



Birth Rites Collection

**SYMPOSIA 2011
MANCHESTER/LONDON**



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Front cover image:

'Birth' 2008

Digital Wallpaper

Helen Knowles in collaboration with Francesca Granato

Brochure Design:

Sean Doherty

www.seandoherty.co.uk

Birth in Contemporary Art

Birth Rites Collection Symposium

Welcome to the Birth Rites Collection's symposium, 'Birth in Contemporary Art'. Today we aim to challenge the fact that the subject of birth is rarely engaged with in contemporary art. The day promises to be a fascinating exploration of the subject and its many facets. Though birth has occasionally been represented in art in the past it has often been sidelined, and even in today's free-thinking art world there are still reservations about artists and works that deal with this topic. This is not just an issue of taboo and aversion. From our experience it seems to be one of stigma towards the mother and also the father, and towards family life in general. What does it say about a society when our entrance into the world is seldom represented and closed to artistic debate? Is it considered to only affect one half of the populace and presumed to be less important than our sexuality, our careers or our death?

Our speakers today, who range from academics to artists and curators, will discuss the social, political and artistic implications of work around childbirth in contemporary art. All the artists have varying approaches to media and production, from the graphic, the polemic, the contemplative, the scientific or the personal. Their talks will take you through their practice and ask you to consider taboos and censorship around the representations of childbirth, sexuality and childbirth and the chang-

ing of art practice post childbirth, amongst other subjects. We will be introducing some of our newer artists in the collection delivering their perspective, whilst the academics will present arguments around the subject. Lisa Barrister and Imogen Tyler will contradict the statement that birth is a taboo topic in present day society, as the principles that have kept it out of the public domain have been fundamentally altered.

We are gratefully coinciding with the Mary Kelly retrospective at the Manchester leg of the symposia. This exhibition covers four decades of Kelly's work, where personal narratives reflect the human dimension of political actions, and the political dimensions within the domestic setting. Most notably for the Birth Rites Collection it includes Post-Partum Document (1973-79), in which the American artist methodically documents different stages in the development of her son. The series provoked media uproar in 1975 because of its unapologetic presentation of used nappies.

In the light of the Mary Kelly exhibition, other recent cultural events such as the Channel 4 show One Born Every Minute, and the activities of our speakers, the representation of birth and motherhood is undergoing its own renaissance. We hope that these symposia will further ignite debate and interest in the Birth Rites Collection's mission.

Following the Whitworth Symposium there will also be an evening reception at Salford University in the Midwifery department to present the old and new acquisitions and films. Symposium ticket hold-

ers enter for free. You can also visit the collection during college opening times by contacting Elaine Uppal - e.uppal@salford.ac.uk. Attendants at the Whitechapel Symposium can visit other works in the collection at the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologist, please contact Marion Goone-wardene - mgoonewardene@rcog.org.

At the end of the Whitworth Symposium there will be a tour around the Mary Kelly Retrospective with two of the curators.

Birth Rites Collection

www.birthritescollection.org.uk





**About
Birth Rites**

Birth Rites Collection

Who We Are

The Birth Rites Collection is a collection of contemporary art on the subject of childbirth. It currently comprises of photography, sculpture, painting, wallpaper, drawing, new media and film. It is housed between the Salford University Midwifery Department and the Royal College of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians in London.

Through the presentation and dissemination of the work in the public domain, the Birth Rites Collection instigates debate and increases awareness around childbirth practice. It engages with Artists, Curators and Arts Professionals, encouraging them to explore the subject of childbirth.

The project highlights issues such as the shift towards medical intervention in birth, and investigates the impact of biomedical advances in technology. We explore whether society's focus on propelling women on to an equal footing with men in the workplace erodes their importance as mothers, and look at how free women are to give birth in the way they choose. The Birth Rites Collection considers who controls the process of childbirth and why.

