we move. My eyes on his, his eyes on the fight. ‘He has a knife!’ he was crying, ‘mum, he has a knife’. I saw the knife reflected in his 9 year old eyes, the same very knife I had seen so many times in
various artworks throughout history. The hand holding the knife went up, threatening, alarming, scarring the soul but never causing physical harm. This time, neither an angel nor an artist froze the moment long enough in order for it to make sense, if there is any sense at all in this act. On the contrary, it happened so fast, the knife penetrated deep into the boy's flash. It was so fast that I didn't see the act with my own eyes. It seemed like we recreated the artwork *Mine* from 2012 (see breaching the contract p.76) I was busy taking my son away from the knife, from the source of the danger, my maternal instinct was at its peak while he was fascinated by the knife, he wanted it with his eyes, or at least he thought he did.

He cried all the way home, I tried to hide the fact that I was shaking. He ran up to the third floor, as soon as I opened the door, he looked for a shelter and disappeared under my bed, repeating like a mantra 'he had a knife, is he dead?'. Nothing I said helped, I called my father and he tried his best, we called his father and he tried his best. Around 9pm he accepted to take a bubble bath and the warm water slowly released the trauma from his body. That night he asked to sleep in my bed with me. Helicopters hovered above us all night searching for those involved.

At 3am I woke up terrified, was he dead? Recalling their faces, they seemed to not be older than 14 years old, only five years older than my son, he will probably go to the same school they did. Searching for ‘Sheperd’s Bush stabbing’, the news confirmed they were actually 16 to 24 years old and no one was stabbed to death. What a relief. Sleep.

In my dream I saw a child stabbing another child. Is this an unusual narrative in the context of the sacrifice? or maybe not? 103 victims of stabbing this year in London. Children with knifes, continuing the tradition of sacrifice. What for? For which ideology? Where are the parents?

As much as I wanted to protect my son from that knife in the street, this knife will stay with him, burnt into his eyes and probably somewhere deeper in his being. I ask myself what effect did the artwork that we made together have on this real experience. Would any child react the same way to such an experience, or did the fact that he had already been familiarized with the concept of the knife in the past amplify his sensitivity? Did he connect
our work with the knife he saw in the street? Or did this knife bring up the national trauma of sacrifice for him, a member of the 4th generation after the holocaust? I wonder how his generation will process the Visual Contract of Sacrifice.
- VISUAL CONTRACT -
JUDITH AND HOLOFERNES

The Visual Contract of Seduction

BETWEEN

Woman

AND

Man

B. BETWEEN

Women

AND

Society
Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1614-20 (fig. 25)
Judith in the biblical story was a beautiful widow. She managed to sneak into the enemy’s camp and decapitate the general. Holofernes invited her to his tent. Judith stayed with Holofernes after his servants went to sleep. She made him drink and talked with him until he fell into a deep sleep. Then, Judith took Holofernes’ sword and decapitated him with the assistance of her female companion.

When looking at paintings depicting this theme, I identify two main narratives; first, Judith’s act of beheading is shown as being done very elegantly and neatly, with no blood around her. In such works she is as calm and beautiful as she ever was, undisturbed by her deeds. For example, in Vincenzo Catena’s painting, 1500 (fig. 26). Judith sits with Holofernes’ head, a window with a landscape behind her; she is calm and beautiful with no traces of blood or physical effort. She is a woman and, according to the male gaze, she is expected to be beautiful, non-violent, and perfect and therefore she is depicted as detached from this violent act. There is a dissonance between the depiction of Judith as a beautiful lady and the act of a deadly and dangerous feminist woman.

Vincenzo Catena, Judith with the Head of Holofernes, 1500 (fig. 26)

The other type of depictions created the Visual Contact of Seduction when Judith is portrayed as a whore, using her body and sexuality as a weapon against men; this
contract is still common in contemporary visual culture. In these paintings, Judith is often topless, revealing at least one nipple while presenting the head of Holofernes and his sword. In most of these paintings, the blood is only symbolic and Judith is always represented after the act of beheading.

Two artists made similar paintings depicting the moment of beheading; Caravaggio and Artemisia Gentileschi. Caravaggio, who was arrested many times for his unexpected and violent behavior\(^{38}\), created two paintings of this scene; in both, blood is oozing while Judith’s act seems almost effortless. It is important to mention that in both of Caravaggio’s paintings, Judith is fully dressed.

In their book \textit{Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology}, Pollock and Parker defined Artemisia Gentileschi, as a ‘renaissance old mistress’\(^{39}\). Gentileschi depicted this Jewish biblical heroine in a very natural manner. Influenced by Caravaggio, this mistresspiece painting, shows Judith during the act of beheading. This is a battle of life and death. Judith by Gentileschi is determined to execute her plan with a sword and her seductive bosom. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock show how the patriarchal world of art and art history conceives Gentileschi’s work as if she was a whore because of her personal story of rape. “Women in Gentileschi’s paintings have frequently been described as ‘gory’, ‘animalistic’, ‘buxom’, ‘sullen’. Her celebration of great women is characterized as ‘irreligious’ (…) This in turn is used to explain the problematic character of such violent images painted by woman. Her repeated rape by her teacher, Agostino Tassi, and her torture at the trial to ascertain the truth of her allegations are frequently cited in sensationalized accounts of her life”.\(^{40}\)

I look at this painting from the here and now, an Iconowlogy point of view. Even if the intention was completely opposite as Pollock and Parker suggest, Gentileschi’s painting on one hand, showed the woman’s ability to kill, just like man, and by this act she equalise women to men - this is an indisputable achievement.

