



FEATURES

## How Being a Mother Changed My Art Practice (And Didn't Ruin It)

By Celina Teague — 24.11.2016

Painter Celina Teague shares what it's really like balancing a career as an artist with the challenges of parenting.

*Boundary-pushing performance artist Marina Abramović **made headlines** recently when she stated that family responsibilities hold back women artists, saying that having children would have been “a disaster” for her career. Is it true that women artists can't have it all? On the contrary, some artists credit their children as a source of inspiration for their work. London-based painter **Celina Teague** shares her insight into how having a child can change your art practice, and what it's really like to be both an artist and a mother. Teague received her MA in Fine Art from Central Saint Martins College and her work has been shown at various art fairs, and awards and residencies include a 2012 Takt Artist Residency in Berlin and inclusion on the shortlist for the 2013 Beers.Lambert Contemporary Visions IV. She's represented by **Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery**.*

—Intro and interview by Jane Fayle



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Making art is not unlike having a child. It’s all-consuming, you give birth to it, you nurture it, you are entirely emotionally connected to it and, if you make great work, you might leave something worthwhile behind. Had I not become a mother, I would have felt fulfilled for sure. But I always knew I wanted to have children.

In 2003, I spent a year in Berlin as part of my degree. It was there that I realized I was painting in a way that was more than a hobby. Germany has such a rich art history, and being in Berlin at that time with all the galleries and an art scene so fluid and energetic was thoroughly inspiring. I was young and free and everything seemed possible.

Before the birth of my daughter, even before I was pregnant, I had deep anxieties about how I would juggle being an artist and a mum. The idea that mothers and good artists are something of an oxymoron still prevails. I feared that with a child commanding so much love and attention, I would lose my compulsion to paint.

In the period before my daughter was born, I did a residency in Berlin, had two solo shows six months apart, and I worked right up until the day before I gave birth. I

clearly had a point to prove! I wish I hadn't worried that everything would change after having a child. It didn't.

Any changes that came were massive positives. My daughter inspires me daily, and I feel protective of my time and space to paint. My daughter will become an independent woman with her own life to live. People will come and go, loved ones will pass away. Painting is mine. It's something I can enjoy for as long as I live, and it will take me on adventures I can't even begin to imagine.

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One of the hardest things when you have a child and a career is the practicalities—the same practicalities that most working women have to juggle. To get lift off as an artist is a real feat in itself. It can take years to hone your craft, and even then there is no guarantee your work will gain traction. Child care costs are prohibitive, and artists' salaries are usually meagre and unreliable, especially to begin with.

There are the other usual pressures: day-to-day chores, bills, trying to be a good partner, mother, daughter, friend, sister, citizen, and all the other kitchen sink drudgery that makes us feel so time poor. Look at the many fantastic artists who are both female and mothers: Phyllida Barlow, Kara Walker, Marlena Dumas, Nancy Spero, Jenny Saville, Cecily Brown, Julie Mehretu, and Wangechi Mutu—to name a few. I remember [Jenny Saville saying](#) that having children was profoundly inspiring and added a new dimension to her work.

We need to stop assuming that a female artist's choice to have a child means they are not serious about art. It is simply not true.

My daughter Assisi is two and a half years old and she's the best thing that's ever happened to me. The work itself hasn't changed so much as the way I work has. There is no time to waste. I used to settle in, get a cup of tea, and potter around. Now I paint, have lunch while I paint, and have a break only at the point when my bladder is bursting. I work with the urgency of someone who knows she will be interrupted soon, but has a lot to do before then. If I have a spare half hour while my baby is napping I'm in the studio like a shot.

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Nighttimes can become work times, especially when there is a looming deadline. I won't lie, it's sometimes a real struggle to work with the constant interruptions.

Painting requires deep focus. The days where I paint for ten-hour-long stretches with no one knocking on the door are few and far between. But it's okay. Those times will come again.

I visit a lot of exhibitions, and my daughter is at the age where she enjoys them too. I love this time with my wing-girl. Coming up in January, I am participating in a group drawing show at [Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery](#) in London. I have literally just relocated to Dubai and am really looking forward to exploring the art scene here. This place is such a crazy melting pot of cultures. I'm just starting to dip my toe into the art world.









Visit Celina Teague's online portfolio at [celinateague.com](http://celinateague.com). Cover image via *Art Fix Daily*.