Birth Rites was founded by Helen Knowles in 2006. After the birth of her second child Knowles decided to research contemporary art on childbirth and found that the subject was inadequately

covered. To remedy this she teamed up with Phoebe Mortimer and began a project in which five artists were placed with childbirth professionals to create new works inspired by their experiences. The five original artists and their collaborative partners were: Ping Qiu and Ina May Gaskin (founder and director of The Farm Midwifery Center); Andy Lawrence and Judith Kurutac (Independent Midwife); Jaygo Bloom and Jim Dornan (RCOG ex- Senior Vice President), Hermione Wiltshire with Gail Werkmeister (former President of the National Childbirth Trust) and Kathleen Beegan (co-chair of 'Yogabirth'); Suzanne Holtom and Sarah Vause (Consultant in Foetal Maternal Medicine). The project was first presented at the Matrix forum at Victorian Baths on the 27th October 2007, where the Artists and Birth Professionals shared insights into their work together. Knowles also created two wallpaper works in collaboration with the designer Francesca Granato. The 'Conception' wallpaper is available for purchase on our website.

Birth Rites ran workshops with elderly patients at Cherry Tree Hospital, Stockport, teenage mothers at Salford Women's Centre, and Year 4 children at St. Anne's RC Primary School, Ancoats. Knowles created three artists' books from the collaborations with the participants.

In May 2008, Birth Rites presented the new commissions at The Glasgow Science Centre. The opening night was sponsored by The Royal College of Midwives and opened by Dame Karleen Davies in line with the 28th International Confed-

eration of Midwives conference at the SECC. Birth Rites exhibition then toured to the Manchester Museum in September 2008 – December 2008.

The legacy of these works forms the basis of the Birth Rites Collection, installed in the Manchester and London venues in 2008.

Birth Rites Collection has since expanded its aims to facilitate the production of new cutting-edge works by artists who might not normally address the subject because of its taboo status within contemporary art practice, and to support the work of artists whose work already engages with issues on this subject. It also aims to acquire relevant existing works to develop the Collection.

In May 2010 Anna FC Smith (Assistant Curator) and Sarah Kate Banham (Marketing Manager) joined the Collection as interns. Since then the Collection has run a competition to acquire new works, launched its new website, held a launch night at Islington Mill in Salford, and is now presenting the ideas behind the Collection through two identical symposia at The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester and Whitechapel, London.

Helen Knowles recently ran a series of workshops at The Whitworth Gallery in line with the Mary Kelly Retrospective Education Programme, where the participants explored the visual representation of childbirth. You can see the blog online at www.drawingfrombirth.blogspot.com

The Collection has also recently acquired work by five new artists including two pieces by Judy

Chicago.

Birth Rites Collection is continually looking for new works and to collaborate and create new projects. If you would like to get involved with the collection in any way please email Helen Knowles at helen@birthrites.org.uk





**Birth Rites
Staff**

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*Helen Knowles
Anna FC Smith
Sarah Kate Banham*
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Helen Knowles

Helen Knowles is an artist and curator of the Birth Rites collection. Currently a British Council, Young Creative Entrepreneur, she has curated and commissioned work for internationally renowned projects which include; 'Birth Rites', Manchester Museum/Glasgow Science Centre and 'Don't Cross the line'. Other shows include 'Agitate' and 'Radio Halo'. She has shown work in the 'One Tree' exhibition and Gallery Oldham's touring show 'Wild flowers - their Art and Science'. Recent shows include 'Walls are Talking' Whitworth Art Gallery (2010) and 'After London' (2010) Sassoon Gallery, Peckham. Her work is in The Whitworth Art Gallery Collection, Tate Collection, Birth Rites Collection and Gallery Oldham Collection. She works as a freelancer leading workshops with The Whitworth art Gallery and the House of Illustration.



Anna is a multi-media artist, illustrator and curator based in Manchester. She has shown globally in exhibitions and film screenings. She is the Chair and Arts Coordinator for North By North Western Arts Collective in her home borough of Wigan.

Her main artistic practice is concerned with transgressive states attained through social ritual. Her work deals with recognizing or recreating similarities with historic rituals, such as medieval carnival, in contemporary life, and attempts to highlight the importance of temporary transgressions in understanding what it is to be human. In doing so her work straddles art and anthropology.

