

Self-portrait with Children

Or as a woman, a mother and an artist what is my place in Western art history?

Nelly Toussaint

Masters of Fine Arts:

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Summary

The Master of Fine Arts thesis project consists of an artistic component comprising three different artworks. The first of them is a series of 20 photopolymer engravings, each measuring 20 x 30 cm and titled *Free Mary*, which attempts to liberate the Virgin Mary from patriarchal oppression throughout Western art history. The second piece is a large-scale, hyper-realistic charcoal drawing, measuring 192 x 120 cm, which is a *Self-portrait with Children*. In the third artwork, titled *Past, Present, Future (Self-portrait with Children)*, the viewer can see the words 'profoundly intensively alone' embroidered on my grandmother's bedsheet. The piece measures 202 x 300 cm. All three were displayed as part of Kuvan Kevät 2025 at the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki.

The written component introduces my artistic practice in relation to my childhood. Having grown up in a dysfunctional family with a psychologically abusive father and deeply religious grandparents, this has had a profound impact on my artistic practice.

Each chapter of my thesis revisits one of the pieces I presented at Kuvan Kevät 2025, exploring the artistic, philosophical and emotional connections running through my work.

The focus of this text is my interrogation of Western art history and my place in it as woman, mother and artist.

List of works

Nelly Toussaint (1986)

1.

Self-portrait with Children

2025

Charcoal, graphite, pastel, watercolor on Hahnemühle paper

192x120cm

2.

Past, Present, Future (Self-portrait with Children)

2025

Cotton/linen bed sheet from wedding trousseau of the artist's grandmother, artist's hair.

300x202cm

3.

Free Mary (After «The Holy Virgin with the Crown of Stars», 1508, Albrecht Dürer)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 7,1 x 11,3 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «The Holy Virgin Seated on a Grass Bench», Jakob Binck)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 8 x 12,5 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «Blessed Virgin Holding the Infant Jesus in Her Arms», Master of the Old Netherlands, 15th century)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 10,5 x 15,5 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «The Seated Holy Virgin», Heinrich Aldegrever)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 9 x 12,4 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «The Seated Madonna», 1527, Heinrich Aldegrever)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 5,3 x 7,4 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «The Holy Virgin with The Swaddled Infant Jesus», 1520, Albrecht Dürer)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 9,3 x 13,7 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «Madonna with Child», 1553, Heinrich Aldegrever)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 6,4 x 10 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «Madonna with Child Above a Landscape», Francesco Novelli)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 9,5 x 9,7 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «The Virgin Mary with The Swaddled Infant Jesus», Jakob Binck)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 6,8 x 9 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «Madonna at the Window», Barthel Beham)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 7,8 x 9,8 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «Madonna with Child with a Pot of Flowers», Barthel Beham)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size : 4 x 5,5 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «The Holy Virgin of the Pear», 1511, Albrecht Dürer)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 6,5 x 9,6 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «The Standing Holy Virgin», 1553, Heinrich Aldegrever)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 7 x 10,9 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «Madonna with Child with a Parrot», 1549, Hans Sebald Beham)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 5,6 x 7,9 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «The Holy Virgin», Albrecht Dürer)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 9 x 14 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «the Holy Virgin on the Throne», Jacob Binck)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 10,1 x 13,4 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «the Holy Virgin with a Parrot», Barthel Beham)

2025

Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper

ed.1/10

Image size: 5,5 x 7,6 cm

Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «Madonna with Child in a Landscape», 1520, Albrecht Altdorfer)
2025
Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper
ed.1/10
Image size: 3,3 x 5,5 cm
Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «The Virgin Mary Crowned by an Angel», 1526, Jacob Binck)
2025
Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper
ed.1/10
Image size: 7,3 x 10 cm
Paper size: 30x20 cm

Free Mary (After «The Virgin Mary», Pier Francesco Mola)
2025
Photopolymer etching on Hahnemühle paper
ed.1/10
Image size: 4,9 x9,5 cm
Paper size: 30x20 cm

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Introduction

In order to approach my artistic work, I believe it is important to revisit my childhood.

I was raised in a middle-class, French, Catholic family. My father was a soldier in the French Special Forces and my mother was a doctor. My parents weren't devout churchgoers, but we attended Mass on special occasions. However, my grandparents on both sides were very religious. There was a tradition of praying to the Virgin Mary and lighting candles in churches for her protection.

When I was five years old, it was Christmas and we were at my paternal grandparents' house. I think we had just come back from Christmas Mass and had opened our presents. My mother wasn't there that evening and, to be honest, I don't know how long she had been gone.

I don't remember her leaving the house or us.

My father took my two older sisters and me into the room reserved for children at my grandparents' house to talk. He sat us down on the bed and said, "Your mother has left us. She left us." I remember his words meant nothing to me, but my older sisters cried. My father cried, too. I cried too, just to be like them.

The process of destroying my mother's image began, alongside the creation of an image of a mother mirroring the Virgin Mary. This juxtaposition of destruction and creation occupies an important place in my artistic practice.

My sisters and I were sent to a Catholic school run by nuns. Our paternal grandmother took us to church to pray to the Virgin Mary, asking for help so that we would never see our mother, who had abandoned us, again.

During family meetings, the adults told us how evil our mother was, how she was destroying the family and how she had abandoned us. They said that "a mother never abandons her children" and that "a mother is like the Virgin Mary; she sacrifices herself for her children". We were told that we "should never see her again". We were no longer allowed to talk about our mother or mention her name without risking a reprimand, or even being told that our mother was a 'whore'.

In short, I grew up being taught that my mother was a prostitute and unworthy of being a mother, and that she should be punished for it. The Virgin Mary was said to protect us from her and her vices. We, as adult women, were told that we should emulate the Virgin Mary and not our mother.

I grew up determined not to be like my mother and I wanted to be on the side of the Virgin Mary.

I'm telling my story, one of many that reflect the reality of how women are treated by Western societies, and the violence they endure.

It's a systemic construct.

As someone who was raised as a girl, I feel that I learned from a very young age that I was treated differently to boys. The female gender carries a heavy history on its shoulders.

As I grew older, I realised that it wasn't so simple; women aren't just divided into “whores” and “virgins”. Being a woman is a social construct, built and maintained by patriarchal societies.

In order to free myself from the childhood education I received and, at the same time, to free the images and stories that Western patriarchal societies convey about women, it is important to understand where these representations come from and to deconstruct them.

In this thesis, I will revisit my own story in an attempt to liberate the image of the Virgin Mary. I will then explore the concept of self-portrait. Finally, I will address the concept of feminine heritage.

To Free the Virgin Mary

“The past as Tradition - in art History it becomes the Canon - is used to justify the present status quo. Validated by time, the canons of great art brook no discussion or serious reconsideration. Feminist interventions have to disrupt canonicity and tradition by representing the past not as a flow or development, but as conflict, politics, struggles on the battlefield of representation for power in the structural relations we call class, gender and race¹”.

¹ Griselda Pollock “The politics of Theory”, in Griselda Pollock (dir.), *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts. Feminist Readings*, (Routledge,1996), 14.

I started my fine arts' studies in France and graduated with Master degree in Video and Performance in 2014. Through my practice, I have been questioning the social role of being a woman in patriarchal society.

In 2017, my family and I moved to Finland, for my partner's work. Whereas I was starting my artistic career in France, I suddenly found myself trapped at home with one baby, one toddler and a bigger one who was big enough to go to school. Spending my days talking and playing with babies, with no friends, no external family, in a foreign country, waiting my partner to come back home every evening... I had become a DESPERATE HOUSEWIFE, my worst nightmare!

