

Mothxrhood - Talk 1

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13:41

Hi everyone, and welcome to today's panel talk. My name is Kasia. I am one of the motherhood producers, together with happy hiding and Tila rich. I am so excited to welcome you all to today's panel talk motherhood and to Messer festival. I will shortly hand over to our wonderful host Shelly Maxwell, after I go over some quick housekeeping. So, as part of the future innovators of East London dance program, or the field for short, myself and the cohort on 2020 have worked incredibly hard to bring you mess up festival Messer is running events, all week long. And if you want to get involved in more events. Tickets are still available to buy all this week by heading to Eventbrite. You can also find us on social media or Instagram handle is the field. I would also like to say a big thank you to our partners represent creative one dance UK and the next choreography pro choreography Festival, which is a part of shiwen David's dance as many other festivals and events and Messer have also had to relocate to a virtual place, so we just want to thank you all for joining us on screen today. And if you would have any trouble with your internet, and you would be logged off, you can log straight back into the webinar, and our administrator will admit to you immediately. As we all know by now, technology can be a little bit temperamental, so if there are any technical difficulties we kindly ask you to bear with us as we try to sort it out. I also want to introduce you to our wonderful BSL interpreters, that are joining today's talk, Sophie and Bridget. If you are experiencing any accessibility issues or technical issues, please find the method Festival, which are the host of this webinar and message, and we will do our very best to help you. Finally, there will be a q&a at the end of this tool. So do feel free to post your question in the box that says asked a question. Without further ado, I'm very excited to introduce you to Shelly Maxwell, and the motherhood panel, Helen bionics and and Cami abrahamian.

16:17

Thank you so much. Welcome everyone, my name is Shelly Maxwell, and I am a movement director choreographer, writer and co director of a production house called venue, creative house. I'm also your host for this house host for this event today. And that's a little bit of tongue tie behavior that happens quite a lot for young mothers, I'm a mother of a six year old child, and there are many instances between her being zero and two, where I literally couldn't even think properly enough to speak. So I think that's very apt as an introduction. I have the pleasure of welcoming our two panelists. I'm going to start with Comey, and I'm just going to give you a little bit of information on both of them. So Comey grew up in an immigrant suburb of Toronto and was born into an Armenian family displaced from the swana region. They arrived in the world today as a supreme hifonics queer feminist caregiver, and an interdisciplinary creative writer curator performer producer and facilitator. They have a BFA slash BA in

film and political science, an MA in expressive art therapy and a PhD in community liberation indigent sorry indigenous and eco psychologies welcome coming. I also want to introduce you to Helen benutzen, who is our second panelist, Helen works across video performance and installation. Helens practice is concerned with how images of bodies are perceived within liminal and online spaces. She has exhibited her work in numerous venues, including but not limited to the Hayward gallery, the Tate Modern, and the Irma stern Museum in Cape Town. She has recently completed her PhD at Oxford University. On the subject of motherhood, in relation to the internet and is the winner of the procreates mother Art Prize 2020 for her film, Jude. Welcome,

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Helen. Thank you.

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So if you guys want to take your mute buttons off we're going to start the conversation. And hopefully, as we go through my pronunciation of words will get a little bit better. So, if I'd like to just invite at this time. Helen or Kami just to say a few words on who you are as artists and a little bit more about your practice. Coming.

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Sure.

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My, my,

19:00

my artwork is is quite steeped in collaborative practices, I would say it has been for for quite some time. and mostly my work is interested in diaspora diasporic identities, diasporic futurism and, and generally I would call it like I always tend to call my work ancestral reclamation work, which I think goes hand in hand with diasporic studies in this breaking identities. And in general, telling you know, I think like telling my own family stories as a way to uplift queer and feminist stories from, from this one our region which is where I'm from. But other than that, I think it's really hard to, you know, like reading my Bible out loud I've never heard it out loud like that and it was kind of nice actually. I felt like I was walking like walking on a red carpet, but yeah I think my most recent work has been is now becoming more collaborative again but there was definitely a phase right around the time that I became a parent where my work was becoming a little bit more insular, it could be because that's around the time that I started my PhD which is like you know tends to be a very heady endeavor, but I think what ended up happening for me was because my work was so collaborative, it became really hard to learn how to collaborate, how to be a collaborator as a caregiver with so many caregiving responsibilities. So then, it just felt easier for me to just do my own work for a while, and then I think as my little one gets older, less attached. That, that expand a little, but I will say that and definitely my, my most recent work is really heavily influenced by by my by my, you know, me becoming a caregiver but not in a very explicit way it's, it's a little bit. It's been a little bit more subtle and more in the just around like process and, and a lot of like nonlinear storytelling and stuff like that and not being able to formulate proper sentences or going into that.

