

ART GYM N° 77



JULIA
ROXANNE OLDHAM
JACKSON
MOTHER

with an essay by **JENNIFER RABIN**

ROXANNE JACKSON is a ceramic sculptor living in Brooklyn, New York. Press for her work has appeared in the *Huffington Post*, *Hyperallergic*, the *New York Times*, *Gothamist*, Sculpture Center Curators' Notebook, *Beautiful/Decay*, *ArtSlant*, *Brooklyn Magazine*, *The L Magazine*, *Eyes Towards the Dove*, *Ceramics Monthly*, *Ceramics Ireland*, and *New Ceramics*, among others. She has been an artist in residence at the Bemis Center, Socrates Sculpture Park, the Wassaic Project, the Ceramic Center of Berlin, Oregon College of Art and Craft, the Pottery Workshop in Jingdezhen, China, and more. Her work has been exhibited in New York at SPRING/BREAK Art Show, Honey Ramka, Lu Magnus, Denny Gallery, Regina Rex, Zürcher Gallery, Catinca Tabacaru Gallery, the Lodge Gallery, Outlet, the Parlour Bushwick, BAM, English Kills, Knockdown Center, BRIC, and Airplane Gallery. She has shown in China, Portugal, Romania, Canada, and such cities as London, Berlin, Vienna, Leipzig, Paris, and Brussels.

JULIA OLDDHAM lives and works in Eugene, Oregon. Her work has been screened/exhibited at Art in General in New York, NY; MOMA PS1 in Long Island City, NY; Portland Art Museum in Portland, OR; P.P.O.W. in New York, NY; the Drawing Center in New York, NY; the Bronx Museum of the Arts in the Bronx, NY; the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, IL; Espaço3 in Lisbon, Portugal; Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, MA; Dia Art Foundation at the Hispanic Society in New York, NY; the Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC; and Nunnery Gallery in London, UK; and she was included in the 2016 Portland Biennial, curated by Michelle Grabner. Her work has been supported by Artadia, the Fund for Art and Dialogue, New York, NY; Artist in the Marketplace at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, NY; Art in General, New York, NY; the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, New York, NY; Outpost Artists Resources, Ridgewood, NY; Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest, Clermont, KY; the Oregon Arts Commission, Portland, OR; and the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Chicago, IL.

JENNIFER RABIN is a writer, an artist, an arts writer, and an arts activist. Her writing has appeared in the *Sun*, *Harvard Review*, *Visual Art Source*, *Hyperallergic*, *Oregon Humanities*, *Bitch*, and the *Rumpus*. Her conceptual art has been exhibited in Portland, Oregon, and in South Carolina. She is the recipient of a grant from Portland's Regional Arts & Culture Council in support of her memoir, *All the Reverence in Our Hearts*, about art's ability to transform grief and to shepherd us through the darkest times in our life. In her capacity as a visual arts writer for *Willamette Week* and *Oregon Arts Watch*, she champions underrepresented voices, challenges the mystique of the white-box art world, and makes a case for why the arts are essential to all of our lives. She is the founder of Art Passport PDX and ArtistsResist.org.

JANUARY 24 —
MARCH 18 2017

JULIA
ROXANNE OLDHAM
JACKSON

MOTHER

curated by **BLAKE SHELL**







JULIA OLDHAM
THE BEARWIFE

2016

Video

7:18

CAPTURED YETI

2015

Video

0:55

THE ART GYM presented *Mother* January 24–March 18, 2017. Featuring work by Roxanne Jackson and Julia Oldham, the exhibition was curated by Blake Shell, the Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Director and Curator. Jackson's craft-based sculptures and Oldham's drawings and videos delve into the dualities of creation and destruction, beauty and the grotesque, and transfiguration and deformation. Each artist generates her own magical dreamworld, full of creatures both real and imagined, to explore the relationship between humans and animals through narrative and folklore.

As part of the Art Gym's PNW Context programming, this exhibition is one of an ongoing series that connects artists of the Pacific Northwest with artists and curators outside of the region. These programs broaden and deepen connections for regional artists, providing a context for their art that ranges from the national to the international. Local viewers experience work from artists outside the region, and regional artists are brought to the attention of art audiences beyond the Pacific Northwest. PNW Context creates a dialogue around ideas, methods, materials, and processes.