Depressed and profoundly alone, with no time to do videos or performances (which by the way needs an audience, which I didn't have), I tried to find answers and solutions in art history. Although I had studied art history for years, I suddenly realized that the figure of the female, mother, and artist had no place in this mainstream western art history² being the one that is taught to us and that we learn at school and fine arts academies. It was full of women painted by white men! Only their stories, patriarchal views of women, were highlighted.

I started to question western art history and my place in it as woman, mother and artist. I realized that when male artists had to address the subject of motherhood, the image of the Virgin Mary was the most recurrent. Stuck in years of Catholic and patriarchal oppressions, always calm, in peace, devoted, obedient; it seemed to me that she did not speak for herself, she did not tell us her own stories, but the ones of the men who represented her.

Growing up believing that the Virgin Mary was the feminine model and finding myself in a position where my experience of motherhood was destroying me, I felt the need to write a different story. To draw my own stories.

Before joining the master of fine arts program, part of Helsinki art academy, I had already started to draw my own stories. Using the codes of representations of the Virgin Mary in Western art, I drew my own representations of being a mother, a woman, an artist, struggling between desire of perfection, social requirements, self-identity and loneliness.

Nevertheless, I wanted to go further, deeper, I wanted to alter the Western art history from its origins. Thus, this art history, so negative for women, would be different from its very beginning. That's when I got the idea to rewrite, redesign the paintings, drawings, engravings... that represent women in Western art history and make them tell different stories. With the final goal of exchanging the originals in museums for my productions. So that future generations would grow up seeing another art history.

I wanted to be the forger of the history of art.

Throughout the Middle Ages, art was in the service of the Church, with religious paintings illustrating the Bible forming the main theme. Towards the end of the 15th century and throughout the 16th century- the period that is known as Renaissance movement in the western art history- the Madonna, or the Virgin Mary, became a popular subject for artists. Although she

² Founded in 1985, the feminist art group Guerrilla Girls demonstrated this in a series of posters denouncing the representation of women in museums, artworks, and the art world. For more information, see <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/projects>

was primarily portrayed in biblical scenes, 16th century artists also depicted her in individual portraits. She is portrayed as a devoted mother, conveying emotions such as compassion, grief and love. During this same period that the ideology of 'confinement' emerges, sending women back to the confined space of the home.³

In the same century as Renaissance⁴ movement, *Malleus Maleficarum* ("The Hammer of Witches", 1487) was published. This misogynistic book advocated extreme violence against women and called for them to be tortured to determine who was a witch. The book was reprinted 15 times in 40 years. It is one of the founding texts of the witch hunts - a state-sponsored genocide of women (now named Feminicide) - that began at the end of the 16th century.⁵

During the Renaissance, a period of significant social change in many fields and disciplines, including art, architecture, politics, literature, exploration and science, great painters, the lineage of the Old Master, emerged. This was the same period when women were erased not only from art history and the role of painter or artist, but also from public spaces and mainstream history.⁶



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary project*, installation view at Kuvan Kevät 2025. Photograph by Nelly Toussaint

³ Tittiou Lecoq, *Les grandes oubliés. Pourquoi l'Histoire a efface les femmes*, (Proche,2023), 88.

⁴ "Continuer à employer le terme de Renaissance ne revient-il pas à dire qu'on ne fait que l'histoire des hommes? qu'on balaie ce qui concerne la moitié de la population? c'est pour cette raison que de plus en plus d'historiennes abandonnent le terme de Renaissance et préfèrent parler de 'première modernité '" (translated by AI: "By continuing to use the term 'Renaissance', are we not saying that we are only writing the history of men? Are we not sweeping aside everything that concerns half the population? This is why more and more female historians are abandoning the term 'Renaissance' in favour of 'early modernity'.), Tittiou Lecoq, *Les grandes oubliés. Pourquoi l'Histoire a efface les femmes*, (Proche,2023),98.

⁵ Tittiou Lecoq, *Les grandes oubliés. Pourquoi l'Histoire a efface les femmes*, (Proche,2023), 94

⁶ Tittiou Lecoq, *Les grandes oubliés. Pourquoi l'Histoire a efface les femmes*, (Proche,2023), 98

When I joined the MFA program, I was already redrawing the Leonardo da Vinci's painting *annunciation* ⁷. In my version of it, the angel and the Virgin Mary were still there, my artistic intervention was to change the gaze of the Virgin Mary and her left hand. In the original version, the Virgin Mary has her left hand raised to chest level, open, with the fingers upwards in an act of submission. In my drawing she now crosses her finger and gazes the viewer with a mischievous look on her lips. The drawing was not finished, I was still working on it.

At the beginning of the semester, Tatu Tuominen, one of your teachers in printmaking department, made us some reading and videos recommendations on printmaking. One of the books was named *Perspectives on Contemporary Printmaking*⁸. Reading this book was an inspiration to me, I want the viewer believe that my interpretation of the *Annunciation* was a da Vinci's thought since the beginning. Like my story of the annunciation was there since ever, hidden for hundreds of years.

Then I remembered in 2019, I had visited at Le Louvre museum, the exhibition *LÉONARD DE VINCI*⁹, and saw an infrared reflectography¹⁰ image of da Vinci's *Annunciation* painting. From there I thought I should work straight away on the infrared reflectography and manipulate the image.



Nelly Toussaint, *What if Mary...*, After Leonardo da Vinci «the Anunciation», infrared reflectography, 98 x 217 cm, 2024.

I started exploring the museums' online collections for representations of the Virgin Mary that I could work with. It is striking how many representations of Madonna there are in just one museum's collection. Almost each one was created by a male artist. Each of them is based on

⁷ Leonardo Da Vinci, *Annunciation*, 1472, oil on wood, 90 x 222 cm, Gli Uffizi Museum, Florence, ref.no. 1890.1618, <https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/annunciation>.

⁸ Ruth Pelzer-Montada, *Perspectives on Contemporary Printmaking Critical writing since 1986*, (Ruth Pelzer-Montada, 2018)

⁹ <https://www.louvre.fr/expositions-et-evenements/expositions/leonard-de-vinci>

¹⁰ Museums use infrared reflectography technology to get an image of the first drawing the artist had drawn on the Caneva, under every layers of paint. They want to get the "essence" of the piece, the first idea of the Master.

the male gaze. Each of them was drawn at a time when the majority of the population was illiterate. Submission was instilled through images and staging.

I wondered who are the women represented in those pictures? All having a different face, size, posture but all named Virgin Mary. Being trapped in male gaze dictate.

I wanted to free those women. I wanted to free Mary.

The artistic process is not linear. Here, I would like to refer to an event that happened years before I started this project, which influenced my feminist thoughts and artistic decisions.

On Friday, 28 February 2020, Roman Polanski — a film director convicted of a rape of a minor by the American justice system in 1977, and considered a fugitive by Interpol for fleeing the United States to avoid serving his prison sentence — received the César Award for Best Director. French actress Adèle Haenel stood up and left the room, saying, “This is shameful.”

In the wake of the global #MeToo movement against sexual harassment and assault, which gained momentum in 2017, the French film industry, represented by the César Academy, made the conscious decision to honour an abuser. For the actress, this was the last straw, and her action shook the French film industry out of its conservatism and protectionism of male abusers.

The following Sunday, feminist and activist writer Virginie Despentes wrote an trenchant text, in the French newspaper *Liberation*¹¹, criticising the César Academy's choice and position, and thanked Haenel for her sign of protest. She finished the paper with the words, “C’est terminé. On se lève. On se casse. On gueule. On vous emmerde.” (freely translated “It’s over. We get up. We leave. We are loud. We don’t give a shit”).

I have been inspired by this text.

I wanted the Virgin Mary to “get up and leave” the images! It is over now.

I then collected prints of the Virgin Mary from the graphic arts collections on the Louvre Museum’s website. I started work on redrawing the prints without the Virgin Mary. It was important to me to make the prints as close to the originals as possible, as an art forger would do. All of the prints that I had collected were engraved on a copper plate using a technique known as intaglio in printmaking. Therefore, my goal was to engrave the new image by hand on a copper plate. It became a long and difficult labour.