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And thinking, I'll just make this into a style and it'll be fine.

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And yeah, little one is three and a half, is that correct. Yeah, me and Helen, I believe that you have two children, and a two year old both wild and a two year old brilliant, and would you mind telling us just a little bit more about yourself and about your work.

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Yes, I was born in London grew up in London. I studied at the Slade School of Law I did my MA MBA there, and then a few years later started a PhD at Oxford, which really focused on motherhood, but it was I tracked my pregnancies and by for the PhD, so I didn't just make work about the states of being actually used the PhD to produce this experience. The final part of my PhD was this need to go beyond my own subjectivity and reach to that of another person. I was finally I was in quite a vulnerable space, very heavily pregnant and I just felt such where I wasn't working within the institution of Oxford and I was in this period of. Suppose that maternity leave this need to reach out to someone else and that person I formed this relationship with was Jude, who is the subject of the film that I will show next up from a little later. But I think it was this throughout the research it was about these this reaching out to other people or other mothers, but actually online in different groups that I was occupying online but also in real life with creating this portrayal of Jude and their experience what it had been like to mother.

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Um, so it's interesting with the idea of motherhood and and what is perceived by it. You know, it is always a different journey for each person, and just inheriting what you've both said and you're kind of introductions to us of who you are coming you spoke about the need to become more insular and Helen I'm hearing that you felt the need to kind of start reaching out to other mothers or other people in the community. And it always strikes me that it's such an individual kind of journey. So I guess my question to both of you is during your, and I'll make it specific for you, Helen, as you have two Junior first pregnancies, were you working or were you, researching or studying. And in that regard. What was your your journey like kind of embracing what was happening to you physically as well as psychologically, as you tried to balance between the professional work, arts and life, and the changes that were happening to you on a personal level.

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I feel like the changes that occurred happened, even before I became pregnant. It was this obsessive and anxiety, anxious tracking of my body and I used different apps and groups. To do this, and that became a kind of obsessive work and research where I recorded and documented every single interaction I had online with these apps where I would put in different calculations or moods or things that I was experiencing and then once I did become pregnant with the first baby that then was translated into a into a documentation of this pregnancy again through these apps and how the apps perceived as what what it means to be a female what it means to be a mother. They're all very normative kind of online platforms, but yet there were I did come across people and spaces that were transgressive of this and that was also very interesting to me.

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And coming

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up so into the what, Helen was saying I forgot the question we were

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just your experience with the guards to as you journeyed into.

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Okay, well I didn't journey into my pregnancy sort of just happened so it was, I think, like really unplanned which. Yeah, I definitely had its qualities, but I would say I continue to work throughout my pregnancy, pretty much up until the last minute actually until I got into a car accident in my eighth month and it was like it was like I felt like it was a bit of a sign for me to start slowing down. So I listened I listened to that I didn't listen to anyone else telling me to slow down and stop working, I think I had something to prove to myself like that I didn't have to just be a mother now or something and especially culturally like for me. Coming from an Armenian family there is very you there is a whole archetype around that right that I was really trying to avoid falling into, because it, there was this constant sense of doom for me was kind of like well now you're a mother and you must give up everything, which was really unacceptable for me I always you know like even like as a young person as a teenager i'd, you know, I was like a very early feminist in that regard where I'm like, we're you know I didn't want to be lumped into the woman box or the girl box or, you know, and growing up like kind of similarly, the Armenian box like this is you know you can't be queer and Armenian you can't be that you know so all those things I think it was natural for me to resign, for my pregnancy or to my transition into becoming like a parent, was one of extreme resistance. And also just noticing like how people come to just the way that people would like look at me and touch me, and make assumptions like it would just became. I just felt like I was constantly fighting honestly like it was, it was really it was really rough, and it took a really long time for me to really settle in and to feel comfortable in my identity as a, as a parent, I continue to work after I was like nursing and like getting on zoom calls I was in the middle of producing a play and a part of me definitely regret that I wish I had given myself a little bit more slack and just a little bit more time to rest you know in retrospect, for sure, but I also think that it is. It is. It is a part of also who I am like my work is a part of who I am and that's just, I don't think is ever going to change no matter what. Giant chaotic catastrophic, you know, event happens in my life, ie having a child so,