ROXANNE JACKSON
RUN TO THE HILLS
2016

Ceramic, glaze, underglaze
decals, luster, hoop earrings
23 × 24 × 13 inches

Photograph by Stan Narten

MOTHER

JENNIFER RABIN

THE WESTERN VERSION of the mother archetype is a unilateral one: she is creative, nurturing, and life-giving. She gives to us and we take from her. She brings us into the world on a wave of her sacrificial screams and we suckle at her ample breast, which is always hidden under a modesty blanket in public.

Roxanne Jackson and Julia Oldham explode this narrow archetype by joining Western and Eastern mythologies to invoke the full scope of the feminine. Their mother is both creator and destroyer, animal and human, beguiling and feral. She listens to death metal. She has diamond earrings, a standing weekly nail appointment, and teeth for cutting flesh.

At the center of both artists' work is the duality of the she-beast, a hybrid creature that is part woman, part animal/alien/zombie.



AFTER MIDNIGHT

2016

Ceramic, glaze, underglaze
decals, luster, hoop earrings
20 × 29 × 12 inches

Photograph by Jamie Steele

STATEMENT

ROXANNE JACKSON

A gentle and reasonable being can be transformed into a maniac or a savage beast. One is always inclined to lay the blame on external circumstances, but nothing could explode in us if it had not been there. — CARL JUNG

I preferred my villains to be evil and stay that way. — DAVID SEDARIS

IN MY WORK, I explore themes of extinction, death, and transformation. I am fascinated by the natural processes of decay and destruction. Nature is referenced not by depicting the virile stag, but by illustrating its inevitable decay. Valuing macabre sensibilities, my work is also seasoned with inspiration derived from both the banality of pop culture and the idiosyncrasies of different subcultures. The final result may seem uncanny or black-humored.

Occasionally I appropriate imagery from horror films, particularly moments of transformation—when a human becomes a beast. This transgressive imagery creates irony and tension in the work, especially when produced in the medium of clay, which has strong historical ties to comfort and beauty. Rooted in traditions of pantheism and superstition, the horror movie depicts a dark side of human nature. Mutated creatures are created in the murky depths of our collective subconscious. These images ride the boundary between animal and human, instinct and reason, the conscious and the subconscious.

The animal (or human) figure is used as a point of departure, so that I may distort, abstract, or scrutinize it. For instance, in my *Alienware* series, I deconstruct an image of a domestic cat and a snake to depict the internal duality of the beautiful and the beastly rooted in Jungian psychology. Domestic cats offer furry, lovable companionship and are a common subject of kitsch. Kitty-themed tchotchkes are ubiquitous, thriving in the form of figurines and cookie jars. Meanwhile, snakes are collectively misunderstood as merely venomous and loathsome—in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series, for

instance, images of snakes are used effectively in the creepy tattoos that identify Lord Voldemort’s allies. According to the accepted quotidian beliefs of the Western populace, the cat is cuddlesome while the snake is inherently evil. However, when a cat becomes frightened, it transforms into a more beastly animal: fang teeth revealed, ears pulled back, *hissing*. In contrast, a coiled, sleeping snake is in a vulnerable state, and resembles a harmless lap cat. I have chosen these two animals in order to better mock the mythos of popular culture; the mash-up of these images, with the added touch of the alien, creates something sublime and inhuman.

Made with “crafty” media such as papier-mâché, ceramics, marbled paper, and yarn, new works are inspired by feminine retro-beasts, such as harpies, Sirens, and Medusa; these archaic figures are combined with imagery found in present-day subcultures. For instance, *Harpy* (2013) draws on neoshamanism and black metal, a subgenre of extreme metal music. *California Dream-in’* (2015) is heavily influenced by antiquated mermaid folklore and circus sideshow culture from the mid-1800s, in which Fiji mermaids were a prominent fixture; my version of these monstrous figures appropriates this folk art tradition and re-creates this profound myth. And the yeti paw in *Money to Burn* (2014) references contemporary manicure culture, a postmodern gesture that echoes what T. S. Eliot called the manipulation of a “continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity.” This provocative work juxtaposes the old and the new, the real and the fabled, the kitschy and the grotesque.