I needed to find a faster way, so I asked Tatu Tuominen for help. Tuominen also, explores old prints and uses new technologies to engrave his copper plates. During our discussion, Tatu told me that old masters had their tricks and machines to help them work faster or more precisely. As we live in a different century, we should use the technologies available to us. This was not a sign of my lack of technical ability or artistic skill. It was simply a case of us artists in the 21st

¹¹ Virginie Despentes “Césars : « Désormais on se lève et on se casse »”, *Liberation*, (2020)
https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2020/03/01/cesars-desormais-on-se-leve-et-on-se-barre_1780212/

century having access to a school full of good, specific machines. If I learnt how to use them, I could take my artistic work and practice to the next level.

Tatu' Tuominen's words in this discussion transformed my artistic mindset. Before, I thought that, to challenge the old masters, I had to prove that I was as good as them using my hands and techniques. I thought I had to prove that I had the ability to be one of them. These feelings are linked to the patriarchal rules prevalent in our society, which are difficult to escape, especially for women.

The reality, however, is quite different.

At that time, old masters worked in studios surrounded by many other artists who worked for them. They employed assistants to begin drawings and paintings and to mix colours. They also employed technicians who specialised in drawing specific things, such as the sky or animals. The old masters did not do everything alone — they had help, too.

I can challenge them using the tools available to me today. These include artificial intelligence, pen plotter, CNC machine, laser cutting machine and photopolymer etching.

I wanted the Virgin Mary to leave the room, to escape the male gaze she was trapped in, in the original print; which meant erasing her image and recreating the background which should be behind her. Leaving a blank spot at her original location would convey a different meaning — more the idea of loss than liberation.

To achieve this, I used an artificial intelligence feature of the Photoshop 2025 application. I didn't just ask the AI to erase the figure of the Virgin Mary and rebuild the background. I had to create a collage from the various results generated by the AI to produce a consistent new image.

Once I had created the new image without the Virgin Mary, I had to find the right technique to ensure that the final print had the same style and texture as the original museum print, as a forger would do. The photopolymer engraving technique was the closest and best option. This involves printing the image that we want to engrave onto a transparent film. The plastic plate covered with a photosensitive film (the photopolymer plate) is then exposed to a strong light with the transparent film with the image printed on it. Thanks to the photosensitivity, the image is being transferred to the photopolymer plate. It then needs to be developed and printed. The result is very similar to a copper plate print. The project to free the Virgin Mary from centuries of oppression and domination was completed! At least the physical part.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After Madonna with Child, 1553, Heinrich Aldegrever)*, image size 6,4 x 10 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.

I thought it was important to work on the title of the artwork. Through the title, I could give viewers a hint as to what was happening in the image. I wanted something short and simple. From experience, I know that if there is too much information on the side of an artwork, viewers do not read it all, so I wanted something that would immediately engage the viewer.

It was then that I remembered the “Free Britney”¹² movement. In 2008 the American pop singer Britney Spears, the international star, was placed in psychiatric hold. At the age of 27 years old, this very rich woman, a big star, mother of two, touring the world, performing in some of the world's biggest concert halls in front of millions of fans, was deemed incapable of caring for herself and was placed under conservatorship of her father Jami Spears. Some of Britney's fans noticed Jamie's control over her and started the "Free Britney" movement online to help her dissolve the conservatorship. From 2019 to 2021, this movement gained worldwide attention. It highlighted issues within guardianship systems and sustained public pressure and media coverage. In November 2021, the conservatorship was finally terminated.

Not only do Britney Spears and the Virgin Mary share the 'free...' title, but their images are similar, too. More specifically, both have been constructed by patriarchal organisations — the Catholic Church¹³ for the Virgin Mary and the pop industry¹⁴ for Britney Spears — as pure, virginal young women. Even though they lived in different centuries, patriarchal societies built the same representation and expectations of women — they liked the virginal, obedient young woman.

Like the “Free Britney” movement, I am campaigning to “Free Mary” from patriarchal oppression.

¹² “Wikipedia: Britney Spears conservatorship case” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified September 11, 2025, 14:44 (UTC), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britney_Spears_conservatorship_case

¹³ Guy Betchtel, *Les quatre femmes de Dieu. La putain, le sorcière, la saint et la Bécassine*, (Pocket,2003), p19

¹⁴ Louise Chennevière, *Pour Britney*, (P.O.L, 2024), 52-61.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After Madonna at the Window, Barthel Beham)*, image size 7,8 x 9,8 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.

As you will have gathered, the 'Free Mary' project is not just about the Virgin Mary. It is also about how women have been controlled since the Middle Ages¹⁵, and how this control has been and still is conveyed through their representations in images, advertising, art and popular culture. By “freeing Mary” and allowing her to leave image’s space, I intend to encourage viewers to rethink their perceptions of women's bodies, women oppressions and challenge their preconceptions.

The aim of this work is to challenge Western art history by incorporating feminist language into its foundations.

Louise Chennevière in her book *Pour Britney*¹⁶ (freely translated “For Britney”) says “et je ne voudrais moi, que l’on arête de dire que les images sont, inoffensives, quelles ne font rien et qu’elle existent loin, indépendamment de nous dans leur règne d’image tandis quelles pénètrent, infectant si profondément les corps et les âmes qui ne sont qu’une une-seule-et-même”¹⁷ (translated by AI “And I would like us to stop saying that images are harmless, that they do nothing, and that they exist far away, independently of us in their realm of images, when in fact they penetrate and infect so deeply the bodies and souls that are one-and-the-same”).

The forger position is important to me. A forger can fit their artworks, fit themself in the lineal art history. “I would argue that all history writing is formed in the present. The politics of historiographical practice belongs to the ideological moments of its own production. Furthermore, it is vital to show that the present is historically shaped. Sexual difference and sexual divisions in society are not natural but historical and that is why they can be challenged and changed”¹⁸. The forger breaks the linearity of art history. Place in the present and using the present feminists’ considerations, I re-shape the past. I challenged it I changed it.

In the next chapters I will develop the idea of challenging the past to write the present and the future.

¹⁵ “The problem for women was that from the Middle Ages, feminity was understood in terms of duties, accomplishments and permissible behavior. This construction of feminity was legitimized by religion, medicine, philosophy and convention, and legalized through concepts of marriage, property and rights. Women were trained to put themselves second, to be supportive to a husband and to serve their families”, Frances Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves. Women’s Self-Portrait*, (Thames and Hudson, 2023),31.

¹⁶ Louise Chennevière, *Pour Britney*, (P.O.L, 2024)

¹⁷ Louise Chennevière, *Pour Britney*, (P.O.L, 2024), 107-108

¹⁸ Griselda Pollock “The politics of Theory”, in Griselda Pollock (dir.), *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts. Feminist Readings*, (Routledge,1996), 14.

Self-portrait with Children

“She speaks (as a woman) about everything although they wish her to speak only about women’s things. They like her to speak about everything only if she does not speak “as a woman”, only if she will agree in advance to play the artist’s role as neutral (neuter) observer. She does not speak (as a woman) about anything, although they want her to. There is nothing she can speak of “as a woman”. As a woman, she cannot speak”.¹⁹

¹⁹ Suzan Hiller, *Ten Months*, extrat from the text of the month six, 10 b/w composite photographs, 10 texts, arranged sequentially; overall size 203 x 518 cm, 1977-79, National Gallery of Art, USA.



Nelly Toussaint , *Self-portrait with Children*, Charcoal, graphite, pastel, watercolor on Hahnemühle paper, 192 x 120cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.

