

● neue
galerie

**Der Geist
des Kumbhaka
Magda Stützer-Tóthová
14.06.–17.08.2024**



Index

- 3** *Visitors Text*
- 7** *Fragments and contradictions*
- 15** *Literature*
- 16** *Room Plan*
- 17** *List of Works*
- 18** *Biography*
- 19** *Credits & Dates*

• **neue
galerie**

Rennweg 1, Innsbruck,
Tel. +43 512 57 81 54, office@kuveti.at, kuveti.at
Mi–Fr 12.00–17.00 | Sa 11.00–15.00

The Spirit of Kumbhaka

Magda Stützer-Tóthová

The term „Kumbhaka“ derives from yoga practice and means to hold one’s breath - a pause between inhaling and exhaling that is natural and influences our breathing rate. Cultivating this pause allows us to recognise the standstill in movement in order to generate new strength for the further course of breathing. Standstill as growth and withdrawal: a comparison with Stützer-Tóthová’s artistic practice, in which, after initial dissonance, her role as a mother became an additional aspect of her being an artist. A role in which she constantly struggles on multiple levels for visibility and needs-orientation, for necessity and justification.

Visitors Text

The exhibition *The Spirit of Kumbhaka* [original title: *Der Geist des Kumbhaka*] at the Neue Galerie touches a sensitive issue in the art world, in which motherhood and parenthood are still marginalised. The question about the working conditions and working realities of mothers and other parents in the art and culture industry, posed by art historian and critic Larissa Kikol in the current issue of *KUNSTFORUM International*¹, touches on what Jori Finkel calls „probably the last taboo in contemporary art“². For Stützer-Tóthová, motherhood is characterised by experiences of withdrawal, both in her everyday life and her artistic practice. Identifying and learning to understand this motherhood-induced withdrawal or standstill, not only from her personal perspective but also from an art scholarly perspective, ultimately helped her to approach her own artistic practice with new self-confidence and empowered her to embrace her personal experiences and narratives.

¹ KUNSTFORUM International (vol. 295 April-May 2024), *Mutter-schaft. Eine Bestandsaufnahme*.

² Larissa Kikol, „Liebe Mutter, du Dilemma“, in KUNSTFORUM International 295, *Mutter-schaft. Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (April-May 2024), 49.

“It seemed to me
that I lost my feminist
vision what my role
in this should be.”

Magda Stützer-Tóthová

The art world needs a structural change to ensure that parenthood is no longer an obstacle to the pursuit of artistic and paid work, or even bans the parent completely from this world. In *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)*, Hettie Judah illustrates how extensive this structural change needs to be: From the expectations of those involved in the art and culture industry, to art academies, to spatial resources such as access to studio and workshop spaces, to residency programmes, commercial galleries and public institutions - all areas of contemporary art need to be reconsidered. The visualisation of experiences and the promotion of a discourse, also from a feminist perspective, is a first step.

In the slide projector installation *Fragments and contradictions* in the first room of the exhibition, Magda Stützer-Tóthová compares her experiences as a mother with her own feminist position. The slides are based on research, reflections and the artist's own experiences and comprise individual text boards quoting personal observations and collaged images. The motifs depict social expectations of mothers as well as abstract masks that react to certain statements and images. The two-part slide show testifies to the ambivalence and transitory character of motherhood/parenthood. In *Fragments and contradictions*, Magda Stützer-Tóthová confronts thinkers such as Susan Sontag, who considered motherhood as the end of growth and achievement for women, and at the same time she confronts the cult of motherhood as the sole destiny of women, which has been spread widely since the Enlightenment.

Even if the artist asks herself the question of regret, regretting motherhood does not determine her experience. Instead, she recognises that there are no two experiences of motherhood/parenthood alike and that answers can only be found within oneself. Answers that she tries to reflect on using fragments of text and images. Do your own experiences correspond with what motherhood is expected to be like? What role do exaggerated attributions play in this? Has the „natural“ mother-child relationship been unmasked as an illusion of the Enlightenment?