On the other hand, Gentileschi portrayed Judith as a sexual and seductive killing machine and in doing so, she fell into the trap of the old masters; she continued and reinforced the visual contract of the seductive woman for the future generations.

Pollock Says: “Feminism has exposed new areas and forms of social conflict which demand their own modes of analysis of kinship, the social construction of sexual difference, sexuality, reproduction, labour and, of course, culture. Culture can be defined as those social practices whose prime aim is signification, i.e. the production of sense or making orders of ‘sense’ for the world we live in. Culture is the social level in which are produced those images of the world and definitions of reality which can be ideologically mobilized to legitimize the existing order of relations of domination and subordination between classes, races and sexes. Art history takes an aspect of this cultural production, art, as its object of study; but the discipline itself is also a crucial component of the cultural hegemony by the dominant class, race and gender. Therefore it is important to contest the definitions of our society’s ideal reality which are produced in art historical interpretations of culture.”

It is important to remember in this context that blood is not an unfamiliar substance for women. Menstrual blood and birth are inseparable, inherent aspects of womanhood, it is therefore only the old master’s gaze and their intention to separate women and blood; women and their own blood and women and their enemies’ blood, as a tool of even controlling this very intimate but nonetheless natural element of womanhood.

After the appearance of Caravaggio’s and Artemisia’s paintings, blood oozes everywhere: Judith is a butcher. When the levels of blood and anger that Judith had towards Holofernes reach a boiling point, the levels of seductiveness and nudity follow it, deepening the image of the raging woman as a whore. Judith and Holofernes are enemies. They are lovers for a manipulative second before she decapitates him.

_Judith I_ by Klimt, 1901, (fig. 27), also follows this contract. Partly covered with semi transparent cloth in a golden seductive world, her tempting gaze gives the viewer a hint about the intimate moment she shared with the general before the act of decapitation.

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41 Ibid; 28.
“Judith and Holofernes” by Kehinde Wiley, 2012, (fig.28) depicts a black woman holding the decapitated head of a white male while dancing in a pop-patterned-like-flower-field. Questions of gender, power relation and race, all tangle into one narrative in this painting. Her deep blue dress somehow resonates with the blue of classical masterpieces that symbolised the church. The flowers overlay on the simple dress and suggest an enriched cloth, turning it into a contemporary version of Botticelli’s patterns, such as the Primavera \(^{42}\) or the Birth of Venus. \(^{43}\)

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42 Botticelli Sandro, *Primavera*, Tempera on panel, 202 cm × 314 cm (80 in × 124 in), Uffizi Gallery, Florence, 1477–1482.
43 Botticelli Sandro, *The Birth of Venus*, Tempera on canvas, 172.5 cm × 278.9 cm, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, 1486.
Susan Sontag says that paintings will always be manipulative; 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.”

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 had been captured on the negative at a specific moment.

In between photographs of horrific beheadings, I recognize Caravaggio’s ‘Judith’ All these photographs are documents of human cruelties as Susan Sontag suggests in her book Regarding the Pain of Others. The photographer might ask “can you look at this?” She continues, “There is a satisfaction of being able to look at an image without flinching.

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45 Caravaggio, Judith Beheading Holofernes, oil on canvas, 145 cm × 195 cm (57 in × 77 in), Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica at Palazzo Barberini, Rome, 1598–1599.
There is the pleasure of flinching.” I answer - “this is wrong”.

From Isis’s beheading video - a natural continuation for Renaissance icons (fig 30)

When zooming into one of the google research results for beheading, I see a still photograph depicting what came to be known in recent years as a typical Daesh (known also as Isis or the Islamic State) beheading (fig. 30). Of course Daesh did not invent the everlasting custom of beheading, and it is not the first religious organization to use a beheading scene as an icon and a tool for spreading ideology.

This photo reminds me very much of Christian iconography; black and orange colors replace red and blue (symbolizing Jesus’ blood and the church). Arid landscape replaces the imaginary-biblical-European landscapes of Renaissance paintings. Can it be that this partly documentary, partly staged, icon is subconsciously influenced by Christian iconography? It certainly hits hard on the collective memory of viewers who for hundreds of years were raised on the notion that evil must be beheaded as was the case of Holofernes who was beheaded by Judith.

(see the work Less, as a departure point for a new equality between the sexes, Breaching the Contract, p. 60).

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The Broken - What Is Ideal?

Classical Greek or Roman sculptures were once elegant, perfect and ideal, icons of beauty and strength. Perhaps painted in lifelike colors, now often armless, noseless, headless, these amputated sculptures stand or lie in museums for the benefit of our inquisitive minds. Their narratives have changed during the history; when I inspect the sculpture of Aphrodite (fig. 31), the Greek Goddess of love and beauty, my subconscious still holds onto its glamorous past. It tricks me into growing back the limbs that were.

‘The broken’ intrigues me because of the gap between the old narrative and the new narrative. Between an imaginary of a perfect woman, and the totally shattered one. I explore this icon of broken woman, whose existence is of total contradiction to the classical artist’s vision of perfection. Should I not be able to block this need to continuously grow phantom limbs onto works of art? Can I accept the new narrative, which allows for imperfection, fragility and brokenness in both women and men?