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um, I definitely agree because I think it's, it's kind of dispelling the pre existing narratives that have existed about becoming a mother, and for myself as well I was on stage, performing for when I was eight and a half months, and it is that thing of ownership. The community tends to feel that they have a sense of ownership over someone who's pregnant, they become very protective where they get very defensive. And I think we're just starting to break that from the idea of this is my body, and this is my person and this is my journey. And I can then make the choices that I need to make and like you said coming. Sometimes it's very very difficult because you're navigating all of that you're navigating how society perceives everything, and how they perceive the individual as well, but you're still striving to maintain your identity, the professional side of your life, while also starting this kind of, I mean I keep

using the word journey because it does feel like it is a journey that doesn't stop with the birth of your child but it continues as they evolve you too are evolving. And I know Helen that in the film that we're going to see later down. That idea about who kind of makes those decision decisions with regards to what is meant for a woman's journey, or, you know, identity with regards to gender non conforming. We can see that through Jude story that will later be told off when we watch it with you. But can you relate to anything with regards to commies journey and kind of the little bits that I've also commented on with regards to for you in your professional versus personal.

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When I also did a performance when I was pregnant, where I was in a birthing pool and then I got out and really kind of quite violently saying they're excited written against the backdrop of one of my films. And I think it was this really quite terrifying moment of performing pregnant in front of other people. And of course, it got me to think about what it means, what the birthing room as a space of performance means when person giving birth is in this room. And even if it's sensibly, this kind of idea of natural whatever that is, and there's probably no such thing as you know this idea of the natural Bar Mitzvah is performed the performing person in the center of all of this is the person giving back, and the kind of acts external paraphernalia. The doctors, the nurses the midwives, the phones in the room, the props. Yeah, the parks. So I find that really interesting and also what you said about touch, when you're pregnant. And it, and it makes me think about the lack of touch that people are experiencing now during lockdown and how pregnancies can be so severely altered, people who are pregnant now. And in that journey. And I feel like for me lockdown just amplified everything I was, I had researched and my experiences of parenthood just became totally and utterly amplified and exaggerated during that time of lockdown and care. In this setting that we're living through now in different parts of the world. I think we're all going through something similar where we're using the internet as a way of of kind of relieving these intimate places of home to try and reach beyond what where we are because it's quite claustrophobic and exhausting, and it's our only means of accessing others.

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Um, can I just mention something that you wrote on your website. It was part of your, your PhD research. So on your website you wrote, I identify motherhood, in a digital networked age as an entangled condition where the push and pull between online and offline space is amplified where the mothering body is particularly tied to others, and where a continual disruption of agency, and articulacy is at play. The product organizes a new configuration of performed materiality asking what constitutes maternal voice, and how this can be spoken, but also heard within a matrix of motherhood, that is tongue tied on biblically tied screen tied internet connected continuously switched on and charged. I must say that I found that really fascinating the way that you put it because it is quite a different time. And he spoke about having a mobile phone in your hand as an extension of yourself, and then the time of the matrix of what being eternal is where does that fit in.

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For me it's this constant, constant

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thing

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in my hands. That's both a, an escape route away from what it means to be a mother and a means in a way of using, you know, ways of gaining information into this thing that we know nothing about when we start the process. But at the same time it's this, this, this divide between awesome. And the thing we're caring for,

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I think,

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I think the internet was probably the

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least helpful tool for me when I was pregnant. Because I was just like googling everything and I was, you know, and I had one friend who was constantly encouraging me to turn away from not just like the information I was reading online and whatever but also just like mainstream info, even just like the stuff. Typical, you know, medical advice was just like your body knows how to do this and you have to trust yourself type thing which I really appreciated in it. That was really helpful for me I think and it was like one of the learnings that that I appreciated most about like, you know, having like a birthing body, I suppose.