In her book *Les grandes oubliées. Pourquoi l'Histoire a effacé les femmes*²⁰, Titou Lecoq demonstrates how, from the 15th century onwards, clerics worked to discredit women and prevent them from accessing education. Then, in a Europe marked by revolutions, the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* was written from a male perspective, stating that women had no rights except to belong to their father, brother, or husband²¹. It is important to mention, by that time, France was already a colonial power. The women of colour from “its” colonies were in a much lower position than white women from the mainland. A return to order took place at its peak in the 19th century, with a separation of spheres and sexes: public life and the exterior were reserved for men, while women were confined to the familiar space of the home. Successive laws gradually prevented women from studying, joining clubs, voting and controlling their own lives.

Nevertheless, the different waves of feminism in Western societies have allowed women to acquire rights. The first wave, which began at the end of the 19th century and continued into the 20th century, fought for women's civil rights. The second wave, which began in the 1960s, fought against patriarchy and for women's bodily autonomy. The third wave, which began in the 1990s, championed the intersectional nature of feminist struggles and campaigned for the visibility of women's history. The ongoing fourth wave, which began in 2010, highlights systemic violence such as sexism, sexual violence and harassment, and domestic violence, and defends the visibility of intersectional feminist struggles. This wave is calling on governments to enact laws that better protect women, particularly from femicide.²²

Political control and repression of bodies recognised as female continues to be an issue in today's world. Several countries, including the United States of America, are restricting women's rights to control their own bodies, notably by banning abortion. In January 2024, French President Emmanuel Macron called on the French people to engage in “demographic rearmament”, meaning women you should have more children for the homeland. Having more children means more domestic and care work for women, which means they are more likely to be at home. Women's bodies are still controlled by politics; they are still considered part of the private sphere. Intimacy is a political issue.

In my artistic practice, I not only re-draw artworks from museums' collections, but also create my own stories about being a woman, a mother and an artist. I was so surprised when I had my first child and realised that being a mother was anything but natural.

I desperately wanted to be on the “good” side of motherhood, someone who dedicates their life to their children. I wanted to be the kind of mother who never complained, who was always at home doing her best for her family and who embraced her position without doubt. The idea is still strongly anchored in me.

This feeling of “what a woman should be” was not only dictated by my family but also by the society, I grew up in.

²⁰ Titou Lecoq, *Les grandes oubliées. Pourquoi l'Histoire a effacé les femmes*, (Proche,2023)

²¹ Titou Lecoq, *Les grandes oubliées. Pourquoi l'Histoire a effacé les femmes*, (Proche,2023), 124-151

²² OXFAM France, *Les feminism à travers ses mouvements et combats dans l'histoire*, (2025),

<https://www.oxfamfrance.org/inegalites-femmes-hommes/le-feminisme-a-travers-ses-mouvements-et-combats-dans-lhistoire/>

Feminist literatures and arts certainly help me to deconstruct my identity as part of the society. But the question of “who I am as a woman artist in the Western art history?” continues to haunt me.

I often found myself asking this question while I was struggling to find time to work on, or even think about my artistic project, surrounded by my babies. Nowadays, my children are no longer babies, yet I am still constantly distracted by them. They are not a burden, as I used to think. However, I still cannot find peace anywhere. I am a mother all the time, every single second of my life, wherever I am.

I still need to work on myself in order to find my place in this world, as well as my place as an artist, a woman and a mother living in the 21st century, with everything that can entail.

Self-portraiture is a significant theme that has been explored by artists throughout Western art history. It enables artists to express themselves, represent their identity through their artistic persona and control their own image — to write their own stories.

My quest to understand myself as a woman artist in the context of Western art history has led me to explore self-portraiture as a medium for reflection and self-expression.

The concept of the artist as author did not yet exist in the middle ages, when the art was in the service of church. The emergence of the bourgeois class in the 12th century — wealthy and educated elites — and the appearance of new forms of religious thought allowed painters to expand the scope of their work.

Around the 15th century, the bourgeoisie began to take over from the church in terms of patronage, and painters started to represent themselves in commissions works from bourgeois families. These are not autonomous self-portraits representing only the artist; rather, they serve as a signature.

Towards the middle and end of the 15th century, the individual portrait became popular. The portrait becomes a painting in its own right, serving as a memento or personal celebration with no other purpose. Every wealthy and influential person in the 15th century wanted their portrait, and this pushed the recognition of painters' techniques. As society becomes more democratic, the individual asserts itself. Painters themselves started to represent themselves. During the 16th century, many of the great artists painted themselves in self-portraits, some to demonstrate their technical abilities, some to boast of their status, others simply because being one's own subject allowed one to work whenever one wanted.

Following the emergence of democracy and the awakening of individuality, the self-portrait developed. In the 20th century, it became the ID photo, and in our time, the selfie.

I remember my first encounter with Nan Goldin's self-portrait taken a month after she had been beaten by her partner in love. Encountering her work was like an electric shock. Her committed work takes the form of a photographic diary. Through this, Nan Goldin's intimacy becomes a politically engaged act. In this self-portrait, she addressed the issue of domestic violence against women, caught up in the idea of romantic love. It is both calm and violent. Although she appears to be showing a moment of 'weakness', this portrait captures all of Goldin's strength as she faces the camera.



Nan Goldin, *Nan one month after being battered*, 696mm x1015mm, 1983, Tate Gallery

I firmly believe that intimacy is a political issue, particularly when it comes to women. The violence experienced by women within intimate relationships and against their bodies is the result of patriarchal political decisions. The psychological abuse that my mother, my sisters and I suffered during our childhood was the result of a legal system and patriarchal societies that protected my father, protected men and their actions. Victims are expected to keep a low profile and bear the shame of their attackers. Fortunately, the current wave of feminism is fighting against this, aiming to restore victims' rights and shift the shame onto the perpetrators.

Inspired by artists such as Nan Goldin, Louise Bourgeois, Jenny Saville, Mary Cassatt, Suzan Valadon, self-portraiture has become a key part of my artistic practice.

It's a place where I can combine my feminist and artistic struggles with my artistic skills. It's a way for me to add my name to the long list of artists who have made Western art history challenging the old masters. To say "I am part of it, just as you are, and I am as good as you." This competition "challenging the old masters", is the result of years of studying Western art history through the works of genius old masters- like Giotto, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Velázquez, Poussin, Dürer.

Mainstream art history does not acknowledge female artists. It does not pay homage to any of the great female artists who have contributed to Western art history as much as male artists have.

This competition, which I am still playing, has been created by the art world's centuries-long oppression of female artists, its insistence that we were not "good enough", "strong enough" or "skilled enough".

Born in 1986 and growing up at the beginning of the 21st century, I, a woman artist, am still affected by it.

The art world and art institutions are still biased against women artists.²³

As a woman, would I ever be considered good enough to be part of the world of the greats?

Hyperrealistic self-portrait drawing seems to allow me to achieve both of these things: it enables me to measure myself against the old masters and prove my technical skill, while also enabling to tell a feminist narrative.

In my self-portrait with my children, I try to convey the challenges I face as a mother, the sense of confinement that I experience as a mother. I feel imprisoned by the role of motherhood. I am barely visible, hidden behind my children, who are constantly climbing on top of me and making me disappear.

The characters in the drawing appear to be trapped in the armchair and restrained. For me, however, this armchair also represents a space where we become one. Despite our doubts, it is a place where we are an island rising out of the water, against all odds.

This is a metaphor for my role as a mother.

Over the years, I have had to learn to embrace it, to build it, because, as Simone de Beauvoir said, 'one is not born a woman, one becomes one'; likewise, one is not born a mother, one becomes one.

I want to capture the complexity of the conflicting emotions I feel as a mother.

I want to reveal both my fragility and my strength.

While working on this drawing, I had a discussion with one of my supervisors, Jaana Kokko, related to the representation and especially portraying a woman in the film, moving image and I found myself considering the question of feminine representation in opposition to masculine representations and self-portraits. What it means to create art with a feminine perspective. Does it even exist?