Praxiteles, Aphrodite, marble, 350 BC (fig. 31)
This question brings me to think about the term ‘imperfection’. Does the usage of this term imply of an acceptance of the convention of perfection? Renaissance and later Romanticism adored the concept and beauty of ‘the Broken’. Adoration of the broken implies the other pole, as if the broken is the ‘Ideal Narrative’. Can the broken just be broken without idealisations and tell the story of something that was once an icon of perfection and is now broken? This natural decay of sculptures and ideas helps me to question both ideals, the perfect and imperfect, as concepts. (See Less, ‘Breaching the Contract’ p. 60 See Young Woman With Hearing Aid, p.68, see ‘The Contract’ Marc Quinn, Mother and Child, 2008 p. 78).
- VISUAL CONTRACT -
MADONNA AND CHILD
The Visual Contract of the Beautiful and Passive Mother

A. BETWEEN

Mother

AND

Child

B. BETWEEN

Mother

AND

Society
Raphael, *The Small Cowper Madonna*, 1505, (fig. 32)
Raphael dedicated many of his paintings to the theme of ‘Madonna and Child’. It filled a significant time, effort and thought in his professional and creative life. “Between 1504 and 1508, the Madonna and Child became the vessel into which most of Raphael’s creative thought was poured”. In the Visual Contract of the Madonna and the Child as it is depicted in The Small Cowper Madonna (fig.32), baby Jesus steps over his mother’s hand. She lets him do so. Unlike Raphael’s other Madonna and Child paintings, such as Madonna and Child with a Book, which had clear Christian attributes, this Madonna and Child is almost secular. There are no attributes such as a cross, book or a bird in this painting, except for the very fine gold halo, which is so subtle, it is almost invisible. It can almost be read as a portrait of a young mother and her child; one significant detail points to the Christian context - Mary’s gaze. Like in many of his Madonna and Child paintings, she has an ambivalent look. In the Christian faith, Mary knows about her son’s fatal destiny before he is born (See appendix - The Annunciation p.109). She is told of his death by the angel as he reveals to her that she is pregnant. Mary has to accept this horrifying narrative of the future without questioning it. Without attempting to change it.

Raphael depicts the natural-mother’s-way by letting the child step over his mother’s hand and also by his hand’s position on her skin. However, what is the natural-mother’s-way? This Madonna seems still and lifeless as a sculpture. Jesus’s death as depicted in Michelangelo’s Pietà, 1498/9, seems more alive than these two figures of the Madonna and Child. The child is weightless. The Madonna is expressionless. The answer for this phenomenon might be explained by the fact that Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci used real-life models while Raphael most likely used small sculpture models of his Mother and Child paintings. Vasari wrote about this new production method for paintings. Religious or the so-called-secular Madonna and Child, are both passive, represented as beautiful and ‘ideals’ rather than real mothers.

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Raphael, *The Small Cowper Madonna*, Oil on panel, 59.5 x 44 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1505.
50 For example, The Virgin in the Meadow, 1505, or Madonna dell Sedia, about 1516.
Again, artists are cementing conventions of young mothers’ behaviours and roles in society.

Going back in time, we find the Egyptian Goddess Isis nursing her child Horus, 600 years before Christ’s first birthday. The ‘perfect’ mother and child motif transmigrated to Christianity and received the name ‘Madonna and Child’. This narrative has been cultivated for thousands of years. Artists are still teaching and placing young mothers in their ‘natural’ role and habitat. However, these attempts are not limited to artists, the great world of entertainment and advertising is devoutly sticking to the old concept of the beautiful lifeless woman stuck forever in her pre-determined role. In the mother-child’s Visual Contract, written mainly by paintings made by male artists, the role of the mother is to nurture and care for her child and nothing else is allowed to her. She has no other role in her child’s life, she doesn’t speak with him, she doesn’t play with him, she is not allowed to move from her position as the ultimate carer.
Lisa Baraitser in her book *Enduring Time*, 2017, writes about the concept of care: “Here, care broke from associations with the mother-child model and instead was understood to construct all human relationships. The earlier reliance on the mother-child relation as a model for care was seen as universalist, normative and reduced concern with the ethics of justice and social equality”.

And Marina Warner writes: “The Virgin in the Catholic Church represents motherhood in its fullness and perfection. Yet the Virgin as a mother is exempt by special privilege from intercourse, from labour, and from other physical processes of ordinary childbearing. On natural biological function, however, was permitted the Virgin in Christian cult-suckling. From her earliest images onwards, the mother of God has been represented nursing her child. But the milk of the Virgin has not been treated as a symbol of constant, fixed content and its varying and often extraordinary shifts of meaning contain a microcosmic history of Christian attitudes to the physicality of the female.”

Here, on the timeline of the mother-child’s Visual Contract, we can see the virgin and the child from ancient Egypt until today. On the timeline, we see that even the greatest ‘norm-breaker’ Pablo Picasso (fig.42), could not deconstruct the Mother and Child contract. Today, Marc Quinn (fig.34) portrays the mother and child in exactly the same way as Renaissance artists, despite the disability of his subject matter. The aim is to fit the mother into the mold inherited from Renaissance iconography regardless of under which conditions.