BARK AT THE MOON

2016

Ceramic, glaze, underglaze
decals, luster, hoop earrings
19 × 16 × 10 inches

Photographs by Stan Narten





Jackson creates pop chimeras using materials most commonly associated with female forms of expression. She wrestles ceramic, papier-mâché, and textiles from the jaws of the craft world in order to sculpt them into aggressive, grotesque figures. In so doing, she subverts our perceptions of these materials as fragile, delicate, or flimsy, recasting them as cartilage, bone, and fury. Known to have hot-glued beef jerky to ceramic during her art-school days, Jackson continues her defiant use of materials, pushing the boundaries of form while refusing to defer to tradition.

In her ceramic *Alienware* series, the artist flays open the heads of beasts to reveal the undulating ridges of their hard palates flanked by gilded fangs. Anatomy is intentionally garbled: brain matter spills out like disemboweled intestine; a nose resembling a sacrum turns an oral cavity into a pelvic bowl; canine ears echo the wings of a sphenoid bone inside an extraterrestrial skull. The ways that Jackson plays with her surfaces reinforce the duality of her figures: lethal horns are finished with pearlescent glaze and pierced through with gold Claire's Boutique hoops; fascia is patterned like sitting-room wallpaper. The soft becomes hard, the visceral becomes ornamental, beauty and ferocity commingle.

Jackson makes frequent allusion to the Fiji mermaid, a common nineteenth-century sideshow relic that was created by sewing together the torso of a monkey and the tail of a fish. In her sculptures, as in the original objects, the monkey's pendulous breasts and razor-like teeth tell the story of a creature that both 17 

CAT BITE

2016

Ceramic, glaze, luster

19 × 12 × 11 inches

Photograph by Stan Narten



CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

2015

Ceramic, glaze

26 × 7 × 12 inches

EARLY WOMAN

2015

Terra-cotta, glaze

17 × 7 × 12 inches

Photographs by Nichole van Beek





MONEY TO BURN

2014

Ceramic, fur, candle,
glaze, amethyst, gold luster,
mini dice, money
18 × 9 × 9 inches