When making a self-portrait, do I really have to present myself as the opposite as a man, simply because I am a woman? Is there a masculine and a feminine way of working? Am I not perpetuating masculine stereotypes?

Feminist art is for example socially engaged art, that addresses the systemic issues faced by people treated as "minorities"²⁴. It is art that defends our rights, our lives and our freedoms. Chantal Akerman talked about her feminist engagement in the following words: "I do think it's a feminist film because I give space to things which were never, almost never, shown in that way, like the daily gestures of a woman. They are the lowest in the hierarchy of film images . . . But more than the content, it's because of the style. If you choose to show a woman's gestures so

²³ Charlotte Burns and Julia Halperin, "*The Burns Halperin Report*", (studioBurns, 2022), <https://studioburns.media/category/the-burns-halperin-report/>

²⁴ UN Women, "Intersectional feminism: what it means and why it matters right now", (June 2025), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/intersectional-feminism-what-it-means-and-why-it-matters-right-now>

precisely, it's because you love them. In some way you recognize those gestures that have always been denied and ignored. I think that the real problem with women's films usually has nothing to do with the content. It's that hardly any women really have confidence enough to carry through on their feelings. Instead, the content is the most simple and obvious thing. They deal with that and forget to look for formal ways to express what they are and what they want, their own rhythms, their own way of looking at things. A lot of women have unconscious contempt for their feelings. But I don't think I do. I have enough confidence in myself. So that's the other reason why I think it's a feminist film-not just what it says but what is shown and how it's shown.²⁵"

²⁵ Chantal Akerman, *Jeanne Die/man*, *Camera Obscura 2* (1977), 118-19.

For a long time, I think I tried to pretend.

I tried to be perfect, whatever that means.

I tried to handle everything: the house, the family, the children and my artistic career, which was almost non-existent or only in my imagination.

I forgot about myself or made myself disappear.

And nobody around me cared.

I took care of everything because that's what women do, isn't it?

But nobody cared about me.

Working on a self-portrait means:

I am here.

I exist.

I am here behind everything.

It is proof of my presence.

It is me calling myself.

It is an act of resistance.

Past, Present, Future (Self-portrait with Children)

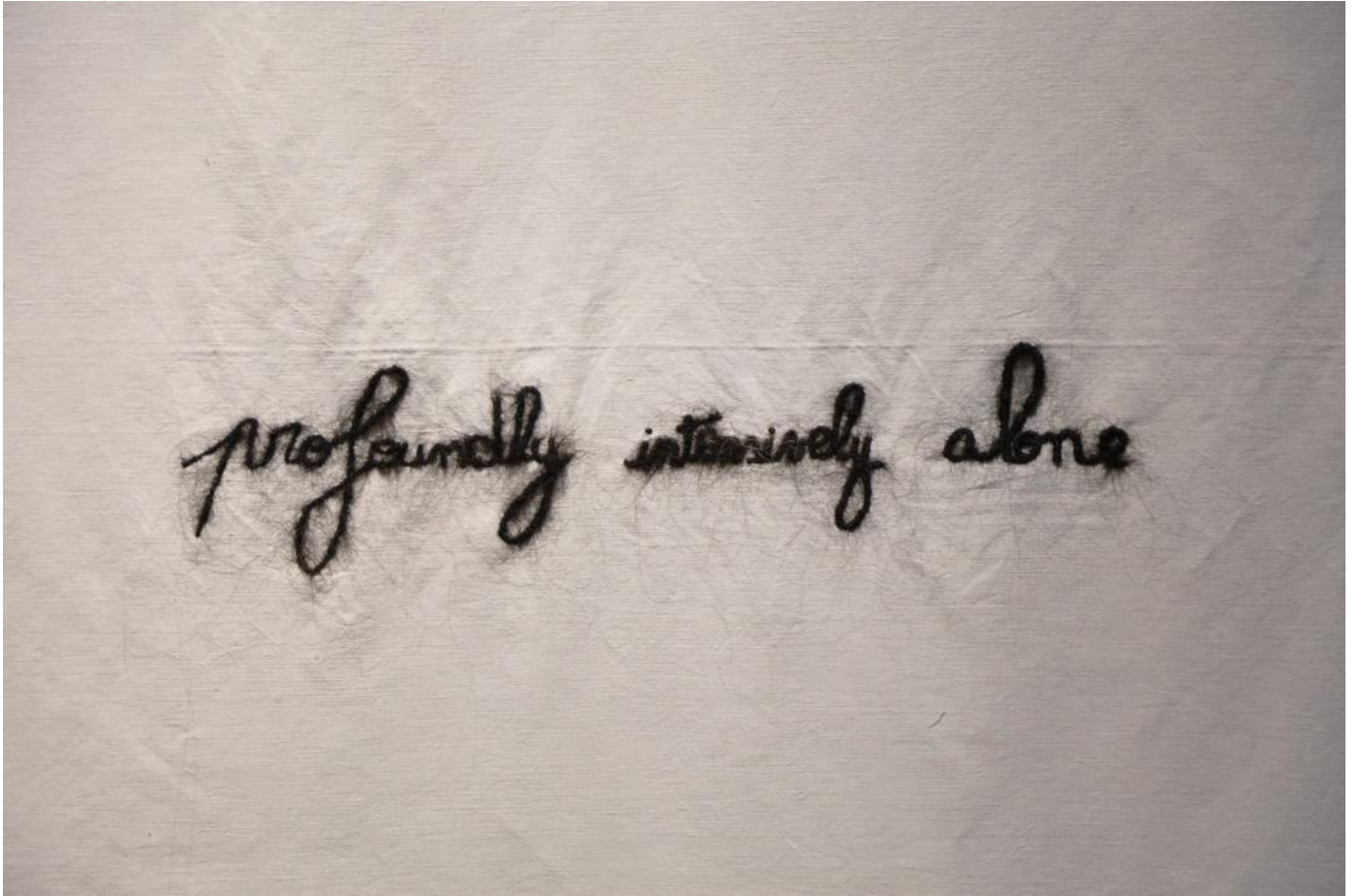
“Les cheveux, c'est d'abord une question de pilosité. Le poil est scellé à l'intime, et doublement: par sa pénétration interne, par sa proximité du sexe. Ses racines pénètrent dans le corps, dans "le Moi-peau", pour reprendre l'expression de Didier Anzieu, cette Mince pellicule qui l'imite intérieur et extérieur. Le poil recouvre le sexe²⁶.”

(Freely translated “Hair is primarily a question of body hair. Hair is intrinsically linked to intimacy in two ways: through its internal penetration and its proximity to the genitals. Its roots penetrate the body, into the ‘skin ego’, to use Didier Anzieu's expression, that thin membrane that separates the inside from the outside. Hair covers the genitals.”)