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A repeating motif in the Madonna and Child theme is the appearance of a window as a background. For example Leonardo Da Vinci’s ‘Madonna Litta’\textsuperscript{54} (fig.35). Leon Battista Alberti says “I describe a rectangle of whatever size I please, which I imagine to be an open window through which I view whatever is depicted there”\textsuperscript{55}. When Alberti describes his idea of how a Renaissance painting should function as a window to reality, I am interested in the creation of spaces for ideologies. It is how Renaissance artists brought to perfection the meeting point between ideology and space. Now, the question must be, what kind of world did Alberti see when he looked out the window he created? My possible answer will be, that he saw an ideal world for men, which was therefore a prison for women. Alberti and his Renaissance colleagues not only saw this world, they created this world and cemented it in their masterpieces.

\textsuperscript{54} Leonardo Da Vinci, ‘Madonna Litta’, tempera on canvas (transferred from panel), 42 x 33 cm, Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, 1490.

\textsuperscript{55} Panofsky Erwin, Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art, Icon Edition, Harper & Row, NY, Evanston, San Francisco, London, 1972, p. 120.
A woman in the window, is a Renaissance art iconography but also an engagement and marriage tradition where the woman needed to prove her beauty, loyalty and devotion. In these paintings such as Fra Filippo Lippi’s painting *Portrait of a Woman with a Man at a Casement*, 1440 (fig.36), which can demonstrate the beautiful woman, with a fake beautiful painted landscape seen from a fake beautiful window in the background; like a prisoner allowed to look either to her future husband, or outside to a particular world painted for her, however she can not to enjoy it. This Visual Contract, replaced words with images, and created emotional and ideological prisons for women. Those prisons have no walls or floors to dig or break through, and their windows are fake, but this might be the reason why it is impossible to escape from them.
I want to explore the possibility of these contracts as almost unbreachable because they were declared throughout history as the most beautiful masterpieces of all time. Beauty created by artists became a tool for silencing questions, and enforcing the taboo around the role of the mother in society.

(See ‘Breaching the Contract’, Mother and Child in a Window, 2016 p.12, and Mother and Child, 2017, p. 16 where women in the windows takes a different role).

The artist Maria Élisabeth Louise Vigée made this self-portrait depicting herself cuddling with her daughter\footnote{Marie Élisabeth Louise Vigée, Self-portrait with Her Daughter, 1789.} (fig.37). She wears a classical dress, corresponding with classical ancient Greek culture. Like Raphael’s painting The Small Cowper Madonna, this painting seems secular in the first instance. However, unlike Raphael’s painting, it is obvious that this painting not only seems secular, it will never be anything else but secular. The female child will never replace Christ’s narrative. Pollock and Parker write: “The novelty of this painting lies in the secular and familial emphasis, the Madonna and the Child of traditional iconography replaced by mother and female child locked in
an affectionate embrace. The Self-portrait laid stress on the notion of woman within the phrase ‘woman artist’. This portrait of the artist and her daughter elaborates that notion of woman, emphasizing that she is a mother. The painting links the two females in the circle of their embrace. The child is like a smaller, mirror image of her mother. The adult woman is to be fulfilled through her child; her daughter anticipates growing up to fill a future role identical to that of her mother.”

Maria Élisabeth Louise Vigée, *Self-portrait with Her Daughter*, 1789 (fig. 37)

This painting highlights the impossibility of creating a depiction of a mother and female child, which resonates with the Madonna and the male Child.

Naked in the landscape, father and two daughters. The father sits, while two young girls are lower on the ground (fig. 38). This triangular composition resonates with Mary sitting with baby Jesus and John the Baptist in many Renaissance paintings, such as Raphael’s *Madonna of the Meadow*, 1506, (fig. 39). The figures are illuminated by natural light, behind them there is a landscape reminiscent of human gestures, such

as a paved path and an architectural building. The only significant change to the classical depiction of the Madonna and Child is in the gender; instead of mother Mary, there is *The Good Father*, which is the title of this work. Instead of two boys, there are two girls. Maria Élisabeth Louise Vigée asked earlier if there can be such a thing as a "Madonna with a Female child"? Sally Mann asks can the father take the conventional mother’s role?

*The Good Father* is part of a series of works that touch on taboos relating to traditional roles in the family structure, sexuality and beauty as part of the everyday life of a family. These works are still considered scandalous. With her series, "*Family Pictures*", Mann manipulates the viewer to deal with cultural conventions through beauty. Her work tricks the viewer through the ‘beauty method’; this reminds me of the effectiveness of beauty on human beings in Renaissance art. In her work, Sally Mann breaches the Visual Contract that Renaissance artists had created by using the same tool.

In an interview with Sarah Boxer for *The Atlantic Magazine* in 2015, Sally Mann said "*It is this kind of gothic sensibility, this intrepid wish to stare down horror in order to prevent it, that produces photographs in which sticky Popsicle juice running down a naked body can look like blood, in which a ring of pee surrounding a little girl on a mattress can look like the remains of a violation, and in which sleep can look like death.*"
Here I would like to expand on Mann’s biography and work. In a way, I feel her work ‘mothered’ me as an artist, it inspired me and it filled me with courage when I faced criticism about my art, and the way I ‘use’ my son for my work.

It is not very easy to find Mann’s works even though she is a very respected award-winning international photographer. Even so, I never saw Sally Mann’s works in the flesh, neither in the UK over the last 6 years, nor in Israel. Looking at Mann’s CV, it seems like she doesn’t venture beyond US borders very often. Not only that, it was also quite difficult to get my hands on her books, the UCL library for example, only holds one of her books. Even her website only represents a few of her works. The question is why is her work not accessible and who is behind the censorship of her work? Who protects who from Mann’s work? Is it Mann protecting herself, is it the art critics protecting the viewers from Mann’s content, is it the universities protecting their students, the bookshops protecting their readers?