Photograph by John Dowling

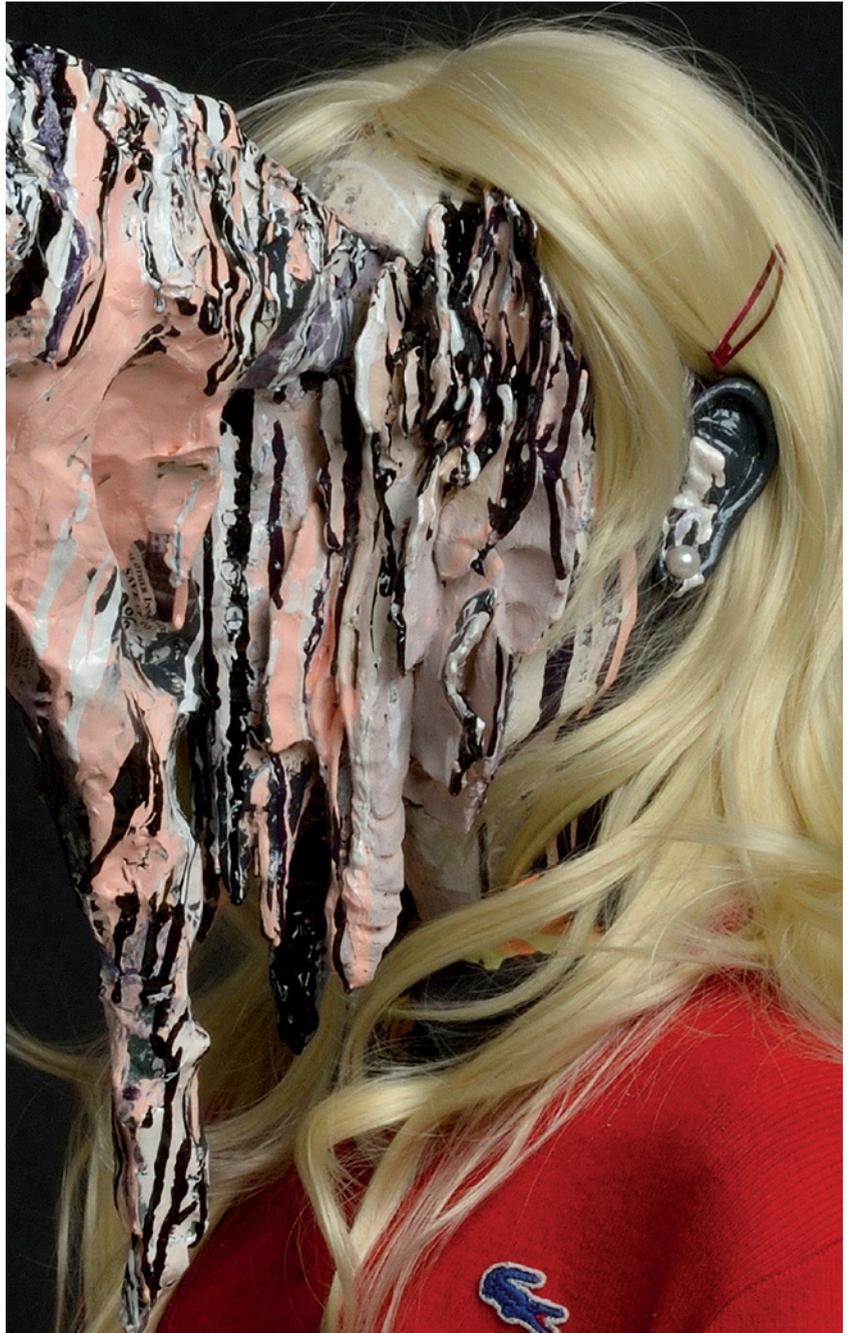


PUT A RING ON IT

2016

Papier-mâché, Magic Sculpt,
miniature killer whales
and shark, nail polish,
shells, gems
30 × 20 × 22 inches

Photograph by Jamie Steele



offers life and threatens to take it away. One of Jackson's mermaids is glazed in the soothing blue color of the sea and has the menacing black lips of a beast. She lies supine, inviting, her piscine tail singing a siren song. The other mermaid is raw and decrepit, hollow sockets for eyes, dorsal spines perked up for a fight.

The original taxidermied “mermaids” from Barnum's circus were long believed to be real, and Jackson's work takes an interest in how a myth can be crafted in secret, hand-stitched into being. The artist doesn't show an interest in inventing straight mythologies, though, preferring to steep her monsters in layers of pop culture.

Some of her mermaids double as bongs—a wink to cannabis subculture and to the intoxicating idea of female as vessel—and she has been known to dress at least one preppy monster in a Lacoste sweater. In addition, Jackson often draws on the aesthetic of manicure culture, which provides her sculptures with a heavy dose of kitsch. Re-creating the severed gorilla paws that were used as ashtrays in the '70s, Jackson sculpts similar forms in ceramic, replacing their claws with highly feminized artificial nails that are bedazzled, pierced, and trimmed in gold. Crystals and candles rest in their palms, a subtle reference—which she makes in many of her pieces—to new age culture's devotion to personal transformation.

This theme of transformation runs strongly through both Jackson's and Oldham's work and is part of what elevates it beyond simple humor, horror, and kitsch.

In her videos, Oldham often appears to be searching for something (an

BLONDE AMBITION

2013

Ceramic, wig, Lacoste
sweater, pearl earrings,
enameled paint,
chicken wire, papier-mâché,
hair barrette, plywood
4 × 5 × 1 feet

Photograph by John Dowling



extinct bird, the answers to the universe). In *The Bearwife*, a woman, played by the artist, is out exploring the wilds when a bear eats her. During the bear's nap, Oldham, covered in blood from her mauling, emerges from the shaggy faux-fur bear suit. She dances with the twitchy movements we associate with zombie movies before the film reverses itself and she is back inside the animal. When the bear, with Oldham inside of it, wakes up and wanders off into the woods, it is left open to our interpretation whether the bear has taken on the qualities of the woman or the woman has transformed into the bear. But in the subsumption of one by the other, a new hybrid she-beast is created.