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I will say one piece that

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that is coming up for me is around

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this, the societal messages that you get right. As soon as you become pregnant and then as soon as you become like a caregiver, a person has a caregiving responsibilities are so intense and so dominating, but it's kind of like, it's almost like having a boss who just tells you what to do, but doesn't actually help you do anything that's what it feels like. So it's kind of like, I just kept getting these messages like this is how you're supposed to parent, but I'm like can you, can someone just like hold my baby while I shit, or shower, like that would be really helpful. So it's kind of like is that vibe of like, you know, there's that societal expectation but without societal support right so it's like this thing of like, oh, it takes a village, but I'm not actually gonna be there for you for like the nitty gritty, like, you know, I'm not gonna change the diapers for you I'm not gonna give you like child support or whatever it looks, you know, support stuff like that so that's what to me was really like that's what politicized I think my becoming a parent so intensely was just like realizing the Stark, the differences. Right. And the politics of care. That was what was kind of sending out for me as well and then around the piece of like touch and body I remember I was in a play also when I was pregnant but in early on, and then later on, when I was seven months I was in a film called Susanna by Oksana missoulia, which was did a really wonderful beautiful job that I still haven't seen in other films yet of of like showing a pregnant person.

That is also deliberated and sensual, and it was a it was really interesting because that's that's part of the story but then also just being on set with this big belly and like my big bush like full nude scenes and like most of the crew was sis men, and then feeling really uncomfortable around me, and I could just set have this feeling of like, I could sense this thing of like you just don't know what to do right now you're literally facing this like, like big loud, you know, brown pregnant body who's like, like there, I could just sense this thing of like, you know, do you want me to like hold you while you cry or do you want to fuck me like there was that thing happening where like they were just so confused and that's what the film does the film does that the film is very much so like, this is still a person. They don't become this like mother vessel, you know, to birth society or whatever but, yeah, that was some thoughts that were coming up for

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me. I mean it is it is about the body being political. It is about body politics and you referred to kimete the, the birthing body, because in essence you still do have those people who look at the female entity as a birthing body, and it serves that function within the society. Whereas, as a females we're looking at the body in an empowering way that you are housing, a human being, and that you're bringing life into the world. And if we go back to again. Different cultures will of course, have a kind of different ways of dealing with birth and dealing with family because I'm from the Caribbean and we're very much about the village helping to raise children so I had my child while I'm in London and I do have less support but I know if I was back home. It would have been very different for me. So it does feel slightly alienating at times as you're navigating it on your own, and rightfully so I think one of you said that we have no idea we have no clue and the incident is there to give you certain tidbits of information, and it can be a positive thing but it can also be a very very negative thing. And I've found for myself and I can only speak personally that I just had to figure out on my own. And we make mistakes, and then we learn from them. And for me, I wouldn't change anything. Looking back, because I've grown in a specific way and that's relative to her evolution. And my evolution as well. But I wonder, Helen. If potentially you could speak about your project your film project, Jude, which is a short film, and on your site, it says Jude is the portrait of a former Robertson, mother and drummer, and their exclusion from an Orthodox Jewish community, as they come out as non binary. Could you just give us a little bit more before you share that with us, just on the film and and your decision to make it

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so Jude was married to a rabbi, and this Rabbi was the rabbi in my synagogue, I belonged to and Jude was kind of coerced at the time, Judas coerced into marrying. This man at quite a young age, and they had three children. And they've subsequently come out as non binary, and left the community and the rabbi, and is living a life of freedom,

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which is really incredible. And a true inspiration.

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Jude is a drummer, and they have drawn the entire soundtrack of the film. It's a 25 minute film. And it's currently on show at the procreate mother Art Prize now, and then it will be shown in November online as part of the UK Jewish Film Festival, next month.

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Um, thanks Helen So should we just share i think is a two minute kind of excellent that we have to share.

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Yeah, I've got a two minute clip, which has captions thank thanks to Hattie and Tilly for

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organizing that.

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Great. So while we wait on Helen. To view that and Helen let me know if you're okay with any tech difficulties. Just a reminder for you guys that you can pop questions into the q&a box, because we will spend some time at the end,

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answering some of the questions.

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Lovely. Here we go.

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Um, so I was completely lost and unsupported in every way. For me, covering my hair was one of the hardest things I ever did, putting on a shader the week. The minute I had to do that. I felt like I lost all my identity.