She came to work as an intern for the BRC through her interest in anthropology and human universals. The differences in methods, myths and attitudes to something as unifying as childbirth is a subject which echoes loudly within her practice. She sees this role as opportunity to help bring this sidelined part of humanity to the fore of the art canon and of social dialog. Her main roles as intern are to promote and expand the collection and its uses.

www.annafsmith.co.uk



Sarah Kate is a lens based image maker based in Manchester.

She graduated in BA Photography at University College Falmouth in 2008 and has since moved north to Manchester where she began her career in arts marketing at Manchester Art Gallery. Sarah Kate now collaborates with other artists and organisations on a freelance bases as an artist and arts marketer specializing in web development and internet marketing.

Her personal practice is informed by memory and nostalgia using techniques that invite viewer participation. Her work explores how space influences personality and the anthropology of non-space.

She has been involved in organising and curating many exhibitions and her work has been exhibited up and down the country. She came to work for the Birth Rites Collection through her desire to develop the presence of the arts community in Manchester and the north.

www.sarahkatebanham.co.uk

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Dr Lisa Baraitser
Jemima Brown
Matt Collier
Martina Mullaney
Dr Imogen Tyler
Liv Pennington
Eti Wade
Jonathan Waller
Hermione Wiltshire
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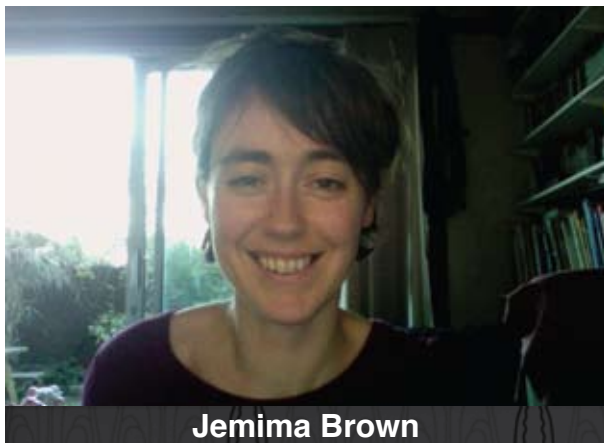
**Speaker
Bios**



Dr Lisa Baraitser

BSc (Edin.), MA (UEL), PhD (London)

Dr Lisa Baraitser is a Senior Lecturer at Birkbeck, University of London. She is Programme Director of the new MA Psychosocial Studies. Her research interests are in gender and sexuality, motherhood, feminist epistemologies, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy and philosophies of ethics, affect and event. Her recent work has centred on the fraught relations, as well as creative tensions, between motherhood, female subjectivity and ethics. It spans an inter-disciplinary arena that takes in contemporary debates in relational, post-Kleinian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, feminism, the ethics of care, philosophies of otherness and event, phenomenology, and the use of autobiographical writing as a feminist research strategy. She is co-founder of the international research network MaMSIE (Mapping Maternal Subjectivities, Identities and Ethics).



Jemima Brown uses sculpture, drawing and time based media to explore formal sculptural decision making, suggested narrative and social critique. Graduating from an MA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art in London in 1995 she has established her practice as an artist based in London and working internationally. Curatorial and collaborative projects, such as 'Family Viewing', (a peripatetic, episodic project), or 'Enemies of Good Art', compliment and contextualise Browns work as an artist.

Forthcoming exhibitions include a solo show in September 2011 at Standpoint Gallery in London as the recipient of the 2010/11 Mark Tanner Sculpture Award. She has been involved with Enemies of Good Art since 2009, and has a 3 year old son. Further information and images can be seen at www.jemimabrown.com



Matt Collier

Matt Collier completed a Masters in Fine Art at Glasgow School of Art 2009, and a BA Fine Art at University of the Arts, London 2004. Matt has shown in various exhibitions, prizes and awards. Currently living and working in Oxfordshire. A piece of his work has been recently acquired by the Birth Rites Collection.

www.mattcollier.com



Martina Mullaney

Martina Mullaney practice explores notions of community and the disappearance of civil associations. After the birth of her daughter in 2009 she started the movement Enemies of Good Art, which began as a series of public meetings at the Whitechapel Gallery, located with the installation *The Nature of the Beast*. She lives in London, where she received a Masters Degree in Photography from the Royal College of Art in 2004. Her work has been exhibited at the Yossi Milo Gallery in New York, Freankel Gallery in San Francisco, Gallery of Photography in Dublin, Ireland, Blue Sky Gallery in Portland, Oregon and Ffotogallery in Wales. Recent projects have been supported by the British Council and the Red Mansion Foundation. She is represented by the Yossi Milo Gallery in New York.



