

ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

MARCH 22, 2023 BY ART SPIEL

Gabriela Vainsencher: Epic, Heroic, Ordinary at Asya Geisberg

FEATURED ARTIST



Gabriela Vainsencher with “Epic, Heroic, Ordinary” at Asya Geisberg gallery, March 2023
In her solo exhibition at Asya Geisberg Gallery Gabriela Vainsencher exhibits wall hanging porcelain reliefs, referencing the nuts and bolts of motherhood entangled in layers of epic mythological context—Medusa reveals a worried woman with a frying pan and a baby’s pacifier as weapons at hand. The show runs through April 8th, 2023.

Tell us about the genesis of this body of work.

Like many other artists, I lost access to my studio when the pandemic began, while also becoming a full-time caregiver to my young child. Up until that moment, I had been, like many other first time mothers, worried about what becoming a mother would do to my career and to my practice. Although it was always clear to me that I wanted to be a mother, I had been reluctant to make work about it, fearing being put into a niche. The pandemic threw my life into stark relief, highlighting my priorities, what I could do without, and what I absolutely could not. Many things fell away, and I was left with my family and my art practice, most of which was at this point confined to a sketchbook. In this sketchbook I made a drawing, which I didn't exactly think of as an artwork. It was more personal, a drawing I made for myself.

The instant I had access to my ceramic studio again I decided to make a wall hanging sculpture based on this drawing. I titled it *Mom*, by far the largest work I'd made, and an unapologetic depiction of motherhood. Made entirely of porcelain, it is 12 feet wide, a self-portrait as a mother to a young child during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In it I am a multi handed, multi breasted snake creature, whose hands are involved in the mundane tasks of caregiving: feeding, doing hair, picking up a stuffed animal. This piece marks the first time I've made my work explicitly about the experience of motherhood, and everything in this show pours forth from that point of departure.



Mom, 2021, porcelain and underglaze, 12' x 9' Installation at Asya Geisberg (photo by Etienne Frossard)

Please guide us through the show.

This show is a portrait of motherhood as I perceive it—an ancient role, encoded both into—our genome and our culture. It’s also a fantastical, borderline surrealist take on the image of the mother. Archeological and art-historical quotes mix with invented histories and mythologies. To me, being a mother is both the most profound endeavor and the most ridiculous one.



Three Muses of Flowing Abundance, 2023. Porcelain, glaze, underglaze, and acrylic, 30 x 20 inches

Fertility Cornucopia is an absurdist cross between the genres of the horn of plenty and the memento mori. As a person who has given birth and is pregnant while writing these lines, I am acutely aware of the state of fertility as both a wondrous expression of the body’s ability to spring forth new life, as well as its proximity to mortality- the mother’s, as well as the baby’s. This still life includes objects that hold the promise and symbolism of fertility- an ovary, a ripe papaya, a stack of bills. But on top of it all is a fish, gasping for its last breath while balancing an hourglass on its nose.



Fertility Cornucopia, 2023. Porcelain, glaze, underglaze, 27x 51 inches

My wall-hanging porcelain works meld imagery of contemporary motherhood with art history and archaeology, mostly from the Minoan and Ancient Greek periods. When I thought about how I would commemorate the act of motherhood had I been an ancient amphora maker, I thought about the epic act of being a parent, which, unlike war, mythology, and conquest, is not measured in grand feats but in countless small devotions, in dedicating an entire life to someone else's, in simply being there for them. The eponymous work in the show is "Epic, Heroic, Ordinary", a wiggly amphora that depicts the ordinary, mundane acts that constitutes being a caregiver to a child: picking her up, brushing her hair, sitting with her quietly.

About the artist: Vainsencher was born in Buenos Aires, raised in Tel Aviv, and currently lives and works in Montclair, NJ. She received her MFA from Hunter College in 2016. Past solo and two-person exhibitions include CRUSH Curatorial gallery, NY, NY, A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, Hanina Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel; Musée d'Art Moderne André Malraux, Le Havre, France; Parker's Box Gallery, Brooklyn, NY; NurtureArt, NY; and La Chambre Blanche, Québec City, Canada. Her work has been included in group exhibitions including Marisa Newman Projects, NY, NY, Bergamo Modern and Contemporary Art, Italy; Kunstforening, Tromsø, Norway; Pierogi gallery, Brooklyn, NY, The Freies Museum, Berlin and The National Gallery of Saskatchewan, Canada. Residencies include Yaddo, The Atlantic Center for the Arts, Byrdcliffe Artist Residency, Woodstock (USA), Triangle Arts Association (France), and La Chambre Blanche (Canada). Vainsencher is the founder of the Morning Drawing Residency. She has written about art for Hyperallergic, Title Magazine and Tohu magazine. She also teaches art occasionally at Williams College, in Williamstown, MA and at the Macaulay Honors College at Hunter College, NY.