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I remember, I remember the first time I got my period I'm

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ecstatic about it because I didn't want to be pregnant, and then a month later, I didn't get my parents, I was alone. Now well. And then I just, I think I remember thinking, shit, that's it. I'm stopping Oh, that's it. It's my life, I'm gonna be stuck in this marriage in this relationship. I Brian. What choice do I have to just be in it. Yeah, I went through nine months of pregnancy which I was really felt really rubbish. This morning sickness things with a morning night, eating days, constantly feeling nauseous sickness, where I didn't really want to do anything about it felt really isolated. I still didn't really have any friends. I think I found the whole idea of pregnancy really hard. Something that I struggled with, with all three of my pregnancies I suppose it was another way of repeating myself. It was another feminine gender expression Sunday that I never really identified with. I remember when I gave birth, and that it was a moment of

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emotion i don't i don't i remember crying. Thank you.

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Um, and so that was that was two minutes of what is 25 minutes correct Helen. Yes. Um, and, for us, we were able to actually watch the 25 minutes. Thanks to Helens generosity. And I think for me and I guess coming you can also come in after, you know, in it Jude speaks about a sense of identity. And for Jude pregnancy wasn't something that she identified with or could identify with. And I think again it comes to that kind of misconception that is portrayed by society that pregnancy is accepted as normal by all by the female gender, and that it shouldn't be viewed in any other light than positive, but pregnancy is complex, and it is not something that is viewed in that way by everybody. And you know, people don't speak about postnatal depression. Well, now it's spoken about a lot more in media but you know before, it wasn't, and all the kind of not so nice or or negative connotations of pregnancy were kind of hidden and behind the scenes. So for me what I appreciated about Jude, was the absolute honesty. And I think, you know, and it's Jude said about marriage, about getting married, I did it because that's what you did. And I think a lot of the time people get caught up in this is what you do. This is what is the norm, and this is therefore what my narrative will be. And I think for the generation that's coming up. It is about breaking the narrative, and really capturing your own sense of identity and being brave enough to do that if you can.

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I think also like i mean i i actually resonated a lot with judo. Because that was my journey, or my or my beginning to identify as non binary happened. Also, shortly after pregnancy For me it was a bit, it was a bit gradual and I explored it a lot in my writing. Nonsense nonsensical writing course because I was not sleeping very well but definitely I think my experience of like nursing and like playing this, this, you know, stereotypical or what's the word I'm looking for here. You know, the socialized act of motherhood. And what that does, what it does to your body and your sense of self and all those things for me. I think again I rebelled and I was like, I started to feel uncomfortable when people call me a beautiful woman I started feeling comfortable with my breasts and my chest. And in general, I think that was like, that's why I'm actually really grateful for Asana coming into my life because I think I don't know if I would have ever like bloomed into like my, my non binary Enos, if I hadn't really been pushed to in that sense you know it was really a push for me of like really questioning the ways that I've internalized like what is feminine, and what is not and all those things and it really broke me open as a, as a person. So, and it made me yeah think a lot about the gendered aspects of of pregnancy, but also of of just sick care, right, that the ethics of care the act of care the relations of care that how it's traditionally feminized labor but definitely need not be also like societal like the, I mean my, my dissertation looks at how diasporic swana women and queers. They know how they negotiate and they're like ancestral and cultural practices of care. In the midst of like settler notions of care and more like independence, or you know this strip the bootstrap like, you can do it on your own do it on your own go live in your little box, you don't need help do it on your own vibe. And, you know, just just thinking about that and how it is a particularly contextual experience right that I think you could resist you could have you could, there's like the micro resistance right and particularly in like whatever cultural community or you're in which I'm not trying to, you know, be nostalgic or about like back in the day like that's not what I'm referring to I'm actually just thinking about like how, how it functions like how the how the expectations of you being able to do it on your own, as a caregiver have implications on your sense of self as a caregiver right so if you aren't. If you aren't doing it well on your own, that means you're failing inside of like a capitalistic,

you know, context for sure, but just some of the pieces around that. I like have been sitting with like mostly in my dissertation work. But, but they come up, constantly every day all the time right the. Because we live inside of capitalism obviously but particularly I mean like I live in Canada. So it's, it has that similar colonial colonial vibe. Well yeah,

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you're paid practice lentil just right it's

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not it's it's a PhD in psych. But I am I am working with participants. But one of the things that we're doing in the research is. I'm not particularly working with, you know, like people who identify as mothers but people who are in relationships of care, right, whether that's caring for a child or an elder, or for land for spirit from memory. You know more than human beings in general so just looking at it from like

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from a relationship point of view.