Liv Pennington

Liv received an MA from the Royal College of Art in 2003. Her work has been exhibited in such UK Galleries as the Lisson Gallery and the Jerwood Space; Internationally in the Bild Museet (Sweden), Oslo Kunsthall (Norway). Her work is included in the collections of Robin Wight, Christopher Rauschenberg and the Grosvenor Estate. A piece of her work has been recently acquired by the Birth Rites Collection.

www.livpennington.com



Dr Imogen Tyler

PhD (Lancaster) MA (Cardiff) BA (Bolton)

DR imogen Tyler is a Sociology Senior Lecturer & Leverhulme Fellow at Lancaster University. Her research interests include Maternal Publics: Bodies, Identities, Practices. She has published widely in this area, most recently editing a special issue of *Feminist Review* on 'Birth' (2009). She also sits on the editorial board of a new journal, *Studies in the Maternal*. She co-directed (with Dr Caroline Gatrell) a research project entitled *Hard Labour: The Cultural Politics of Reproduction* for which she organised a workshop on *Maternal Bodies* (2005) and an international conference, *Birth* (2007). She is currently working (with Dr Celia Roberts and Dr Candice Satchwell) on a European-funded research project on *Childbirth Organisations in the UK 2009-2011*. She is am co-writing a monograph on *Maternal Publics and Counterpublics* with Dr Lisa Baraitser.



Eti Wade is an artist and academic. She is the programme leader for the MA Photography at the University of West London. Her photographic practice is a personal investigation of the limits of maternal subjectivity expressed through photography and video and she also writes on the subject of the maternal gaze in contemporary photographic art. She is a mother of three boys aged 18, 11 and 2 and lives in North London.



Jonathan Waller

Jonathan Waller is an artist and senior lecturer at Coventry University. He has an MA in Fine Art, Chelsea School of Art, London (1985) and BA (Hons) in Fine Art, Coventry (Lanchester) Polytechnic, Coventry (1983). His solo exhibitions include True Adventures, National Maritime Museum, Falmouth (2005), Box Assemblages, Lanchester Gallery (2003) and Birth, New End Gallery, London (1997). His group shows include Kunst Europa - 74 kunstvereine zeigen kunst aus 18 Landern, Karlsruhe, Germany (1991), The New British Painting, Cincinnati Contemporary Art Centre, touring to Chicago, Milwaukee, Winston Salem, Grand Rapids and New York, USA (1988-1990) and London, Glasgow, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA (1988). Amongst many awards and grants he has won First Prize, Midland View 3, Nottingham (1994), British Council Grant: working visit to New York, USA (1990) and Mark Rothko Memorial Trust: travelling scholarship to USA (1988).



Hermione Wiltshire is an Artist and Senior Lecturer at the Royal College of Art in the Photography Department. Although originally trained in Sculpture, she positions her work between the object and the image – a physical presence in the world and an imaginary one residing the imagination. She has produced sculpture, photographs, an animation and has exhibited extensively. She has lectured widely and is presently developing a series of theoretical seminars called the 'Physical Image' with Susan Butler. She is one of the original artists from the Birth Rites Exhibition.