Birdmaker, Oldham's black-and-white video, features the artist as neoshaman-witch guarding a cauldron draped with pearls. Cutting her palm, she drips blood into the water, stirring in potions and powders with a knife trimmed in fur. Dancing and praying, she summons the spirits to help her pull a crow from the waters. The bird spins, lifeless, until the shaman, arms outstretched, beckons it to flight. After the bird takes off, a murder of crows follows, flapping in every direction, the frame teeming with life.

To conjure something from nothing is the ultimate act of creation. But it should be noted that Oldham chooses to give life to a symbol of death—the crow. By marrying these two forces, she introduces us to the Eastern view of the feminine, in which creation and destruction are not at odds but are, instead, considered collaborative forces. The goddess Kali is the simultaneous embodiment of motherly love, creativity, and death (and, like Oldham's character, she wields a bloody dagger). 24 

JULIA OLDHAM
THE BEARWIFE
2016
Video
7:18





STATEMENT

JULIA OLDHAM

IN MY TIME-BASED WORK, I combine live-action video with traditional animation to create narratives about science and nature—two subjects that saturated my formative years in rural Maryland, where I was raised by a physicist, an avid gardener, and a pack of dogs. My love affair with science burgeoned as I grew and developed as an artist, and scientific curiosity emerged as a character in my work.

I typically juggle themes of connectivity between humans and animals with poetic notions of science. I am the performer in my video work, and the character I play in these pieces is a fantastical self: the self that has a love affair with a coyote, discovers the infinite, splits into matter and antimatter, and lives in an alternate universe. Always searching for the impossible, my characters are guided by desire that is rarely required, and that reflects my impossible longing to understand the unknowable and transcend humanness. By performing the lead role in my videos, I go through the same process of journeying as the character does. The performative aspect of the work is just as significant as the act of drawing, setting up shots, and writing scripts. Physically moving through a story invariably changes the narrative structure of the piece—for instance, when the body disagrees with a particular movement or environment and creates new gestures by chance.

Animation can be a tool for accessing that which is dreamlike, and in my videos, I use animation as a means of making the impossible visually possible and blending the real world with invented ones. I animate manually, drawing each frame by hand on a light box, a method

that allows for more variation between frames than is typical in studio-produced animation. This process of drawing is visible in the squirming, scratchy lines of the characters' wrinkles and fur, and in the strange and uncanny transitions between drawings that would typically be considered too detailed for a cartoon. I mix these rough animated characters into live-action video worlds in which I perform, superimposing them onto real and imagined landscapes and interacting with them. These visual elements pull the dreamworld into my narratives to create a visual language that can move seamlessly between the sweet and the creepy.

GIRL UNDER THE FLOOR

2016

Animation

1:00



BIRDMAKER

2016

Video and animation

3:00

Birdmaker





In Eastern thought, destruction—because it makes way for new life—is the midwife of creation.

In the West, the only representations we have of these opposing forces are the Jungian archetypes of the Great Mother and the Terrible Mother, which are wholly unintegrated notions of creativity and destruction, love and neglect, benevolence and malevolence, pitted against one another.

For *Mother*, Oldham presents us with a series of Edward Gorey-inspired drawings from her *Petite Book of Monsters*, which functions as a modern-day bestiary that could very well double as the Terrible Mother's family album: a daughter in her Sunday best bearing a mouth full of fangs, waiting to eviscerate you; a sister on her wedding day, looking beautiful as ever but for the fact that she has no face. Images of adorably murderous animals—adopted family pets?—are interspersed with cross-hatched depictions of the decrepit and the undead.

One of the drawings in this series successfully bridges the worlds of the Great Mother and the Terrible Mother: a werewolf squats down, the black night behind her, her head lifted in a primal open-mouthed howl. Her human body, with its six engorged breasts, symbolizes nourishment and abundance. Her animal head, protection and savagery.

Inherent in this mythology of the she-beast is the notion that the female body is more closely aligned with the cycles of nature. Mother Nature presides over

from
**THE PETITE BOOK
 OF MONSTERS**
 2016

Ink on paper
 Each 5 × 7 inches

Smita Thornfowl
Bobby Fitzgerald

No Face Bride
Lillgra the Death Horse

Purrberus
Tillighloper





**HORGRISSE THE
WEREWOLF MOTHER**
2016

Ink on paper
5 × 7 inches
from *The Petite Book
of Monsters*

birth, growth, death, and regeneration; and though she is supportive of all life, she is equally indifferent to its demise.