Mann’s beautiful and controversial body of work is her way of processing extreme and difficult life events such as the murder and suicide of her husband’s parents, or her son’s psychological struggles that ended in tragedy.

Growing up in a strictly atheist family, young Mann was the only student sitting outside the classroom while her peers studied religious education in primary school. Even though she wanted to be like the other children, her father restricted her studies, today she believes this restriction freed her from having some cultural references “…when I look at the arc of my work, those pictures [Family Pictures series] taken on the farm and at the cabin seem more balanced, less culturally influenced and more universal…”60 She is also aware of the fact that her parenting/work style, created a childhood ‘different’ to those of her own children. Her children were often mocked at school for being presented in odd pictures while Mann was often accused of being a ‘bad mother’. In her book Hold Still, she writes: “Although the pressure and confusion gouges often buried their needles in the critical red zone, I continued to take the pictures, and I continued, with the help of the kids’ patient,

60 Sally Mann, Hold Still, Little Brown, NY, Boston, London, 2015, p. 104
consistent, and loving father, to be the best mother I could be.\textsuperscript{61}

Similar to Genticheli’s renaissance art which was the subject of negative responses 400 years earlier as shown in p. 64, Mann’s receives similar aggressive comments. However these comments criticize the mother she is: “Many people expressed opinions, usually in earnest good faith but sometimes with rancor, about the pictures: my right to take them, especially my right as a mother, my state of emotional health, the implications for the children, and the pictures’ effect on the viewer.”\textsuperscript{62} Sally Mann paid an enormous price over the years for breaching the visual contract of mother and child, it is not only quantified by a limited exposure, but with persistent social emotional abuse.

Responding to these accusations, Mann revealed her working methods with her children in her memoir book. For example, she describes the freedom her children had in selecting and editing the work before exhibitions. “…the kids visually sophisticated, involved in setting the scene, and producing the desired effect for the images – and they were included in the editing of them.”\textsuperscript{63} She also writes what I believe is even more powerful and true “Children cannot be forced to make pictures like these: mine gave them to me.”\textsuperscript{64} she said. And what is the purpose of making these pictures in the first place?

After few scary situations with her kids, especially the accident involving her son Emmett when he was hit by a bulldozer, bleeding on the road in front of her eyes, Mann said “Even when a very scary situation turned out benign, I replayed if for the camera with the worst possible outcome, as if to put the quietus on its ever reoccurring.”\textsuperscript{65} “… I prayed it would protect us from any such sight, ever. In fact, it didn’t.”\textsuperscript{66} Like Mann giving her photographs talismanic powers, the Israeli author David Grosman wrote a monumental book The End of the Land\textsuperscript{67}, telling the story of an Israeli mother who runs away from being announced of her son’s death in war. As soon as the mother drops off her son at the military base, she decides to never go back and wait for the knock on her door announcing her son had fallen

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Mann Sally, \textit{Hold Still}, Little Brown, NY, Boston, London, 2015, p. 134
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Mann Sally, \textit{Hold Still}, Little Brown, NY, Boston, London, 2015, p. 140
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Mann Sally, \textit{Hold Still}, Little Brown, NY, Boston, London, 2015, p. 126
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Mann Sally, \textit{Hold Still}, Little Brown, NY, Boston, London, 2015, p. 114
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Ibid
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Grosman David, \textit{Ishah boraḥat mi-beṣorah (End of the Land)}, ha-Kibuts ha-Me’uḥad, Bene Berak 2008
\end{itemize}
in the battlefield. The mother’s refusal to take the classical role of the passive mother waiting at home for her son, is her resolve to defeat her son’s destiny to sacrifice himself for the sake of his country. Grosman, the father of three boys, wrote this book while his son was serving in the Israeli army. In the preface of the book he expressed his hope that by writing this book, describing the most horrible scenario, he will be able to protect his son from this very destiny. In 2006, two days before the end of the war in Lebanon, and few

months after Grosman wrote this book, his own son Uri died in the war.

For years I didn’t want to read Grosman’s book, I resisted it as if it was a contagious disease, threatening my own life. When the book was published, my partner at the time and I were trying to get pregnant, and once I knew I was carrying a boy, my fears of a potential sacrifice got even worse. It was only two years ago that I forced myself to read it for my PhD research. It shook my world to learn of the role of Mann’s and Grosman’s works in their personal lives serving as some kind of talismanic objects to protect their children, and their tragedies that made them bereaved parents. I ask myself whether art can alter destinies? This question haunts me knowing that I work within a logic similar to Mann and Grosman, who are now bereaved parents. (See Double p.28, Mine p.76, Crude Ashes p.20 in ‘Breaching the Contract’).