Timetable

The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester
Monday 9th May 2011

- 1000 Welcome Speech by Anna FC Smith
- 1010 Intro to Birth Rites by Helen Knowles
- 1030 "Private View: Public Birth: Feminist Commons"
- 1125 "The Maternal Subject In Photography"
- 1210 Lunch (60 mins)
- 1315 "Birth as Confrontational Image"
- 1410 "Enemies of Good Art"
- 1455 Break (30 mins)
- 1525 "Science Abstracting Pregnancy"
- 1610 Round up of the day
- 1620 Tour of Mark Kelly

The Whitechapel Gallery, London
Wednesday 11th May 2011

- 1100 Welcome Speech by Anna FC Smith
- 1110 Intro to Birth Rites by Helen Knowles
- 1130 "Private View: Public Birth: Feminist Commons"
- 1225 "The Maternal Subject In Photography"
- 1310 Lunch (60 mins)
- 1415 "Birth as Confrontational Image"
- 1510 "Enemies of Good Art"
- 1555 Break (30 mins)
- 1625 "Science Abstracting Pregnancy"
- 1710 Round up of the day

Each talk will last for approximately 30 mins and is followed by a 15 minute q&a.

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Lisa Barrister and Imogen Tyler:

“Private View: Public Birth: Feminist Commons”

Eti Wade:

“The Maternal Subject In Photography- Mirroring and Mothering in Contemporary Photographic Practices”

Jonathan Waller, Hermione Wiltshire, Helen Knowles:

“Birth as Confrontational Image”

Jemima Brown and Martina Mulleney:

“Enemies of Good Art”

Liv Pennington and Matt Collier:

“Science Abstracting Pregnancy”

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Talks

Lisa Barrister and Imogen Tyler:
"Private View: Public Birth: Feminist Commons"

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Christina Aguilera REVEALED

AMAZING PICTURES INSIDE

"WHEN I FOUND OUT, I STARTED SHAKING" >>>

Barrister and Tyler will consider the shifting social

and cultural meaning of maternity and birth in all forms of contemporary representation. They will argue against claims that birth and the maternal are abject and barred from representation within public culture. They suggest that the private/ public distinctions which kept them 'out of sight' have been radically reconfigured.

The issue is that many of the now predominant cultural representations of birth and the maternal are decidedly normative. Though birth and motherhood has been 'made public', they often appear in ways which conceal the affective drama of birth, the emotional turmoil of maternal experience and the ongoing experience of mothering, the complexity and material inequalities of maternal lives.

Turning to Birth Rites and allied forms of new maternal art practice, they argue for forms of critical aesthetic practice which approach birth and the maternal anew.

Eti Wade:

"The Maternal Subject In Photography- Mirroring and Mothering in Contemporary Photographic Practices"



"Bath Womb" (Eti Wade)

Maternal subjectivity is largely absent from culture, obscured by representational idealisation. 'Artist mothers', or 'maternal photographers' make images that expose the maternal gaze, challenging and disrupting conventional ideas about mater-

nity. Wade links her own experience of post-natal depression to the culturally prevalent idealised mother which inhibits and silences the genuine experiences of motherhood. Often, the presentation of such photographs attracts social unease and raises issues about familial power relations and parental authority. Indeed, it raises questions about the moral right of the mother to make the work. This presentation will offer an intersubjective interpretation of contemporary maternal photographers. Wade will look at the work of Ana Casas Broda,

**Jonathan Waller, Hermione Wiltshire,
Helen Knowles:**
"Birth as Confrontational Image"



"Mother No.27" (Jonathan Waller)

This conversation witnesses the meeting of three artists who have tackled the image of birth directly. Jonathan Waller is a painter who began creating his large mix media images of pregnant and birthing woman after experiencing the difficult labour of his wife. Hermione Wiltshire is a photographic artist working with both pictures she takes herself and found images. She was one of the initial artists from the Birth Rites Exhibition in 2008. Helen Knowles utilizes the different media women have chosen to explore to inform their ideas around birth. These include images from historical and contemporary books and YouTube. She reassembles this imagery through drawing, printmaking, installation work, artist books and collage. Knowles has been exploring the subject of birth since 2006 in her own art practice and through curating the Birth Rites Collection.



"Ecstatic Birth" (Pamphlet Detail)

Through their different mediums, each artist has sought to challenge social taboos and break new ground in the art world. By the graphic quality of each artist's work we are transported beyond representation into politically charged polemics that have been met with celebration, recognition and censorship.