With the video work ***81 Days Without the World*** [original title: *81 Tage ohne Welt*] in the last room of the gallery, Magda Stützer-Tóthová attempts to portray „real“ motherhood/parenthood. In doing so she follows a feminist practice in art history in which „new images of motherhood with emancipatory potential“³ are created in art opening up the discourse by depicting realistic daily life and family situations. The video diary, which accompanies the artist's everyday life with her two-year-old daughter during the pandemic, provides an unfiltered and unsparing view and is reminiscent of the approach adopted by feminist consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s, who by sharing individual and personal experiences embedded them in a structural and political context.

The artist's experience of motherhood during this time, exacerbated by the pandemic, is characterised by a lack of the resource time. Artistic work is only possible during the child's naptime or requires you to choose between sport for physical well-being or writing for mental well-being.

³ Sabine Kampmann „Great Mother Artists?“, in KUNSTFORUM International 295, *Mutter-schaft. Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (April-May 2024), 130.

Visitors Text

In the video, Stützer-Tóthová poignantly describes her feeling of disappearing - due to the lack of (her own) space and within her role as a mother - as well as the persistent feelings of guilt as constant companions, her endless exhaustion, and how she is unlearning to demand things based on her own needs.

The feelings and emotions that Magda Stützer-Tóthová experiences through her motherhood also underly the 11-part series *Emotional Artefacts* in the central exhibition room. Influenced by a tradition of Bon Buddhism, in which spirits are to be appeased through certain rituals, Stützer-Tóthová works her emotional states into clay objects. These clay masks relate to the images of masks from the slides shown in *Fragments and contradictions* and can be associated with spirits, and are also a recurring element in her artistic practice. The masks are complemented by objects whose form is reminiscent of worry stones, which calm and relieve tension. They are a sort of placeholder and at the same time relics from the artist's everyday life. Stützer-Tóthová transfers the walls from the video into the gallery by using plaster pink colour to create the spatial framework for the multi-part sculpture *Face to face*, in which the masks, reminiscent of ghosts, face each other in a friendly manner as mother and daughter and enter into a dialogue. The sculptures are complemented by two further figures positioned between them on the floor. Made by Ella, the artist's daughter, the two Fimo sculptures emphasise the collaboration between mother and daughter on a further level. Just as Ella allows her mother to be part of her artistic work, Magda allows her daughter to take part in her solo exhibition.

Bettina Siegele

Fragments and contradictions

Fragments and contradictions

In 2018 I became a mother.

It seemed to me, that I lost my feministic vision what my role in this should be.

“Maternal bliss conspires with maternal guilt,” Julie Phillips says - I often agree.

I also feel what psychoanalytic theorist Lisa Baraitser calls the “intractable problem of how ... intellectual and maternal labor appear to cancel one another“.

maternal ambivalence

It is, however, not the loneliest time of my adult life.

Is there a theory of motherhood and the transformation of an artist-mother through this period of her life?

Is anyone out there, who can explain this to me?

I pause

I work my way through books, countless texts, words, like a hungry worm that gets dizzy from the flood of images.

my beloved

PARASITE

I let you make me so weak in my version of matrescence

**Fragments and
contradictions**

After I read the painter Stella Bowen's words: "I simply had not got any creative vitality to spare after I had played my part towards him and Julie (their daughter) and struggled through the day's chores." I slowly start to acknowledge, that I might not be the only one feeling this way.

the MYSTIFICATION of
JUSTIFICATION can finally start to end

cramps in my body in my brain
in my soul in loving disguise

Susan Sontag is not helping- she observed, to her annoyance, while she was ghostwriting her husband's book on Freud's influence, that mothering was the end of growth and achievement for a woman.

I am obviously searching for something in this material, for proof or some kind of evidence, so that I can show the world why I am trapped, where did I end up and that I didn't give up trying not to lose myself - - without grieving the loss of my childless time or hesitating with the purpose of my new role - - No, no, I am sure, everything is fine.