Mann says that the children in her photographs are not her children but the children: “The fact is that these are not my children; they are figures on silvery paper slivered out of time. They represent my children at a fraction of a second on one particular afternoon with infinite variables of light, expression, posture, muscle tension, mood, wind, and shade. These are not my children with ice in their veins, these are not my children at all; these are children.” I find comfort in applying this to my work, wherein the image of my son is not my son, but rather ‘the child’. Stepping out of the private narrative and calling the figures in the works ‘the mother’ and ‘the child’ is what makes them a universal mother and child with a hopefully different destiny to the horrible ones of Mann and Grosman.
In 1994 Catherine Opie made a self-portrait and called it ‘Pervert’. Here she sits in front of the camera half naked covered by tattoos, piercings and a bleeding fresh scar with the word ‘Pervert’. Ten years later, poised in a classical ‘Mother and Child’ scene, Opie, was perceived as overweight by social norms, tattooed, carrying the traces of her old, faded but ever-present ‘pervert’ scar. This word describes one who has diverted from the norm, who needs to be excluded from society, Opie assumes herself as a pervert in a performative and painful act. Has she placed herself in this position or is she critically placing a mirror in front of the concept of the ‘other’?
The structure of this research is the opposite to the natural life journey that we humans take over the course of our lives: the Pietà, the moment of Jesus’s death at the age of 33; continuing with Isaac, a teenage human sacrifice; then later Judith and Holofernes bringing the perspective of the male - female relationship; and finally, the Madonna and child, the baby Jesus.

I wish to end this research with perhaps what was supposed to open this life journey - the Annunciation of Mary’s pregnancy by the angel. Due to the cyclical nature of Jesus...
and Mary's journey, it seems possible to conclude with this scene.

This theme as depicted here by Fra Angelico, describes the moment at which Mary is told of her pregnancy by the holy spirit. The journey of Mary as a mother and the physical existence of Jesus begins here. Mary is often depicted with her hands crossed, this gesture implies her instinct to protect her own body from this pregnancy and her fate. Her facial expression seems ambivalent, as according to Christian belief, Mary comes to know the whole narrative of her son's destiny and suffering as soon as it was announced.

Mary, as I learned in this research, became a role model for women by being the subject matter of the most famed and beautiful works of art in western history, these shaped her character visually and conceptually as 'the' ultimate woman and mother.

As a woman myself and a mother by choice, I am concerned by Mary’s depiction as lacking free will over her own body and her own future as a mother. I perceive this depiction as violent to women despite its beautiful representation. The work Sight Specific, (see Breaching the Contract p.109) strives to create a dialogue with the classical Annunciation. In this work, a sense of violence applies to both genders, male and female. Unlike the classical representation of the Annunciation, where beauty may act as a cover for the act of violating the woman's body and free will, in Sight Specific, the woman’s sight is blocked by the man’s penis. He is paralysed, standing still, as choiceless as a classical sculpture on a podium. They share space that seems to be built especially to their size which also resonates as a confessional cell.

John Berger wrote"...Seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it..."\(^{68}\) The power of the image is based on this understanding as Berger has phrased here. Like Berger, I also believe that when we see an icon, we can never erase it from the subconscious, that the icon’s effect on us is irreversible.

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CONCLUSION

The sublime, beauty, perfection, tenderness, harmony, love, and proportions, are all synonyms for describing the works of the great masters as they depicted women. Through this research, I have discovered ‘beauty’ as a manipulative tool used by Renaissance artists for the creation of Visual Contracts meant to control women. ‘Perfection’ is a dangerous tool which defines and creates social norms, governed by the ‘ideal’ rather than the ‘real’ and in doing so, defines those who do not fit into this frame as ‘others’ and even ‘perverts’. ‘Tenderness’ and ‘love’ become the only ‘natural’ and legitimised emotions, leaving a spectrum of undiscussed feelings behind. When I see images depicting love and tenderness only, knowing that I have a broader spectrum of feelings, they leave me with the difficult emotions of guilt and shame.

This research begins with the death of the son and ends with the Annunciation. This is a reverse journey which begins with the Pietá, the child’s death while he is cuddled in his mother’s arms. In contrast to the Pietá, the Binding of Isaac, presents the biblical narrative when the father is the one who sacrifices the son. Judith and Holofernes led me into the exploration of male female relationships and the Madonna and Child brought me again to the moment of the cuddling mother, sitting with her child on her lap. At the very end, in the Annunciation, I see Mary losing control of her body and being physically violated by a male God.

Critically reading these four themes of Renaissance art enabled me to trace, compare and contrast between works, which were created around similar themes in different eras and geographical places. I found iconographical repetitions of these concepts and a lack of questioning.

My core question was why certain themes were not challenged by artists throughout history? When I look at the art world today, I see that mother-artists are expected to create ‘Maternal Art’ depicting pregnancy or position us back to ‘our chairs’ to sit with our children, dead or alive. I try to understand what makes artists and viewers so attached to this recycled imagery and concepts of motherhood. My main assumption is that the viewers wish to see only one aspect of motherhood. They want to see the Madonna and Child where the mother is beautiful and the child is a harmless baby, and with the death of the child, they want to see the Madonna and Child when the mother
again cuddles him as if he was a baby for one last time. The artists on the other hand, are captured by the beauty of Renaissance art and rely on art history as a source without being aware of the harmful content. Anything between the Pietá and Madonna and Child is not depicted and considered not interesting, neither in the past nor now.

Another question is why technology, such as photography, did not challenge the depiction of these themes. Even when the world has changed so much since the creation of these masterpieces. The function of the self-timer enabled women to depict themselves more easily without needing men to photograph them. Women were able to depict themselves as they were, bold and strong but also alone, at home, with their children. Yet, when it comes to representations of motherhood, sacrifice and bereavement, there was and still is a tendency to reproduce the same images and iconography as had already been established by Renaissance art.