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Did you interview the participants.

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Yeah, we're doing I'm doing an artspace methodology, it's gonna be some dialogue and some kind of, it's gonna be like participatory art making, but also integrating some Casio Mansi into the work which is Armenian as well it's not Armenian sorry It is like a general swana practice of coffee cup reading is a divination practice. So that's part of the methodology that you do, you'll do that, we'll do it together Yeah.

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I'm coming you spoke about for you during your pregnancy, I'm realizing that your identity was going to be non binary, and having that revelation during the pregnancy, whereas I no one's watching Jude. I'm not quite sure if we could get that from the excerpt with the two minutes. But for Jude, that realization happened later on. After I think maybe the third pregnancy is that correct Helen.

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I don't want to speak too much for Jude.

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Obviously they're not here right now. Um, I think it was this, I can't really ask that, then I feel.

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Okay. I'm just pulling from what I remember watching it. It's, again, that idea of doing your journey into motherhood, can you speak about being a caregiver. And what that is. And I'm very interested in that idea of motherhood and caregiving. As for me, I view them kind of hand in hand.

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But

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for you Come you're Helen, do you kind of differentiate between the two.

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Did you say motherhood, and

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being a caregiver.

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For me, the quality of care, and cuz layered and looped on top of what being a parent is in some ways, but I think you can be a parent and not care, kind of wrapped to interrupt that what that even means. So I think it depends on each specific person

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situation.

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Do you refer to yourself

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as mother's question to to a few.

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I do but i i use the MN brackets, because I think it's I think it's important to open up what it means to be a mother and not to be this pared down, kind of gendered role.

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And coming.

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Yeah I typically I oscillate. I'm much like my gender and like my sexuality and literally everything, but I would say I do, I do try to refer to it as refer to myself as a caregiver, but I do sometimes even just because I think, like, I am both of both minds in terms of looking at care, and the practice and the act of care in. In an intellectualized way, but also the the practice, and the act of caring for a child, caring for an for an elder, caring for land, it's, it's different, there are differences right, not just, you know, performative Lee or physically but also politically right, they are in different political playing fields, there are connections, I think, but I think that they're you know I'm often complaining about like my friends who don't have children or don't have any caregiving responsibilities how there is a, there's just a part of our the experiences that we have in the world that are just plain different. And I want to acknowledge that right, especially around the fact that like you know caregiving has been traditionally feminized labor

for for so long. Right. And, again, does not need to be. Anyone can feed a child, anyone can change a diaper. Anyone can hold a crying baby right. And so, I think, for me it's a little bit of depends on the context, also depends on like, you know, I'm not offended when people can call me a mother, that's for sure. And I do, I read a lot of like scholarly work on motherhood, and even if it's not incredibly, they don't, it doesn't tend to be inclusive in terms of gender. I do still I just, I still do think that the foundation is there right like in like reading works of like feminist motherhood or like queer motherhood and stuff like that like the basis of it is still there for me so it's not i'm not too nitpicky about it.

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You, um, we have a question from someone so I'm just going to read it to you guys and you can answer dependent. If you feel oriented to the person says, I wonder if the panelists might speak to imagining to be a mother of how motherhood is also part of the imagination, with the points being raised as someone who has experience in fertility and fertility, much of my emotional and creative Labor has been coming to terms with the motherhood. I imagined. And then what my lived experiences reveal as time goes on about this imagination. Is that a shared feeling experience perspective that resonates.

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You want me to read that again. I'm just having another moment. Think about it.

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I think I definitely resonate with the idea. I think we, I think in terms of pregnancy and having a baby. You really do imagine what it's going to be like and

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then it's

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never

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like that that's that.

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I think.

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And I think again the, for lack of a better word, the process of becoming pregnant as well. Everyone has a different journey. And again, I have many friends who had difficulties getting pregnant they wanted to do planned pregnancy but couldn't, and had to go with different kind of means and methods and some were successful and somewhere on successful, and being there for those that aren't able to get pregnant, and to have children, but who want it so badly and so desperately because they envision their lives with an extension of themselves in that way, and trying to comprehend how that can feel in a way the devastation of that for that person because part of their identity has been about going full circle on that journey of what society dictates being a female and a woman to be and and having to come to

terms with the fact that for them the circle is not going to come be complete in that way, and then having to transition to a different kind of system of belief that you can actually fulfill your circle on this planet, without having an extension of self through birthing an individual. So, again, I do think it's, it's something that resonates with me. And I think it is something that should be shared a lot more with with people in general.

