

Beyond the initial bond with life that originates within her, the maternal figure is frequently ascribed the role of guardian of the family home in Western societies, marked by a patriarchal tradition. This conception of the maternal role, although it is gradually being challenged, continues to shape social expectations and individual trajectories. While we can question the weight that this assigned role puts on women’s shoulders, the mother, regardless of her choices, does however represent selflessness and is the ultimate symbol of love. This love, sometimes described as unconditional, nevertheless deserves to be challenged, as bell hooks has done in *All About Love* (1999). Because even if there is love, the mother-child bond sometimes proves to be infinitely more complex than it at first appears.

It took me much reading and many discussions before I managed to identify this reality, which is rarely broached in our society, in which certain ferocious behaviours remain invisible to the naked eye. Female authors such as Vivian Gornick, Chantal Akerman, Annie Ernaux, Marguerite Duras, Delphine de Vigan, Virginie Linhart, Alexandra Auder and bell hooks were invaluable in helping me to understand that love, far from being an insurmountable rampart, does not escape from either the subconscious contradictions inherent to parenthood or from dysfunctional relations. In this context, Mona Cholet astutely reminds us “that between parents and children there is a relationship of mutual attachment and protection, but also, whether we like it or not, whether we defend ourselves from it or not, a relationship of domination”.¹ It must be acknowledged that while love is a fundamental element in identity construction, the degree of control exerted by a parent over their child, even in adulthood, can affect their sense of self-esteem as well as the ability to develop true emotional autonomy.

Ferocity at Home explores the ambivalence of the maternal bond through the work of seven artists—Chantal Akerman, Tolia Astakhishvili (with Zurab Astakhishvili, Simon Lässig and Maka Sanadze), Cudelice Brazelton IV, Rosa Joly, Harilay Rabenjamina, Rosemarie Trockel and Sebastian Wiegand. With contrasting and sensitive approaches, these artists question the ways in which this complex relationship influences our presence in the world. The film *News from Home* (1977) by Chantal Akerman constitutes the exhibition’s point of departure, highlighting the complexity of maternal

Chantal Akerman

Chantal Akerman’s film *News from Home* (1977) is presented through a press release designed for its screening at the Cannes Film Festival. Using a very simple device, the work clearly illuminates the ambivalence of the maternal bond. While the camera’s eye explores New York in a series of static long takes, Akerman’s voice monotonously reads the letters that her mother has sent her from Brussels. Combining declarations of love and worry, her statements reveal an attachment as profound as it is suffocating. The final scene, shot from a ferry as it leaves the city, shows the failure of genuine emancipation: physical distance has not been enough to instil a separation.

Tolia Astakhishvili

Tolia Astakhishvili’s architectural environment, composed of two rooms, integrates artworks by her parents, Zurab Astakhishvili and Maka Sanadze, as well as by Simon Lässig. The aesthetic of the construction site makes this space a limbo, whose origins and end result remain undefined. Everyday objects, drawings, photographs, mural inscriptions and videos suggest a diffuse human presence. Together, they weave a fictional tale characterised by affective density, between absence and presence, ferocity and tenderness, forgetting and melancholy.

Harilay Rabenjamina

The installation *Le Nez de ma mère* [My Mother’s Nose] (2021), by Harilay Rabenjamina invokes the contradiction of a maternal love undermined by the pressures of social norms. Through a video in which he questions his mother and a photograph representing his sister’s swollen nose, the artist tells a story of plastic surgery that is laden with paradoxes. After reproaching her daughter for changing her face, the mother chooses in turn to change her own, to obtain “a white woman’s nose”.

Rosemarie Trockel

Rosemarie Trockel’s contribution comprises wallpaper adorned with two framed prints –*Mama Told Me Not to Come* (2002), and *Seeing Touch* (2024), – as well as a ceramic work. The installation crystallises a diffuse, almost animalistic tension. The photograph showing the interior of a family home emanates a sense of coldness. In the foreground, a child, sitting cross-legged in an armchair, stares into the void; in the background, a maternal figure, blurred by the artist’s intervention, seems to defy the lens with a frontal gaze. Despite the cosy ambience, the silence of this scene betrays a distanciated atmosphere, reinforced by an ironic title and the presence of the ceramic piece *Dry Milk (Mother’s Invention)* (2020), an ambivalent mass in white, red and brown tones reminiscent of a placenta.

Cudelice Brazelton IV

In the work of Cudelice Brazelton IV, the maternal figure emerges as a vector of aesthetic norms. The “wall-tattoo” created from bits of burnt jeans features a stylised cut, as though marked by both the intimate and commercial, recalling the graphic clarity of a logo. In counterpoint, a table presents a photograph taken by her mother: a meticulous composition of hairstyling tools, arranged with surgical precision. Despite being destined for educational purposes, this staging is akin to an autopsy scene and evokes the underlying pressures of hairdressing (straightening, braiding, etc.) and other treatments, with their injunctions of respectability, shaped by a world in which racial and social hierarchies dictate the norms of the body and its appearance.