In my practice, I used the familiar and effective tools and methods of Renaissance narratives, such as symbolism, beauty and colors, to create new narratives referencing Biblical and classical themes from an entirely different point of view, with the aim of freeing women and also men from their emotional and ideological prisons. I borrow the iconography – colors, shapes, light, shadows, compositions and themes – from the Renaissance masters. Spectators are familiar with these traditional forms of visual contracts, however, they read them together while breaching these very same contracts simultaneously. Each image contains both the echo of the visual contract and its breaching.

I was surprised to find out that my wooden structures for Mother and Child, which can be also called sculptures, were often not interpreted as sculptures even when they were exhibited in an art institutional context such as a gallery exhibition. (See Breaching the Contract p. 84) The spectators ‘forgot’ the rules of the White Cube which ask the viewer to look but not to touch, to learn but without experiencing. These were all forgotten when the spectators confronted these objects which were built on a one to one human scale. Naturally, viewers stepped into the structures as if they were made for them. This surprising reaction, illustrated my assumption that most human beings are indeed ‘programmed’ to fit themselves into existing systems. It seems as if the artists of the Renaissance knew this powerful information which helped them to create
works of art which functioned as power structures influencing not only their contemporaries but also future generations. This finding answered my question as to why bereaved mothers fit themselves into a patriarchal structure. My answer was found in the process of my art-making. By creating new structures, I can expand the existing narratives and suggest new interpretations.

Feminist discourse on women and mothers covered mainly the technicalities of being a mother, labour, childcare, and abortion rights as their themes, and less about the emotional reality. Until 2015, we were still a small family of a father, mother and a son. The triangular relationship was dominant and this was expressed in my art; some works such as *Jesus of the Jeans*, dealt with family structure, others dealt with male-female relationships such as *Less or Hanged*, while the mother-child relationship was the third side of this triangle. It took me some years after the break up of our family to realise that motherhood and art are the centre of my private and professional life. It was only at the Slade Graduate Exhibition, in 2018, the celebration of 3 years of PhD research, that I found myself surrounded by these wooden structures built solely for mother and child. Self-portraits such as *Nordic Eve* and *Young Woman With Hearing Aid* also joined this arsenal and gave a form to the sensation of dependency on one hand and loneliness on the other hand (See ‘Breaching the Contract’ p. 36, 68).

Towards the very end of this research, I was ‘found’ and ‘adopted’ by a several groups of mother-artists: the Mothersuckers project in Cardiff, Desperate Artwives and Procreate Project in London. Their practice deals with motherhood as their main concern. It was a relief to be found by these fantastic groups of thinkers, scholars and practicing artists. During the previous years, I felt very isolated being almost the only mother among my artist friends and even more isolated when my practice became more focused on the mother-child relationship and the role of mothers in society. I
didn’t have many role models of female artists who dealt with motherhood as the main subject of their practice. ‘Maternal Attitude’, the symposium in Cardiff (October 2018), filled me with joy as I was no longer alone. However, the realisation of this group being the underdogs of the dominant art world, who still has preconceptions about the abilities of women, and especially mothers, to be great artists, was magnified. It was almost like finding a group of witches in the middle ages, living in the shadow of patriarchal law and establishment.

The mother-child relationship is not something that disappears with time, on the contrary, it becomes deeper, as language evolves, as shared experiences accumulate. Is it possible that it becomes impossible to survive as an artist dealing with motherhood? Are mother-artists forced to change their subject if they want to survive? Or, after thousands of years of oppression, is it that we lack the visual tools to create a new iconography for mothers, which is beyond the Madonna and Child or the Pietá as a continuation of pagan representations of women as vessels for procreation and fertility? It might also be an ethical question about the representation of children and the inability of our children to give full consent to the public display of their images. Not once was I asked by tutors, curators and viewers about the possibility that I’m “using” my child for my work. I would like to unfold this near accusation.

I can begin answering this question by asking what is the difference between posting a family photo on social media such as Facebook or Instagram, which exposes our children to the public domain. But I think the answer is much longer and deeper than that. Children were depicted in paintings and sculptures for thousands of years. They were depicted because they are part of the world and part of the human race and therefore their existence cannot be ignored. Children were models for painters in the past, half naked or naked they were observed and studied by artists throughout history.

The camera, as discussed previously, broadened artists’ possibilities for depicting and studying their subjects. Artists who use photography as part of their practice and who study children as their subjects, were criticized and still are criticized, as if the pictures have no right to be part of the art historical research of mother and child as human interactions, as reflecting on social and political human behaviours. What will happen if we will exclude the depiction of children and their mothers from art? I believe it will
lead to the exclusion of mothers and children from the public sphere. And, in “using” their children in their art, why is it easier to accuse mothers than fathers?