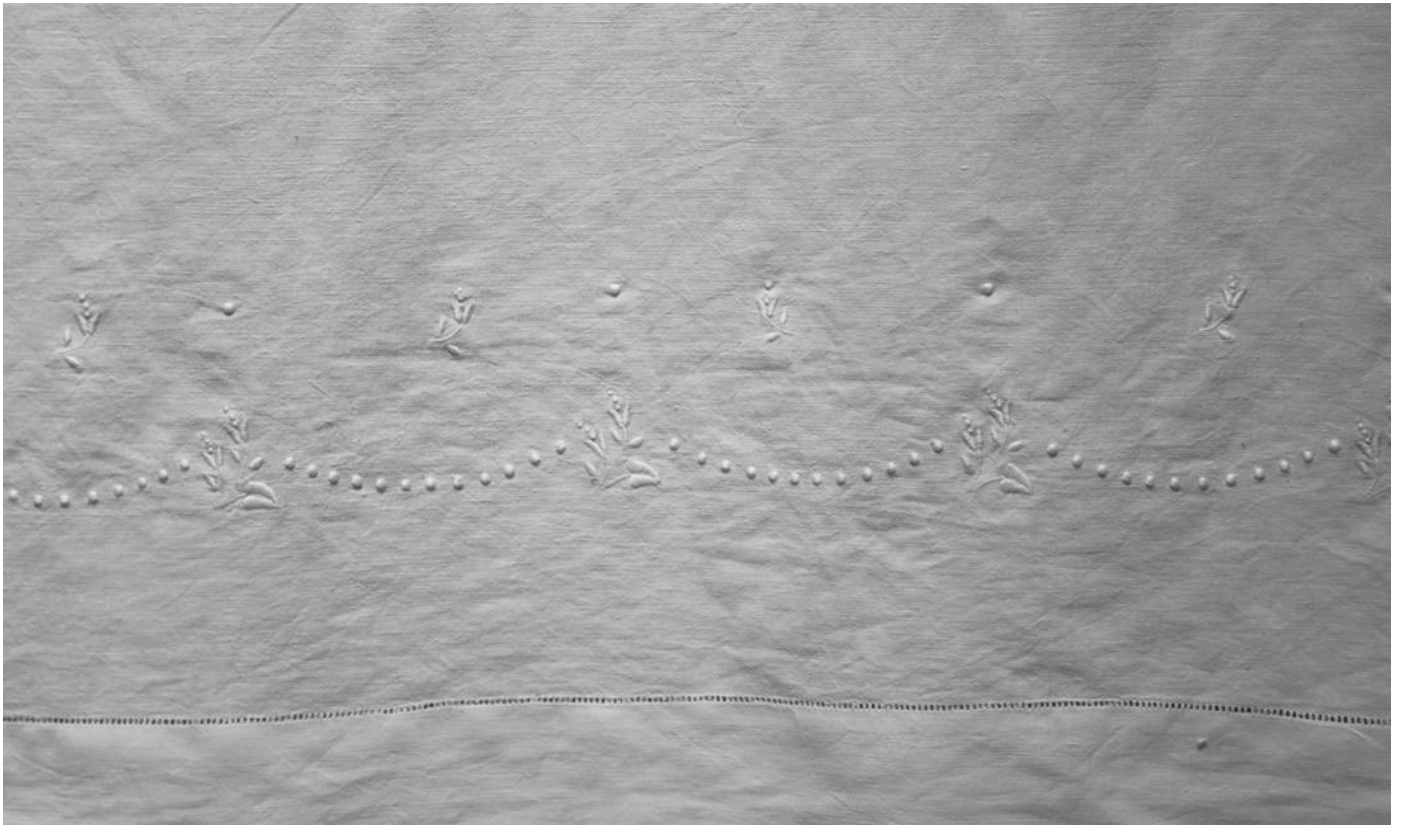
²⁶ Michelle Perrot, *Mon histoire des femmes*, (seuil, 2006), 64



Nelly Toussaint, *Past, Present, Future (Self-portrait with Children)*, linen/cotton bed sheet, artist's hair, 202cm x300cm, 2025.
Photograph by Nelly Toussaint



Nelly Toussaint, *Past, Present, Future (Self-portrait with Children)* 2025, detail. Photograph by Nelly Toussaint



Nelly Toussaint, *Past, Present, Future (Self-portrait with Children)* 2025, detail. Photograph by Nelly Toussaint

As I approach my 40th birthday today, I am beginning to understand that I grew up in an environment of psychological violence. I was conditioned to think negatively about women. Thanks to my mother leaving home and my witnessing, albeit without understanding, her fight for freedom, my adult self has fought against this conditioning. Little by little, I am regaining control.

When it comes to feminism, heritage is very important. How do we pass on societal stereotypes from women to children? This happens when we choose to dress children in pink and tell them to “behave” because “good little girls are well-behaved and don’t run around like boys”, “obey”, “don’t argue with orders so as not to be rude”, “tidy their rooms and belongings”, “don’t take up space”, “learn to sew so they can mend their husbands” or future children’s shirts”, “iron” and “clean to keep their homes tidy”.

I wonder about legacy.

One of the pieces of my artistic component is an embroidered bed sheet with the phrase “Profoundly intensively alone”. Made from my own hair and embroider onto a bed sheet from my grandmother’s wedding trousseau.

She embroidered the sheets herself for her wedding so that she would have beautiful bed linen, tablecloths and towels throughout the house, symbolising the love between her and her husband, my grandfather.²⁷

It makes me wonder what kind of love they had.

My grandmother spent hours alone embroidering initials and floral patterns on these pieces of fabric. I’m not sure if my grandfather ever noticed them or thanked her for her efforts.

The invisible labor of women²⁸ lies behind the embroidery.

The art world has worked hard to marginalise women’s work. ‘Homecraft’ versus ‘fine arts’. “Women’s work inevitably falls within the sphere of culture, as opposed to nature, and women often perform tasks similar to those of men, but their work is given secondary status because of the difference in where the tasks are performed. Differences are structured between private and public activities, between domestic and professional work.

This provides a good overview of the structures of gender division in the hierarchies of art. For what distinguishes art from craft in the hierarchy is not so much the methods, practices and objects as the place where these things are made—often the home—and the audience for whom they are made—often the family. The fine arts are a public, professional activity. What women do, and what is often defined as ‘crafts’, could in fact be defined as ‘domestic art’. The conditions of reproduction and the audience for this type of art differ from those of art produced in studios or art schools for the market and galleries. It is on the basis of these different conditions that the hierarchical division between art and craft has been constructed; it has nothing to do with the intrinsic qualities of the object or the gender of the author.”²⁹

²⁷ “The act of embroidery—the hours a woman spent sitting and sewing, out of love for her family and home—symbolised the domestic virtues of tireless diligence, selfless service and commendable thriftiness.”, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses. Women, Art and Ideology*,(JRP,2025),134.

²⁸OXFAM Canada, *valoriser le travail invisible: celles qui comptent*, (2020), <https://oxfam.qc.ca/campagne/travail-de-soin/>

²⁹ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses. Women, Art and Ideology*,(JRP,2025),147.

When I asked my two grandmothers if they could give me their magnificent embroidered bed sheets- as they were sleeping at the bottom of a chest of drawers- they both asked me, 'What will you do with them?' I answered truthfully, saying that I would use them for an artistic project. They both declined my request. My mother's mother said, 'We'll talk about it later' (I'm still waiting for that discussion to happen), while the other just said, 'No'. I wonder if this 'we'll talk about it later' response is linked to the one they used to give me when I was a child, when they thought I was too young to understand, or when they didn't want to explain. Anyway, I enlisted the help of my older sister, whom they regard as wise, to circumvent the rule. She pretended that she wanted the bed sheets to use as curtains in her house. And then she got them! It seems that, even for them, creating artwork from their work, is not relevant. They prefer the bed sheets to stay where they are meant to be in the house, the domestic place.

The embroidered bed sheet reflects the legacy that my grandmothers tried to pass down to me: the idea that women must submit to their husbands through the sacrament of marriage. They embroidered these sheets as an act of submission to their roles as married women. They devoted themselves to their husbands and families. They poured their hearts and souls into these pieces of household linen. They poured their hopes and skills into these pieces that consecrated their marriages.

My grandmothers wanted me to be docile and kind, but I grew up to be a firebrand who wanted to tear down everything in her path.

By embroidering the phrase 'profoundly intensively alone', I am breaking the cycle.

I no longer wish to perpetuate the cycle of women passing on from generation to generation what they believe a woman should do or be.

Through these words, I scream my loneliness as a mother caring for my family.

I am lonely in a position where I should feel surrounded by love and affection, as society sells it. It is a slogan.