The early analyst Alice Bálint wrote in 1939, that the ideal situation was one in which "the interests of mother and child are identical".

when I became what I had not been before
I was overcome by a fatigue that was unknown to me until
then
to take a break seemed to be impossible
my breath was not enough for three
my breath only reached to the doorstep
beyond that I had become a pause
not the one from before
nor what I would have become
but the tiny little slit in between

the annoying smell of LACK of SELF-REALIZATION is
everywhere I look, I don't even have to open my eyes.

the illusion of being a mother as the one thing I was meant
to be, to disappear

It's comforting to know that there is no such thing as
the instinct of the MOTHER. Everyone can become a caring
person, our brain structure needs some time and practice
until we know how to react as a parent.

Despite of the neurological POV, there is this other question
cruising in my head - am I a "good enough mother"- as
the psychiatrist D.W. Winnicott described a mother-child
relationship that is healthy and nurturing. And if yes, good
enough for whom?

Yes, Camille Henrot, thank you for this one: „There is no
global image, there is no ideal mother, there is no good-
enough mother: there are only many, many singular forms
of care, or lack thereof. “

Fragments and contradictions

Am I regretting this already? Regretting motherhood?

Or did I fall for „the increasing commercialization and artificiality of the institution of motherhood, its sugar-coated aesthetic in social media culture, the weight of domestic duties, and the narcissistic reward...“as Camille Henrot describes it in her book Milkyways.

Let’s not forget, the cult of true womanhood and the instinct of the mother, only exists because of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued for breast-feeding and affectionate mothering.

I remain as “the impossible subject, par excellence ... a shadowy figure who seems to disappear from the many discourses that explicitly try to account for her,” these are Baraitser’s words, not mine - but I can relate.

The feeling of becoming a mother is indescribable - playwright Sarah Ruhl wonders, if this experience is even unstageable - beyond narrative and language - this thought leaves me behind - all those staged images of women in my head...

I try to come back to something - but to what?

the fetishization of the artist studio

Where is my space? Rachel Cusk describes the kitchen; where she spends a lot of time with her baby for safety reasons, as a cell, a place of impossibility. I recognize this space and myself in it.

It is not a feeling of guilt that holds me back, it is a mixture of tiredness, disinterest and an inner reassurance that someone needs me more than I need myself. This self-abandonment is reflected in the initial neglect of physical space in the form of a studio.

But the lack of demarcation also has its price and is mapped on my skin, in places that are responsible for contact with the outside world. Rashes along my eyes, around my mouth and on my hands. Signals from my inner compass that I don't want to see and when I do see it, it disappears into the fog because I let it.

If Sheila Heti is right and the most feminine of all problems is that we don't take enough space or time or are not granted it then I MUST react before it's too late.

Feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva calls mothering unnameable, while Ursula Le Guin, whom I admire on so many levels, described the fact of becoming a wife and mother as turning into "a nobody."

Ughh, that is painful to read. A minor backlash.

Let's try again, what about this one:

Julie Phillips says : „Many creative mothers have argued that their relationship with their children has deepened their sensibility, broadened their range, brought them, as Ursula Le Guin put it, “closer to the bone”.

I love these words by Rachel Cusk: “split in two ... like a divided stream...” - years after giving birth, I still feel this way.

**Fragments and
contradictions**

But my shared self is here to focus and appreciate
to focus and appreciate
to focus and appreciate - what a stupid mantra! I have to
find another one!

the presence of the interruption and the pause I became

I have to dig deep into myself until I open the door to my
own space and when I do, years after my daughter was
born, it feels like someone was expecting me long ago. No
reproaches, no regrets, nothing I have missed, the time is
just right to return from retreat.

since an unified self is an illusion and probably a fiction
anyhow

But a lot has changed since Eva Hesse stated in 1965: "To
achieve an ultimate expression... requires the complete
dedication seemingly only man can attain. A singleness of
purpose no obstructions allowed seems a man's prerogative.
His domain. A woman is sidetracked by all her feminine
roles from... cleaning house to remaining „young“ and
having babies."

Thankfully Mierle Laderman Ukeles disagrees: "One night
I just said to myself, 'If I am the boss of my freedom, then
I call maintenance, art.' What am I doing? I'm taking a
Western notion of art as freedom, and taking a non-Western
notion of repetitive systems, and saying that's art. I'm
crashing them together, actually."