I think of the Abraham and Isaac narrative and its subsequent depiction in art. The father points a knife to his beloved son, he is about to sacrifice the child, and luckily an angel appears and prevents him from doing so. Has anyone ever questioned such a narrative where a father is about to murder his child to prove his devotion to God? Neither the mythical father who holds the knife nor the artist depicting the scene are questioned, challenged or accused of child abuse, this narrative is culturally accepted. (see Breaching the Contract p.76) It would be culturally unacceptable however, if a mother held a knife to her beloved son. The mother is targeted for using her child, even though the new narrative is different and more realistic, as it doesn’t involve angels or miracles, and the uniqueness of the mother-child relationship is what actually prevents from this potential tragedy from happening. The mythical and the real mother become one and the “mothers” are accused of child abuse. Why is the mother accused of abuse while the biblical father does not take responsibility for his deeds? The mother in the new narrative, injected into the patriarchal history, is the one who takes responsibility, she looks straight in her child’s eyes and when he claims the knife, she understands he might get hurt and she takes it away from him. It is easy to silence her narrative while crying abuse at her actions, instead of creating a real discourse about the question she asks. The mothers in these works depicting the mother and child are not individual mothers, but are universal mothers, protesting against old narratives. The mothers in the work refuse to be victims and they refuse to sacrifice their children. It is the price that one individual mother and one individual child represented in The New Mother and Child, has to pay. Is it worth it? Only time will tell.

These questions bring me to think about my most recent and future works. It is the ninth year that I am working on the theme of the ‘maternal’, and so far my mother-child works have evolved as we have grown up together. All major physical or psychological states that we went through; breastfeeding, changes in family relations, the shift in support - were captured and encapsulated in the form of artwork. The very personal quality of our relationship is at the same time a symbolic representation of a mother-child relationship. I look at the works that I create and I see my beloved son and myself, yet instead of calling the reflection of my son by his name I call him ‘the child’, I look at
myself reflected in my work and I call my reflection ‘the mother’. We are no longer individuals, a particular mother and child, but a representation of mother and child, secular icons.

I see this as an important mission, to continue and reflect, question and create art that will expand on the traditional iconography of mother and child by creating new secular iconography that expands the mother child relationship beyond the narrow spectrum of the mother cuddling her child, dead or alive.

I wish to continue to create work using new materiality such as air pollution-sensitive material, as it was used in the project in Portland: this is my way of creating new narratives, visualized in new materials, which together are our era’s challenges.
APPENDIX

MATERNAL ART

Towards the very end of this PhD I was fortunate to take part in a symposium in Cardiff called ‘Maternal Attitude’. This symposium gathered thinkers, art critics, publishers and artist-mothers whose works revolve around ‘The Maternal’ as their main subject. The symposium was organised by the Mothersuckers Project, Eve Dent and Zoe Gingell, and hosted by the Storytelling Department at the University of South Wales with Dr. Emily Underwood-Lee. Two men were almost invisible in the majority-female audience.

In the panel discussion one of the panelists described her experience of motherhood as a daily struggle. She said she felt grateful for managing neither to kill herself nor her children at the end of each day. I presented my works: Mine, Sleeping Madonna, Double, Jesus of the Jeans and Crude Ashes (see ‘Breaching the Contract’ p.76,26,56,20). We all spoke about having mixed emotions as parents-artists, usually an undiscussed topic, especially in art when the subject of maternity is often idealised.

I often find myself needing to justify and defend my Mother-Child works, which can be interpreted as unpleasant or disturbing. In the context of this symposium I had no need to justify my work; this common ground of motherhood was seen as an independent issue, and not as a sub-theme of feminist movements, theory and practice, which allowed for other questions to be asked.

Throughout the symposium, milk, breasts, blood and pregnant bellies filled the large screen. Not all mother-artists deal with representations of motherhood. But those who do, have a tendency to continue with a traditional symbolism that has become an aesthetic of ‘Maternal Art’, as if the depiction of motherhood has not been challenged since the creation of ancient figurines, as if milk and pregnancy is not only the representation of motherhood, but milk and pregnancy is motherhood itself.

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69 There was one father-artist in the symposium who is working with his wife and three children in what they call ‘Townley and Bradby Collaborative Family Art Practice’.
These questions lead me to another question, why do mother-artists who deal with ‘The Maternal’ in their practices, often abandon this theme as soon as the child is no longer a baby?

Of course, as babies grow up there is a natural separation from the mother and this process is mirrored in the art of mother-artists. Furthermore, the overwhelming experience of motherhood becomes more integrated as time passes and milk dries. Yet, I’m certain that cultural and social pressures force mother-artists to leave their subject matter of ‘The Maternal’ and push them into finding new, “more comfortable” subject matters for the viewers and art establishments.

Mary Kelly and Susan Hiller both had episodes in their careers in which their experiences as mothers were their primary theme; Mary Kelly with *Post-Partum Document*\(^{70}\), and Susan Hiller with *10 months*\(^{71}\), a work of pre-motherhood. Kelly and Hiller are examples of established artists, who visited ‘The Maternal’ in their artistic practices and abandoned it shortly thereafter. Susan Hiller said: “I was told by someone important in the art world that with this work [10 months] I separated myself by joining the feminists and that I ruined my career.”\(^{72}\) Other mother-artists didn’t “survive” and completely disappeared from art history; these artists fell, like soldiers in the battlefield, leaving us with important messages that are still relevant today.

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\(^{70}\) Kelly was first known for her installation *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79) where she depicted her experience as a young mother to a son, and using psychoanalysis and sociological studies as part of this work (fig. 44).

\(^{71}\) *10 Months* by Susan Hiller was made during the year 1979; a photography and text work describing and depicting the physical and emotional changes she had experienced during her pregnancy.(fig. 45)

Left: Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document: Documentation*, 1973-79 (fig. 44)

Right: Susan Hiller, *10 Months*, installation, 1979 (fig. 45)
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