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Comey.

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I mean, i think it's like, it's really, it's an individual experience like i think

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i think a lot about

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my initial, I don't know why this is coming up for me but my initial resistance to people identifying as mothers when they weren't caring for children I remember initially feeling really resistant to that. And then I had to kind of check. You know, I had to do some like really digging of like why I was resisting that and then I figured it was because, like what I mentioned before is like there is a part, there's an experience of, of, like, you know, caring for children that is, and I'm referring to, mostly like it's mostly something that happens in queer communities like queer moms queer dads drag moms stuff like that, which now I have come to to it, it doesn't it doesn't it bothered me initially and now I really see like the value in that right like just the, especially in queer communities when, you know, maybe some folks are not in touch with their immediate families for, let's say various like homophobic reasons right and finding community and finding ways to care for each other and mother each other or mother oneself also through that I think I'm a little bit more flexible with that term right I think when I had son as an infant I was so I was really feeling, the difference, and every little every little interaction you know even if a friend was like do you want to go out for a drink tonight and I'm just like no I can't do that anymore like when are you going to understand that you know like there's that that like that constant reminder that my life is just not the same anymore and grieving that a lot around grief. And so I think that's why I was like really like militant about like who gets to identify as mother but then I was like this is going a little bit in a turfy territory so I I reeled back and I'm like okay like actually, you know, what would the world look like if we learn, if we learn to mother ourselves and mother each other or care for ourselves and care for each other right a little bit better and that's something I think about a lot in terms of like the term mother is, is it denotes a particular type of gender and what does that mean right like so if I identify as non binary Am I allowed to identify as a mother because mother like typically denotes like, you know, like a feminine person, let's say, but I also don't think that's necessarily true. Like I also think that, you know, it can be a little bit undone. And so, you know, on one hand, I can see the arguments made for being more strict with terminology and identifiers. And then on the other hand I see them. Not, not the benefits but I see the generative possibilities of being a little bit more fluid and flexible

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around that a bit more open.

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Someone has a question that kind of goes on that tangent off. How do we both acknowledge the patriarchal imposition of rendering the pregnant body as feminized in brackets receptacle, while also actively stepping away from the obligation of a gender binary in brackets female question.

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So acknowledging that it is indeed an imposition that has been patriarchal with regards to the body as a receptacle. And how do we actually step away from it, that obligation of that gender binary of the female.

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I think I want to I want to disrupt that question a little bit and say I don't think I don't personally believe that patriarchy has imposed production onto feminized like bodies. I don't think that's, I think, that patriarchy has definitely had an impact on everything around that and the processes around that and the politics around that. Right. If we look at like the medicalization of birth, for example, or systems of care like if we look at the systems and the political apparatuses around, let's say, you know, motherhood or a caregiving or childbirth. Definitely there's an analysis there like patriarchal mothering even as an ideology right, but I don't necessarily feel like patriarchy forced me to. I don't equate like

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like production to.

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What's the word, how am I trying to help me out here. I don't I don't necessarily think i think i don't think that patriarchy is like, you know, definitely culturally I can make an argument let's say for Armenians where it's like, oh, like your job as a woman is to home Armenian babies, or whatever for sure that is a thing but I don't I don't personally feel, you know that it is, it is patriarchy that is like, forcing us to. Yeah,

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maybe I'm misunderstanding the question though, it could be

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no, I agree. I think that it's it's the idea of us as a receptacle is is broken and is like you said it's not an imposition by the patriarchy it's something that in different cultures still exists. And I think it's therefore, maybe a reflection on where you are geographically as well, with regards to that part of the question. But the idea

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of a woman's body as being a receptacle Yes, yes that is fucked up and sexist and definitely patriarchal I guess. So now that um maybe I'm understanding the question a little bit better. So yes, hearing that for sure. Definitely, the idea of a body being a receptacle is like definitely fucked up. But I will say that I think like everybody has different experiences of, like, of that right and i think it's a matter of like, you

know, figuring out what it means for you in whatever intersecting identities backgrounds experiences that you have right.