My loneliness is the depression that being a mother at home with babies has driven me to. Depression and mental health issues which are more prevalent in the female community.³⁰

As my grand-mothers embroidered their stories, I am embordering my story.

I have started using my hair as material in 2024 following the course 'the Materiality in printmaking – Why is the material different today than it was in the 1990s?'. A course led by the artist and teacher Annu Vertanen and the artist Helen Elizabeth. The point of the course was to think of matters and how matter matters. I started to question what women's hair carries in our Western societies after my 12 years old daughter asked me "Maman on peut enlever les poils sous mes aisselles!" (freely translated "Mum, can we remove the hair under my armpits?"). The biggest problem underlying this simple question was that she wanted to respond to a societal request, be part of this game of domination. That terrified me. How could I let my daughter play this game? Why can't I protect her from it? How can I protect her? In this case, the question was linked to body hair, but women's hair in general is an issue.

³⁰ "Depression is about 1.5 times more common among women than among men. Worldwide, more than 10% of pregnant women and women who have just given birth experience depression". World Health Organisation, "Depressive Disorder (depression)", (2025), <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression>

A matter which, through the lens of societies, religions and politics, becomes a matter of subjugation, oppression and control.

I wanted her to understand that this is not a meaningless act. It's a gesture of history, of domination over women's bodies and repression.

From the beginning, women's hair has been a constant source of oppression, starting with religion: in the Bible, Eve represents sin. Through her beauty and hair, she seduces Adam and plunges the world into eternal sin. To protect men from temptation, women were veiled and hidden. Women accused of witchcraft were shorn before being burned at the stake. During the era of slavery, masters shaved their slaves so that the signs of domination were visible at first glance. In the Catholic Church, nuns cut their hair upon entering the order to signify their renunciation of their carnal bodies and loss of intimacy. After the Second World War, women suspected of having affairs with German soldiers were publicly shaved as a punishment for betraying their homeland.

More recently, Mahsa Amini was killed by the Iranian morality police for wearing her veil incorrectly, prompting Iranian women to shave their heads and burn their veils in response. In black feminist movements, women are fighting colonial domination by reclaiming the Afro hairstyle, reclaiming their hair, their stories and their history.

Women's hair matters.

“If women cannot free themselves from their bodies, they can at least make their bodies places of freedom³¹.”

Using my hair to embroider is a feminist act.

An act of engaging my body.

Reclaiming my freedom.

The title of the artwork, *Past, Present, Future (Self-Portrait with Children)*, allows me to superimpose and confront my own emotions regarding the role of mother/housewife with those of my grandmother.

It provides viewers with a key to interpreting the presented work.

³¹ Camille Froidevaux-Metterie, *un corps à soi*, ed. Du Seuil, 2021.

Conclusion

My artistic practice is closely linked to my personal life.

My days are organised around my family's schedule, I work on drawings in the studio during the day and then go home to spend time with my family. At night, once my children are asleep, I embroider in bed while watching murder mystery series or listening to podcasts. At the weekend, when I can't go to the studio, I work on the Free Marry project on my computer. Each morning, I collect the hairs that have been left in the brush after brushing my hair. I put these in a plastic bag for future use in embroidery work.

My artistic practice is intertwined with my personal life.

As I demonstrated it in my thesis, personal is a political matter.

By blending personal experiences, Western art history and feminist critique, I encourage viewers to free their minds from patriarchal oppression.

My artistic practice is where I engage with feminism; it is my political battlefield.

As Griselda Pollock says, in the preface of her book, *Old Mistresses. Women, Art and Ideology*³²: 'What is said through and about art has a direct and profound impact on our perception of ourselves, sex, gender, race, class, and human possibilities.'

"Rereading the past is not only a way of dreaming, but also of building democratic, inclusive and mutually respectful futures".

Through my artistic practice, I intend to disrupt Western art history by incorporating feminist language, with the intention of changing the future.

Whenever misfortune befalls my family and I pass a church, I always go in to light a candle for Mary and spend a few moments talking to her. I am not a believer, I see her as a friend who shares my respect, love, protection and secrets. I know that, just as she has always been there for me, I am now there for her.

³² Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses. Women, Art and Ideology*, (JRP,2025),50.

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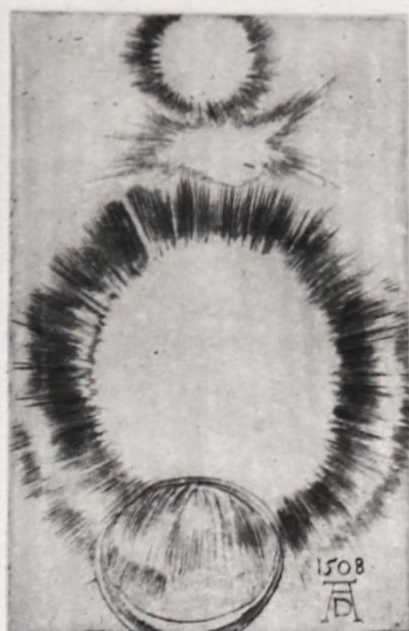
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Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and love to my partner and children. Thank you for your love and patience, and for giving me the time I need to work.

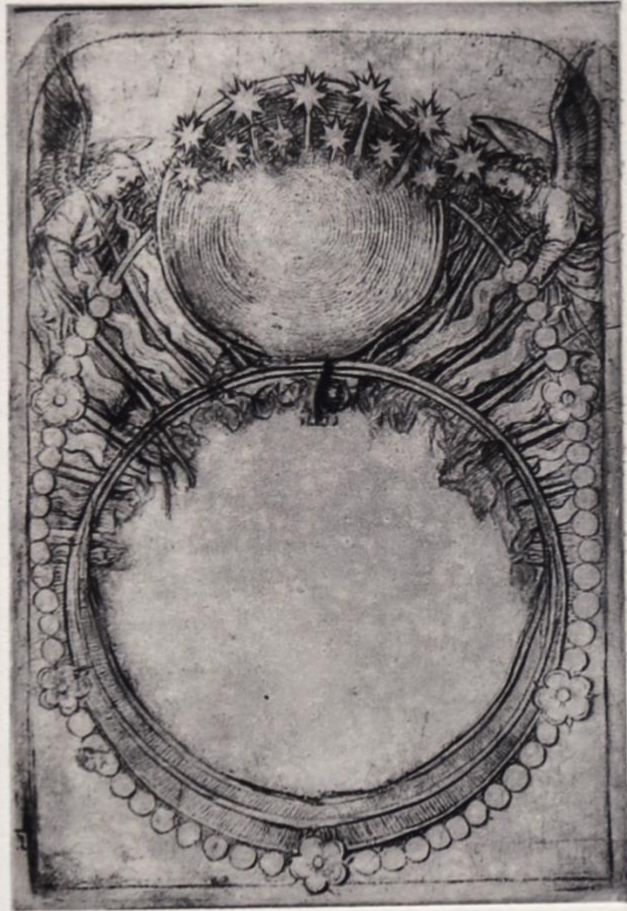
Free Mary images



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After The Holy Virgin with the Crown of Stars, 1508, Albrecht Durer)*, image size 7,1 x 11,3 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After The Holy Virgin Seated on a Grass Bench, Jakob Binch)*, image size 8 x 12,5 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary* (After *Blessed Virgin Holding the Infant Jesus in her Arms*, Master of the old Netherland, 15th Century), image size 10,5 x 15,5 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After The Seated Holy Virgin, Heinrich Aldegrever)*, image size 9 x 12,4 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After The Seated Madonna, 1527, Heinrich Aldegrever)*, image size 5,3 x 7,4 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary* (After *The Holy Virgin with the Swaddled Infant Jesus*, 1520, Albrecht Durer), image size 9,3 x 13,7 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After Madonna with Child, 1553, Heinrich Aldegrever)*, image size 6,4 x 10 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