"Therese in Ecstic Childbirth" (Hermione Wiltshire)

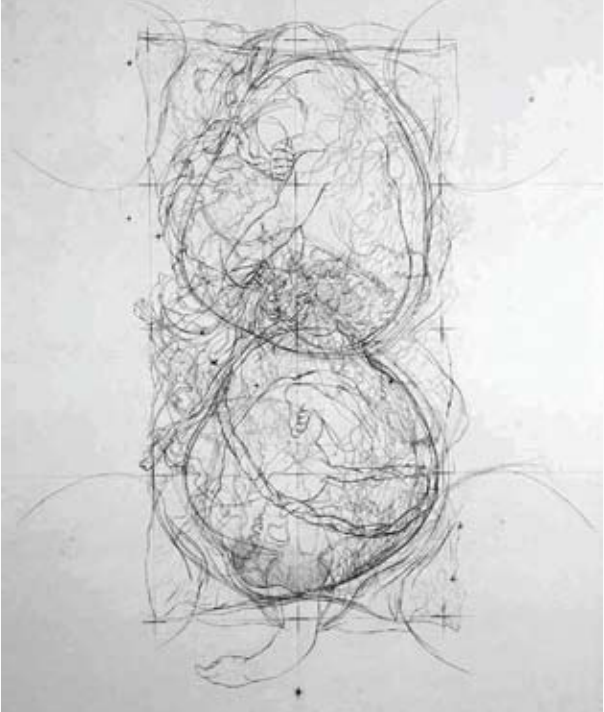
Jemima Brown and Martina Mulleney:
"Enemies of Good Art"



*Enemies of Good Art meeting held in April 2010
Whitechapel Gallery London*

In his 1938 novel *Enemies of Promise* Cyril Connolly asserted that 'there is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall'. Since April 2009 *Enemies of Good Art* has debated the issues arising from this infamous quote. These two speakers will be present the *Enemies of Good Art* project which investigates the possibilities of combining art practice and family commitments. Using the examples of their own art practice and experience the pair will consider the meaning of community and relate their own interests to the activities of the Birth Rites Collection.

Liv Pennington and Matt Collier:
"Science Abstracting Pregnancy"



"Gravid Uterus Twin" (Matt Collier)

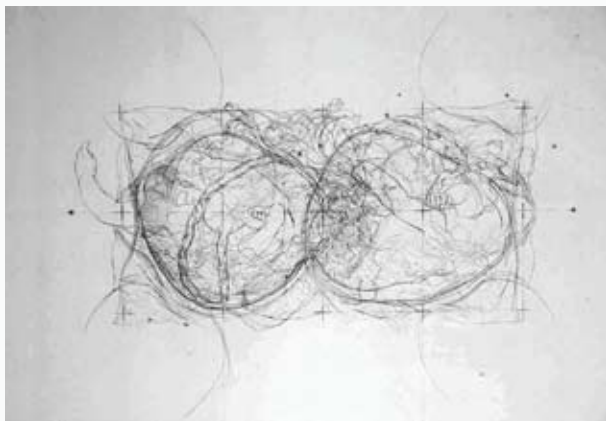
These artists are two of the newest members of the collection. Liv Pennington is predominantly a photographer and video artist. Her work in the collection, entitled "Private View" 2006 is a Digital C type

print on Aluminium. It is a composite image which documents forty different women's pregnancy tests from an art performance of the same title. The images are combined with text written by the women as they were waiting to take their test. Matt Collier's piece 'Gravid Uterus Twin' 2009 is a detailed pencil drawing of epic dimensions, 176 x 140cm. The work borrows its aesthetic from historical anatomical illustrations.



"Private View" (Liv Pennington)

Both artists approach the subject via scientific methods of representation and abstraction. This conversation will focus on their individual practice, how they have come to create work on birth and how they have chosen to address the body.



Birth Rites Collection

www.birthritescollection.org.uk

Left: "*Theresa In Ecstatic Childbirth*" (Hermione Wiltshire)

Right: "*Gravid Uterus Twin*" (Matt Collier)