

THE LET DOWN REFLEX

January 30 - March 12, 2016

Artists: Dillon de Give, Home Affairs (Arzu Ozkal, Claudia Costa Pedersen, Nanette Yanuzzi), Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn, Leisure (Meredith Carruthers & Susannah Wesley), Lise Haller Baggesen, LoVid, Shane Aslan Selzer

Curators: Amber Berson and Juliana Driever

Curators' Statement

The Let Down Reflex began from a place of personal frustration. When we set out to create an exhibition about parenting, we were weary from concealing our roles as parents in order to not jeopardize our careers. We were fed up with fighting for better work hours and better conditions at workplaces within the art world. We were exhausted by assumptions that our appetite for professional involvement would - and maybe *should* - change because of our parental status. And we were tired of feeling alone; alienated from the larger (art) world by our fear of speaking up about these issues.

What we desired was a forum in which we could safely discuss these feelings. As we dug into our research, what we found is a community as hungry for this discussion as we are. Whether we found ourselves in conversation with those who were loudly voicing the validity of the maternal, or interacting with parents who are less able or willing to broadcast their experiences, it very quickly became clear that this is an issue deserving of urgent redress. Whereas we initially worried about a slippage within feminist circles in the art world, we soon realized that the problem didn't lie with the art and work being produced by parents, but rather with the institutions built to support the artists and administrators working within them.

Our response was to summon a group of artist-parents to contribute to re-imagining an art world where "Mom" is not a demeaning characterization, where childcare is factored-in for participating artists at art spaces, and where artists aren't forced to choose between home and work because of a lack of parental leave. The "let down reflex," a term referencing the involuntary reflex that causes nursing mothers to produce breast milk, takes on a double meaning in this exhibition, referring here to the reflexive tendency of letting down parents, and particularly mothers, within the flawed labor system of the art world. *The Let Down Reflex* creates a radical presence for families where they are typically absent; excluded from residency programs, low-pay/high demand exhibition opportunities, panel discussions, and the like.

This exhibition highlights the need for a more flexible system in which artist-parents can find art world advocacy, encouraging a model that promotes sustainable practices for those actively caring for young children. It asks:

- What feminist tactics were in place in the past that we have come to take for granted, and are they being considered in the current art world infrastructure?
- What strategies can be developed to improve current conditions, and how can we alter current systems to build a better future aligned with our values?

These questions drive this exhibition, asking artists (both parents, and not) to contemplate work that critiques the perception of parenthood – and more specifically, motherhood – as a liability, and move towards building a feminist space for the flourishing of labor-based practices that work with the realities faced by families. This, in turn, forces a confrontation with a universal sense of vulnerability in the various balancing acts of family life and art practice, while simultaneously soliciting non-parents to reflect on the current status quo and strengthen a system of support and community.

Families and children are encouraged to attend. Childcare provided for select public programming – please contact meghana@efanyc.org for details.

The artworks included reflect the various needs and desires of parents, individual challenges and successes, and calls to action. The artists work from a variety of approaches. Some take space as parents: Lise Haller Baggeson presents *Mothenism*, an installation which creates “a mother sized space in the gallery” and which proposes a space for institutional critique, and for childcare, and also a disco. Others, like LoVid, who are presenting *Kids at a Noise Show*, work through their archives to assess the secret ingredients of art spaces and institutions that welcomed them as artist-parents. Home Affairs’ (Arzu Ozkal, Claudia Pederson and Nanette Yannuzzi) projects *And Everything Else* and *Award Letter #1 and #2* send thank you letters to institutions that support families, along the way exposing the dearth of such spaces available to us. In the art of Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn, with *The Wages Due Song*, and Leisure’s (Meredith Carruthers & Susannah Wesley) installation *Conversation with Magic Forms*, the artists work through historic precedents for a feminist call to action, and attempt to see where new shifts can occur. Finally, Shane Aslan Selzer’s video work *Horizonline: Gowanus*, and Dillon de Give’s performative installation *By My Own Admission* make visible the tension of being both a parent and artist at all times.

For many of the participants, this was the first time that they wove mothering into their interdisciplinary practice. As curators we are indebted to them for the risk they took in signing up to make demands for a better future. We can’t claim that art can fix societal problems, but it should be a place where we can at least imagine a better future. For us, that future is one in which everyone is welcome, not least of all, families. At a moment of reclaiming and owning feminist identity in all of its possible variations, we wish to stand up as feminists and build supports for mothers and parents of all stripes.

Related Events:

1. January 30, 2:00 – 4:00 pm: Opening reception
2. February 17 & 19, 7:30 PM: *By My Own Admission*, performance by Dillon de Give
3. February 27, 3:00 – 5:00 PM: *Wab-wab, shb, chomp, munch, nom, burp, poot, slurp, yum, toot, mwah. But who's holding the baby?*, a panel discussion organized by Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn
4. March 5, 11:00 – 1:00 PM: *Early Horizons*: an exploratory material workshop for children under 6 years old, organized by Shane Aslan Selzer (RSVP by Friday, March 4 to meghana@efanyc.org)
5. March 10, 6:30 – 9:00 PM: *Artists Raising Kids* a live streaming/free communal sharing of Creative Capital’s seminar with Andrew Simonet (RSVP by March 8 to meghana@efanyc.org)

Amber Berson is a writer, curator, and PhD student who conducting doctoral research at Queen’s University on the subject of artist-run culture and feminist, utopian thinking. She most recently curated *The Let Down Reflex* (2016); *TrailMix* (2014); **~_~*JENNIFER X JENNIFER*~_~* (2013); *The Annual Art Administrator’s Relay Race* (2013); and *The Wild Bush Residency* (2012–14). She sits on the editorial committee of *.dpi*, a feminist journal of digital art and culture; and is the Canadian ambassador for the *Art+Feminism* Wikipedia project. Her writing has been published in *Breach Magazine*, *Canadian Art*, *C Magazine*, *Esse*, *Fuse Magazine* and the *St Andrews Journal of Art History and Museum Studies*. She is a mother to a toddler named Paloma.

Juliana Drier is a curator, writer, and educator. Her work strives to create equity for art and ideas that exist beyond a perceived mainstream. She is primarily concerned with public space, site-specificity, and participation, and has worked on a variety of related exhibition, programming, editorial, and writing projects. Recent curatorial work includes *About, With & For* (2013, Boston Center for the Arts), *Art in Odd Places* 2014: *FREE* (with Dylan Gauthier, New York, NY), and *Socially Acceptable* (2015, Residency Unlimited and InCube Arts). Her writing on social and participatory art has been published online by *A Blade of Grass* Foundation and *Bad at Sports*, and in the print volume *Service Media: Is it ‘Public Art’ or Art in Public Space?* She is a mother to a seven year-old named Jackson.

EFA Project Space is located at **EFA CENTER | 323 West 39th Street, 2nd Floor | NYC 10018**

Gallery Hours: Wed – Sat, 12 -6 PM

projectspace@efanyc.org | <http://www.projectspace-efanyc.org/the-let-down-reflex/>

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