So what now? Where do I actually want to return to?
After the years of isolation, which according to Hettie Judah
remains a huge issue.

“Visibility generates change,” as the artist Kaylan Buteyn says.

Hello judgment and anxiety, depression and disapproval!

Also “paying for time needed to do speculative work, work that might not sell, or not be sold for months or years is hard to justify,” explains Catherine Kurtz.

So let’s work from home.

“The space available dictates the size of work, which shrinks from studio to domestic scale,” according to Hettie Judah. I agree and decide to shoot some video-footage.

NOW IS THE TIME TO FOCUS

My first show is at galerie asterisk*, an online Gallery, the year my daughter was born. This show never happened, but it’s still part of my CV and a political statement, initiated by Christina Stark.

The fact it took almost 10 years for Louise Bourgeois to show her work again after she became mother of three, feels somehow comforting, but the reason for this behavior - „I had the feeling that the art scene belonged to the men, and that I was in some way invading their domain. Therefore my work was done but hidden away.“ - reminds me of my own sentiments, except the gender reference.

Fragments and contradictions

My invasion would need to integrate my daily life into an art world which mostly takes no accounts of family life issues, therefore a decision needs to be made. But I am hiding from this one.

My very own maternal ghost lost its autonomy, yes I know that now.

Sometimes I feel passive and after setting one foot forward I immediately withdraw my decisions. This might go on for a while.

No rush.

I plant radishes in my garden every year. I harvest them and then I eat them. At some point, the time for radishes is over and it's time for the next vegetable.

I've always had a passion for tomatoes. The time for tomatoes has not yet come.

the text slides are based on the books of
Sheila Heti - MOTHERHOOD
Moyra Davey - THE MOTHER READER
Julie Phillips -THE BABY ON THE FIRE ESCAPE
Adrienne Rich - OF WOMAN BORN
Rachel Cusk - A LIFE'S WORK
Hettie Judah - HOW NOT TO EXCLUDE ARTIST MOTHERS
Annika Rösler/Evelyn Höllrigl Tschaikner - MYTHOS
MUTTERINSTINKT

and my own experience of writing my own motherhood plot.

Further Readings:

Literature

Sheila Heti, *Motherhood* (London: Harvill Secker, 2018).

Anne Waak, *Kümmern und Kämpfen: Warum Geschlechtergerechtigkeit in Erziehung und Familie uns alle freier macht* (München: Goldmann, 2023).

Moyra Davey, ed., *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001).

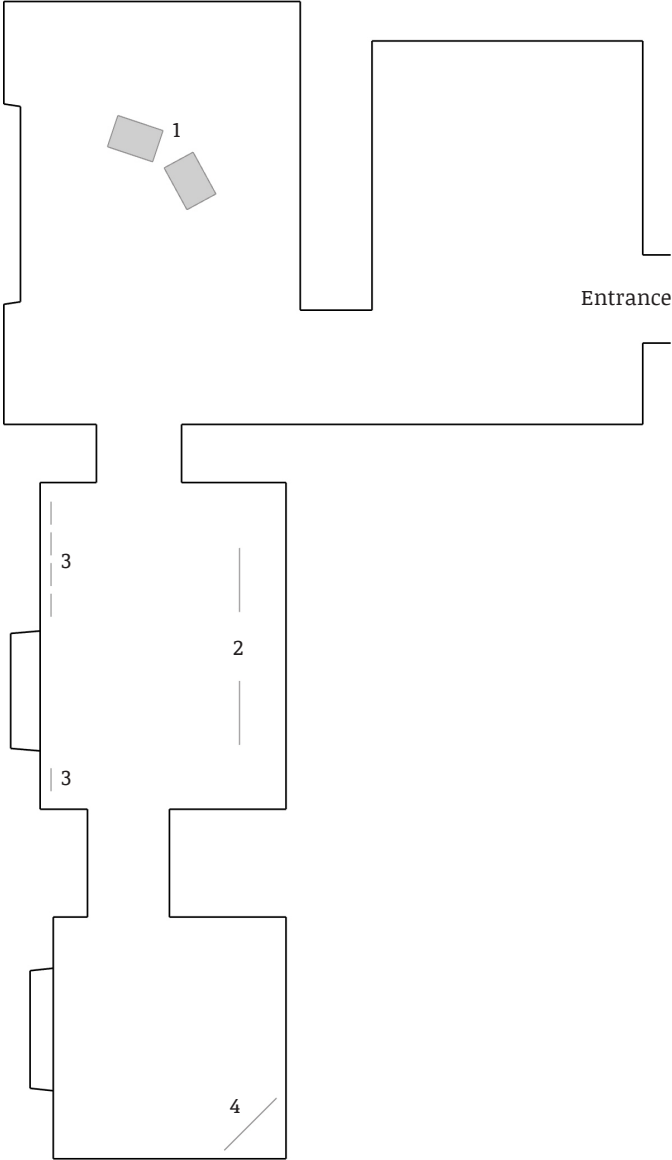
Julie Phillips, *The Baby on the Fire Escape: Creativity, Motherhood, and the Mind-Baby Problem* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2023).

Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, paperback ed., reissued, *Women's Studies* (New York, NY London: Norton, 1995).

Rachel Cusk, *A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019).

Hettie Judah, *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)* (London: Lund Humphries, 2022).

Room Plan



List of Works

- 1 *Fragments and contradictions*
Slide installation - 2 projectors, duration ca. 40 min, 2024
- 2 *Face to face*
multipart sculpture - steel and clay,
Fimo sculptures from Ella Stützer, 2024
- 3 *Emotional Artefacts*
11-part series, clay on cardboard, framed,
30,7 x 22,2cm, 2024
- 4 *81 Days Without the World*
Video HD 16:9, Duration: 71 min, in German language
with English subtitles, 2020/2024
*Our employees will be happy to play the movie
for you at any time from the beginning.*

List of Works

Biography

Biography

Magda Stützer-Tóthová (*1979 in Bratislava) lives and works in Berlin. She studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam (NL), the School for Artistic Photography Vienna with F. Kubelka, and at the University of Applied Arts Vienna with G. Rothemann. Participation in residency programmes in Amsterdam, London, Chicago and Copenhagen. Stützer-Tothova was the co-editor of an art magazine with a changing name (www.ztsrpt.net/). International exhibitions and exhibition participation, including: Galeria umelcov Spisa, Spišská Nová Ves (SK); Hilbert Raum, Berlin (D); Essener Lichtkunsttheater, Essen (D); Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen (D); Zollamt, Bad Radkersburg (D); Galery Syster, Luleå (SE); Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga (LVA); ADDS DONNA, Chicago (USA); The Kitchen, New York (USA); Haunch of Venison, London (GBR).

www.magdatothova.com

Credits & Dates

Curatorial Support: Bettina Siegele
Exhibition Technique: Paul Irmann, Lukas Klestil
Production: Cornelia Reinisch-Hofmann
Exhibition Booklet: Milena Thurner
Exhibition Booklet Editorial: Bettina Siegele & Cornelia Reinisch-Hofmann
Grafic design Booklet: Marille. Büro für Grafik und Text

Credits &
Dates

Der Geist des Kumbhaka is part of the annual programme *The Resistance of Nothingness* curated by Bettina Siegele.

Jury for the programme 2024:

The jury consisting of **Didem Yazıcı**, curator and director of the gallery at Yapı Kredi Culture Arts and Publishing, Istanbul, **Michael Strasser**, artist & board member of the Künstler*innen Vereinigung Tirol, and **Bettina Siegele**, artistic and managing director of Kunstpavillon & Neue Galerie.

Opening:

Thursday 14.06.2024, 18.00

With a performance by Magda Stützer-Tóthová

Curator's tour with Bettina Siegele:

03.07.2024, 17.30 Uhr

Exhibition tour **Art & Coffee:**

03.08.2024, 11.30

Current information on the events and outreach in the realm of the exhibition can be found on our website: www.kuveti.at

The exhibition booklet for download:

