

Hannah Perry: *Manual Labour* 22 June 2024 – 19 January 2025



Hannah Perry, *Manual Labour*, production still, 2024. Image courtesy the artist. © Hannah Perry.

Opening 22 June 2024 at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, British artist Hannah Perry presents a major new commission that considers motherhood, labour and class.

The work is a large-scale installation developed for Baltic's level 4 gallery, comprising film, sculpture, printmaking, and sound. The commission, mediated through the artist's own experience, looks at the process and transformation of matrescence – the process of becoming a mother – and its creative and destructive power.

Perry said: *"I came to the realisation that I had a deep-rooted, unconscious, anti-feminist view of the role of a mother that is excruciatingly patriarchal. As though the value of a mother's labour is somehow less than that of one's success in the professional, male-dominated world."*

Perry is known for her psychologically charged installations that investigate the intersection of industry, class and gender. Her materials, from sheet metal to car lacquer, body wrap and hydraulics, are associated with manual occupations in manufacturing and industry, and tell stories about shifting cultural and social values, shaped by the economic forces of capitalism and their effects on mental and emotional health.

The commission includes a sculpture, comprising steel and mechanical elements, which considers the physical act of labour and is choreographed to resemble a pelvis during childbirth. The work captures the force, violence, struggle, shock and trauma of the transition and its brutal, constrained power.

The artist said: “*Childbirth may shatter you into pieces and, while I allowed myself time and grace to recover physically and mentally, I still feel divided.*”

A film and a spatial soundtrack explore this madness of personal alienation which the artist likens to the idea of the internal crisis of motherhood alluded to by Sylvia Plath in her poem *Morning Song*.

Matrescence is a period when the physical act of creation puts the concept of the self under threat and even leads to a struggle of displaced identity. “*Perhaps, the process is to undergo an existential re-birth in which a past self, a past body, a past life, must now be mourned. A new self has been more or less replaced with the leaden experience of generations of mothers who I cannot relate to. I’m stepping away from my own singular experience and acknowledging the shared experience of societal pressure and pain of women at large,*” said Perry.

If part of the role of the artist is as perceiver, the mother’s role is as perceived, such as Madonna in Christian iconography. Can these identities be reconciled? How does the Madonna-whore complex and internalised misogyny contribute to the struggle for identity after birth?

Hannah Perry: *Manual Labour* is on show from 22 June 2024 until 19 January 2025 at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Artist Biography:

Hannah Perry, (b. Chester 1984) lives and works in London. Recent exhibitions, performances and events include *Chester Contemporary*, curated by Ryan Gander, with John Akomfrah, Fiona Banner, Simeon Barclay, Jacq Bebb, Fischli and Weiss, Tim Foxon, Ryan Gander, Hannah Perry, and Elizabeth Price (2023); public sculpture commission, Lake Worthersee, Austria (2023); Galerie Kandhofer, Vienna, Austria (2023); *The Momentary*, Crystal Bridges Museum of Modern Art, Bentonville, USA (2021); *A Smashed Window and an Empty Room*, Kunstverein in Hamburg, Germany (2019); *Smoking Areas*, David Roberts Art Foundation, London (2019), live performance; *GUSH*, Somerset House, London (2018) solo show and live performance programme in collaboration with the London Contemporary Orchestra, touring to Towner Gallery, Eastbourne and Arsenic Theatre, Lausanne; *Viruses Worth Spreading*, Arsenal Contemporary, New York (2017), live performance; *Touch Sensitive*, Guest Projects, London (2017), installation & performance; *100 Problems*, Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin, (2016), solo show and performance; *Déjà Vu*, Serpentine Gallery, London (2014), live performance in collaboration with

Holly Blakey, Sam Reviere and Mica Levi; *Just Relaxx*, Barbican Create Programme, London (2013), live video and performance installation.

About Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art

Baltic is a major international centre for contemporary art situated on the south bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, England and has welcomed over eight million visitors since opening to the public in July 2002. BALTIC presents a distinctive and ambitious programme of exhibitions and events, and is a world leader in the presentation and commissioning of contemporary visual art.

Housed in a landmark ex-industrial building, BALTIC consists of 2,600 square metres of art space, making it the UK's largest dedicated contemporary art institution. BALTIC has gained an international reputation for its commissioning of cutting-edge temporary exhibitions. It has presented the work of over 460 artists of 60 nationalities in 220 exhibitions to date.

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