

Mother: Barbara Weissberger

Silver Eye

Education Guide
Feb 6—Mar 21, 2020

About the Artist

Barbara Weissberger's photographs—and related photo-objects—contain familiar things and things that are confounding enough to sow doubt about the nature of those that are most identifiable. She started as a sculptor and is still deeply engaged with materials and making objects. Weissberger crafts many of the objects within her photographs, mingling found objects with the miscellany found in her studio. Her work has been shown at The Drawing Center, White Columns, PSI/MoMA, Gridspace (Brooklyn), Photoville (Brooklyn), and Hallwalls (Buffalo) in New York; Coop Gallery, Nashville; Big Medium, Austin; The Mattress Factory, SPACE Gallery and the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, Pittsburgh; GRIN (Aldrich + Weissberger), Providence, RI; Artspace New Haven, Connecticut; ADA Gallery, Richmond, VA; and The Holter Museum of Art , Montana.

I. Introduction

This exhibition explores ideas of the creative impulse, the many ways we can think about and define the meanings of the word "mother" and the practice of the artist working in the studio. The focus of this exhibition is Pittsburgh based artist Barbara Weissberger, who is a professor of in the Studio Arts department at the University of Pittsburgh.

The artist doesn't tell us exactly what or who or even where the mother is in this exhibition. Instead, she leaves the door open to many different ideas around the word. Weissberger has created images and objects which resemble bodily forms, but the elements she uses are mostly disembodied: there are eyes that float, hands that remain estranged from their arms, and intestinal-looking tubular shapes! It isn't always clear precisely what kind of body or bodies are being created.

Questions for Looking

→ What do you think of when you consider the word "mother"? What about mothership? Motherland? What other sorts of adjustments can we make to this word to complicate its meaning?

→ Come up with a new word to title this exhibition. How does that word make you feel about the work?



Mother

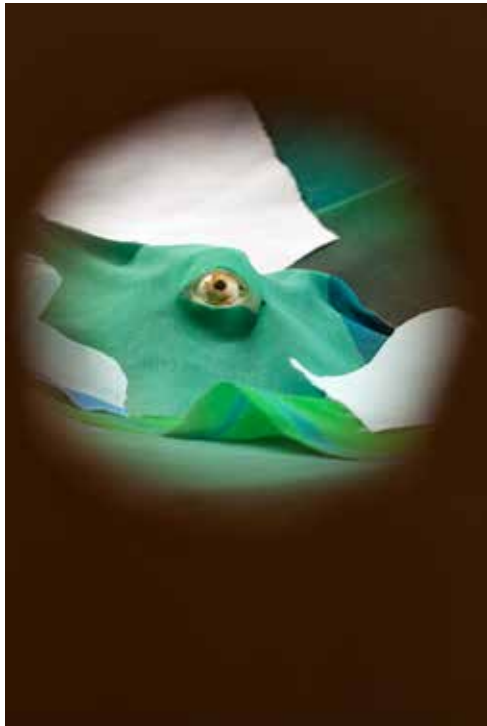
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II. The Artist in the Studio

Barbara Weissberger is an artist who considers the time she spends in her studio as very crucial to the final, finished work of art she creates. Often, her work contains materials and artistic decisions that blur the distinctions between her time spent in the studio, and the way her finished work exists in the space of the gallery. If you look closely, a few of the frames in the exhibition are wrapped in the same fabric materials that appears in the photographs that sit inside the frame - creating the feeling that the materials has oozed out of the image, or the studio, and into the gallery. Weissberger also creates using every day, often ignored items such as cardboard, spare one-way mirror window film, and emergency blankets, as she likes to say she “celebrates humble material.”

Questions for Looking:

- What does “humble material” mean to you? Are some materials flashier or fancier than other?
- What types of material can you see the artist has used in these images and objects? Does this seem like the kind of material you imagine artists using? Have you ever created something out of these materials?
- How do you think the artist’s studio is different than a gallery space or a museum space? How is it similar?



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III. Creation and Creator

There is an interesting relationship between the artist and the art works in this exhibition, in large part because many of these objects and images look like representations of bodies - but only sort of. A big influence on Barbara Weissberger's process for this exhibition has been Mary Shelley's "*Frankenstein*" and the artist referenced the novel as she sat sewing all the different parts together by hand, with the visible stitches you can see holding everything together. The idea of a creator and a creation, like in *Frankenstein*, is very present in this exhibition, but instead of an entire, complete body, Weissberger shows us fragments of bodily forms: a hand, or an eye, or a leg-like shape, but never a whole entire human form. The artworks almost seem to have personalities, but then we look at them from another angle, and they seem to be just objects again.

Questions for Looking

- What kinds of shapes and forms do you see in this exhibition? Do you think some of the materials in the photographs or objects look more human-like than others? If they don't look human, what do they remind you of?
- How does being able to see the handmade stitches in the artwork make you feel? What kinds of emotions do you feel looking at this work? Is it silly? Scary? Funny?
- Does the sculptural work make you feel differently about ideas of creator and creation than the photographs do?

Glossary

Anthropomorphic	When something is described or thought of as having a human form or human attributes, also the manner in which people often ascribe human characteristics to nonhuman things
Triptych	A grouping of three works of art, often photographs or paintings, positioned together, side by side, and considered one whole piece of artwork.
Dptych	The same concept as a triptych (above) but with two works of art, instead of three.
Agency	In this exhibition, we're thinking about agency as the capacity, condition, or state of a person, or an object, of acting out or of exerting power
Studio	the working place of an artist such as a painter, sculptor, or photographer
Mixed Media	When an artist combines multiple kinds of material, or artistic practices, in the process of making a single work of art. An example would be when a photograph has fabric stuck to it, or when a drawing is created from several different kinds of materials such a pen, ink, or paint.

Reading List

Miller, Dana. 2012. *Jay De Feo: A Retrospective*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Storr, Robert, Louise Bourgeois, Paulo Herkenhoff, and Allan Schwartzman. 2003. *Louise Bourgeois*. London: Phaidon Press.

Harrod, Tanya. 2018. *Craft*. London: Whitechapel Gallery

Trotta, Julia. "Artist Jessi Reaves, Queen of Scrap." *Pin-Up*, Fall/Winter 2015. January 2020.

Pesanti, Heather. 2008. *Are We Just Going to Stand and Watch This: Barbara Weissberger*. Buffalo: New York. Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center

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This guide serves as an education supplement to the exhibition, *Mother: Barbara Weissberger*, and contains information about the works on view, questions for looking and discussion as well as room for student responses. To schedule a tour of this exhibition for students, go to: silvereye.org/about/plan-your-visit

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Silver Eye Center for Photography educational programming is generously supported by the Allegheny Regional Asset District, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Bloomberg Philanthropies, The Fine Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, The Hillman Foundation, the Henry John Simonds Foundation, The Jack Buncher Foundation, The Laurel Foundation, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and the PNC Charitable Trust.