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Um, there's another question that asks, and it's motherhood, with the expert, he has been complicated for me further by the climate crisis has that impacted the panelists experiences. And do you have any advice slash resources where we can learn more about this aspect of motherhood. I'm loving these questions. Everyone needs like sit and think about it for a hot minute, I'm Helen, does that bring anything to mind for you. With regards to the climate crisis, having two children,

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potentially,

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I think we've all got a role to play.

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Bringing children into the world is obviously more responsibility. And I was looking at ideas around. Reproflow and reproductive flow, and

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was more to do with

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like reproductive scientific reproductive reproductive advances but you, the use of surrogacy in other countries and the travel to other countries for people to become pregnant, and what that means in terms of bodies traveling long distances and body matter, traveling.

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What that what that could do to

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potentially.

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Yeah. Think about that.

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Very good idea I've actually never thought about that before. I'm worried that we have five minutes left. There is one more question. So I'm gonna throw it out to you guys as the last question before we kind of do a wrap up. And it says it was mentioned briefly motherhood and caregiving as a performance. How does seeing that as an outward showing role or action affect how you connect intrinsically with your child slash children. So motherhood and caregiving as a performance, I know Helen that you mentioned when you were pregnant, you were in a birthing pool, how to sing that I guess also do you

see it as an outward showing role or an action how does that help you to connect intrinsically to your children,

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quite a hard question. I think I see a separation between the work I make as a researcher, an artist and and what I do, like in my private life at home. And even though the two are quite intimately connect the door, I make work in relation to that, I don't.

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I keep them quite separate.

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So, actually, I'm probably quite an inverted commas, normal as a mother or.

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Do you know what I mean,

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I get you and can I ask, um, for you Why is it a kind of deliberate separation, given that a lot of what you research is about motherhood. Why do you

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find an artwork I make work.

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I make work critically about different things that I've experienced or, but the fact that my children for example on the performance. Yeah.

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I see it's quite separate

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and coming.

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Oh, I'm not sure, but when you totally talk about like performance and motherhood and caregiving I automatically think of social media. And I think about, like, the cleanliness of the aesthetic of motherhood like there is a particular aesthetic that I am quite repulsed by and like, that sounds really judgmental but it's really just where I'm at like the, just the way that like, like the the motherhood and caregiving and like children are depicted on social media to me feel like so far away from the actual, the actual truth of motherhood like, you know what I mean. And, and I find that it's, I could use a little bit more of the the nitty gritty and and of like the tough like the tough. It's tough work it's dirty work it's like, I think, you know, the data in tough one, social media, portrayed is that they kind of sanitized again. Sure even, even you mean, even like the dirty and tough is sanitized is that, yeah. Yeah, for sure, for sure

even that is like framed in a particular, I don't see often people just being like, just straight forward and I think so, but that's social media right it's always gonna like alter somehow our filter somehow but I do, I just I think like, there's a particular aesthetic of like, like, and this is my piece is culturally like local but like the like the homeschooling mother who like makes beautiful wreaths and like it's just like everything's just like perfect like I just like love being a mother I'm just like, I feel like it makes me feel bad because I don't love it all the time, and I don't, you know like, making art with my kids is like really messy it's never like something that I could like post on Pinterest after and be like look at what a productive Mother, I am it's, you know, like that shouldn't really pisses me off and I would like to see less of that, because I think it's just like not very

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honest and it does just like makes people,

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and it's similar just a social media critique right it's also like how bodies are portrayed on social media and making people have, you know, it's it's similar and i think it's it's not individual to caregiving and motherhood, but I find it problematic in a particular particular way because it feels personal to me, you know.

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Absolutely.

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Um, well we are in time. So I just want to say thank you to you both and to everybody that came in today I am going to hand across so we can have closing words from the organizers of the MESA festival.

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Thank you so much.

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Oh You're very welcome.

1:12:04

Um, wow, a huge, huge thank you to our wonderful host Celli, and panelists, Helen and Cami for the time and for this wonderful talk. Thank you also to Bridget and Sophie for your wonderful work. And thank you so much for coming and joining in on this conversation. We'd like you to remind you of our second motherhood talk, which is on Saturday, where Shelley will be joined by actress Thea guyot, and producer grace. Okay, okay. It happened it's happening between one to 2pm this Thursday, and Tickets are available on Eventbrite after this talk, you will receive a post event email with an evaluation, as well as more information about artists and their work. So you can continue to be connected to this event. And we hope that you enjoyed this, and thank you again so much for joining us. Bye everyone.