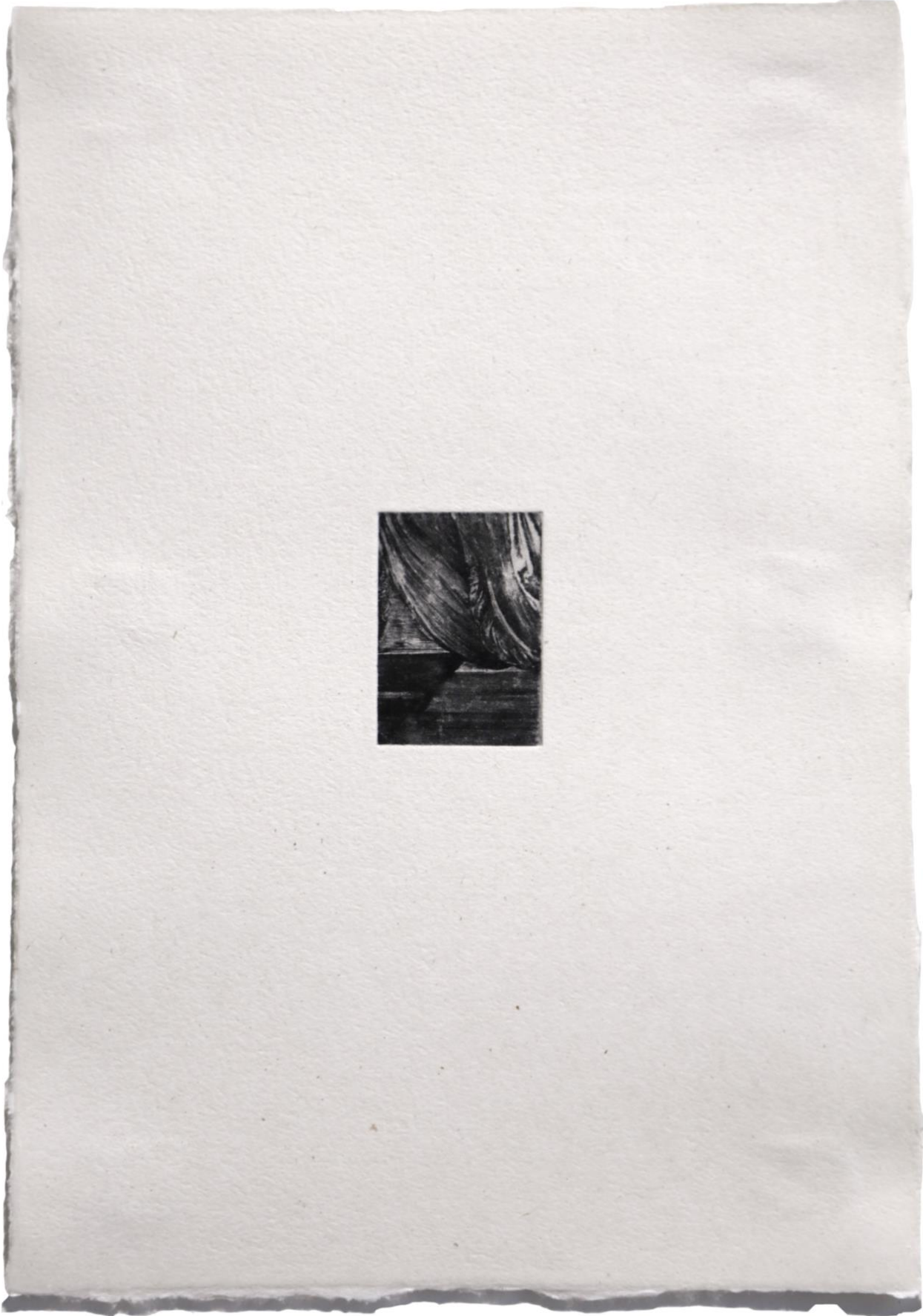
Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After Madonna with Child Above a Landscape, Francesco Novelli)*, image size 9,5 x 9,7 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After The Virgin Mary with the Swaddled Infant Jesus, Jakob Binch)*, image size 6,8 x 9 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



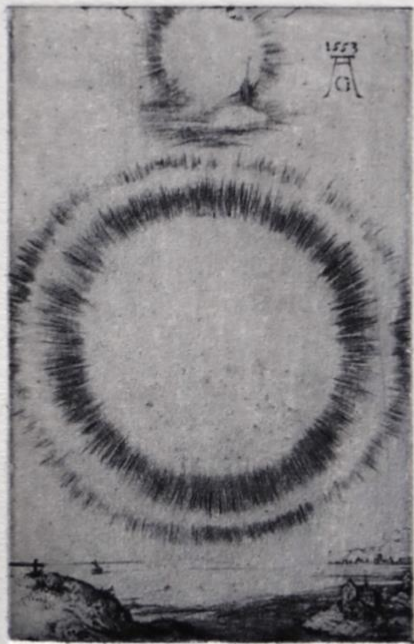
Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After Madonna at the Window, Barthel Beham)*, image size 7,8 x 9,8 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After Madonna with Child with a Pot of Flowers, Barthel Beham)*, image size 4 x 5,5 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After The Holy Virgin of the Pear, 1511, Albrecht Durer)*, image size 6,5 x 9,6 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



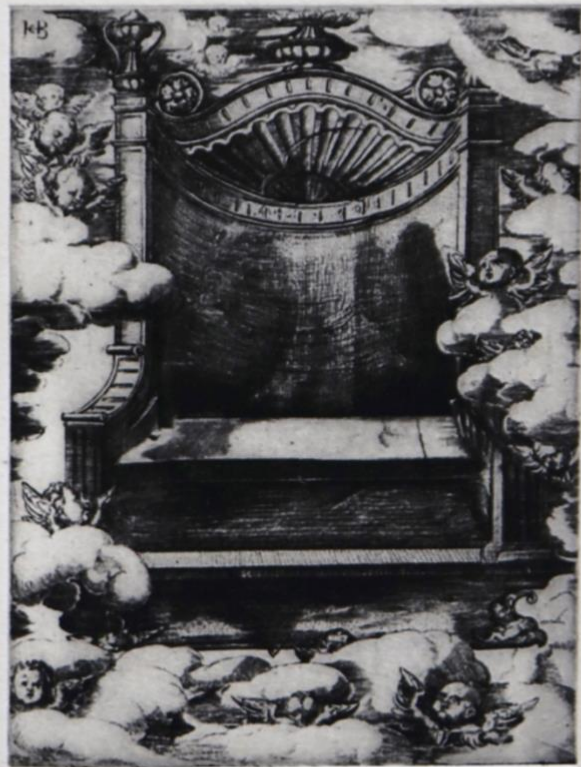
Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary* (After *The Standing Holy Virgin*, 1553, Heinrich Aldegrever), image size 7 x 10,9 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary* (After *Madonna with Child with a Parrot*, 1549, Hans Sebald Beham), image size 5,6 x 7,9 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After The Holy Virgin, Albrecht Durer)*, image size 9 x 14 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025.
Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After the Holy Virgin on the Throne, Jacob Binck)*, image size 10,1 x 13,4 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After The Holy Virgin with a Parrot, Barthel Beham)*, image size 5,5 x 7,6 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After Madonna with Child in a Landscape, 1520, Albrecht Altdorfer)*, image size 3,3 x 5,5 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After The Virgin Mary Crowned by an Angel, 1526, Jacob Binck)*, image size 7,3 x 10 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025. Photograph Nelly Toussaint.



Nelly Toussaint, *Free Mary (After The Virgin Mary, Pier Francesco Mola)*, image size 4,9 x9,5 cm, paper size 21x30cm, 2025.
Photograph Nelly Toussaint.