Rosa Joly

With her imprints of balustrades and glitter collages depicting roses, Rosa Joly transforms domestic space into a ghostly decor that gives off occasional glimmers. Traditionally seen as a protective cocoon, under her watch, the home becomes a place of instability in which intimacy falters. The clearly precarious nature of her works, combining plaster and glitter, fuels a sense of instability. That feeling extends into the series of photographs presenting a young woman on a boat – the artist’s mother – at once a silent spectre, a go-between and an idealised individual, fixed by the objectifying gaze of her father, the photographer. But while childhood and femininity are revealed here as vulnerable, other works by Joly pay tribute to artists like Akerman, tutelary figures from a reinvented ancestral line, sketching out new connections and the possibility of transcending inherited wounds.

Sebastian Wiegand

Sebastian Wiegand’s artworks explore forms of community and the conditions for navigating harmonious coexistence. Interior scenes, bathed in warm tones, show lone figures or groups in a strangely charged atmosphere, suspended between torpor and relaxation. In particular, they reactivate the political legacy of the 1960s–70s, an era corresponding to the socialisation of the artist’s parents. Full of feminist struggles and revolutionary hopes, this period appears in a new light through the maternal figure, lying on a sofa, exhausted. Through his paintings, Wiegand invites us to explore the persistence of politics in the private sphere, as well as the subconscious connections that condition us.

love with captivating clarity. At once a refuge and an insidious trap, this love that the filmmaker’s mother expresses in the letters she sends her daughter, living in New York at that time, oscillates between tenderness, guilt trips, and infantilisation. This contradiction—which I call *ferocity*—lies at the heart of the exhibition. It is deployed in artworks in which the maternal figure haunts the space with her presence, as diffuse as it is oppressive, whether it is a spectral mother in Rosemarie Trockel’s mural composition, Tolia Astakhishvili’s domestic space under construction or Rosa Joly’s precarious guardrails. The home, traditionally seen as a protective cocoon, here becomes a place of instability, a territory of uncertainties in which intimate space is threatened. Cudelice Brazelton IV’s “wall-tattoos” and sculptures, as well as Harilay Rabenjamina’s video installation highlight a maternal figure conveying aesthetic norms, shaped by the assimilation of internalized racism and social hierarchies. As for Sebastian Wiegand’s paintings, they extend the examination of the Western political legacy of the 1960s and 1970s. The choice of yellow-orange colours combined with the representations of hippie style convoke the utopia of an era marked by feminist movements and revolutionary hopes. Outstretched on her couch, the mother nevertheless appears exhausted.

Oscillating between presence and absence, tenderness and oppression, singularity and the weight of social constructs, these artworks trace a sensitive cartography of the maternal bond. They reveal its tensions, contradictions and occasional ferocity—all sorts of dimensions that play out in the private sphere, in silence and far from “prying eyes”. Implicitly, the exhibition questions the dominant representation of parentality. It recognises affection as a cornerstone of stability, while highlighting forms of subjugation sustained by the child’s vulnerability. It invites us to rethink emotional responsibility as a shared commitment, capable of liberating mothers from a stifling and isolating assignation. Because, as the proverb accurately affirms, it takes a village to raise a child.

Oriane Durand
curator of the exhibition

Chantal Akerman
Tolia Astakhishvili
(with Zurab Astakhishvili
Simon Lässig and Maka Sanadze)
Cudelice Brazelton IV
Rosa Joly
Harilay Rabenjamina
Rosemarie Trockel
Sebastian Wiegand

Curator
Oriane Durand

Informative tours
Wednesdays → noon
Saturdays → noon and 4 pm

Associated programme
→ Saturday, May 17
Guided tour of the exhibition by curator Oriane Durand, followed by a screening of *News from Home* by Chantal Akerman
→ Saturday, May 24
Writing workshop for adults led by writer L. Etchart
→ Saturday, June 7
Children’s workshop led by artist Rosa Joly
→ Saturday, June 28
Storytime tour for families

Exhibition
16.05.25
→ 19.07.25

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Tolia Astakhishvili, *With and Without Light*, 2023, view of the exhibition “Living Spaces”, Galerie Molitor, Berlin, 2023. © Marjorie Brunet Plaza. Courtesy of the artist.

Ferocity at Home

¹ Mona Chollet, *Résister à la culpabilisation* (Paris: La Découverte, 2024), 76.

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