Oldham's work has long been tied to the artist's affection for the natural world, but never more so than in her new video *The Ghost Bird*. In it, a naturalist (played by a real-life naturalist whom the artist met during a residency in the Everglades) searches for the ivory-billed woodpecker, a bird that has been listed as critically endangered—and possibly extinct—due to hunting and habitat destruction. The woodpecker appears to the naturalist as a weeping apparition, or perhaps a faded memory of its once-thriving existence. The video is a tender admonishment of man's defilement of nature, and serves as a reminder of the consequences of going against the natural order.

Jackson shows similar concern in the way that her mermaids reflect the grotesquerie of man's hubris in trying to take the place of nature. It is not surprising, given Jackson's degree in botany and Oldham's standing as an amateur naturalist, that they would arrive at a similar destination, though they take different paths to get there.

These two artists' bodies of work have much in common, but the most remarkable overlap is their highly sophisticated use of low-brow aesthetics. Jackson's employment of kitsch works only because of her demonstrated mastery as a sculptor. You need only look at a piece like *After Midnight* to acquaint yourself with what the artist is capable of. Similarly, Oldham's incorporation of camp announces itself in stark relief to her technical drawing skills and abilities as a filmmaker. Her videos' 30 🖱️





high production values, glorious soundscapes, and treatment of quieter moments let the viewer know that decisions to create costumes and sets worthy of a B movie are, in fact, decisions. These choices on the part of both artists inject humor into their work and, counterintuitively, add nuance to their final objects instead of stripping it from them. *Mother* is a testament to craftsmanship and high concept made manifest as hideous hilarious beasts.

Though the exhibition is not political, it is impossible to separate it from the moment in which it is being shown. Two days before *Mother* opened, women organized the largest single-day protest in history. Over six hundred women's marches erupted all over the world to protest the rise of greed, misogyny, xenophobia, bigotry, and hate. One phrase that came out of those marches echoes still:

We have birthed a nation and we can unbirth a nation.

At a time when women are embracing the full scope of their power, the work of these two artists feels sharply relevant. We are grappling with what feels like the destruction of many things at the hands of a masculine paradigm. But these artists remind us that death is a prerequisite for rebirth and that women are the most promising agents of change because they embody a balance between these two forces.

Despite all of the destruction surrounding us, we are also witness to something astonishing—the birth of a new mother.

ROXANNE JACKSON
RUN TO THE HILLS
 2016

Ceramic, glaze, underglaze
 decals, luster, hoop earrings
 23 × 24 × 13 inches

Photograph by Stan Narten



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

MOTHER IS THE Art Gym's 77th publication documenting contemporary art in the Pacific Northwest. It is available in print and online. This publication would not be possible without the Art Gym Art Production and Publication Fund donors, including the Harold & Arlene Schnitzer CARE Foundation and Linda Hutchins and John Montague. Thank you to everyone for your support.

We would like to thank Jennifer Rabin for her bold, thoughtful writing on the work of Roxanne Jackson and Julia Oldham. Thank you to Adam McIsaac of Sibley House for the primal yet polished design of the catalog.

The Art Gym and Marylhurst University also deeply thank Roxanne Jackson and Julia Oldham for their amazing work in this exhibition and publication.

SINCE 1980, the **ART GYM** has been recognized as a venue that exhibits some of the most significant and timely art of this region. The mission of the gallery is to increase public understanding of the contemporary art of the Pacific Northwest through exhibitions, artists' projects, publications, and public engagement.

The Art Gym is a noncollecting, noncommercial gallery that supports artists in creating ambitious, risk-taking projects at various stages in their careers. As an art space working within an academic venue, we are committed to providing artistic and intellectual freedom. The Art Gym's catalogs continue to be among the greatest records of the contemporary art history of the Pacific Northwest, contributing to the discourse on contemporary art and representing the region. We are dedicated to making knowledge accessible and connecting artists and community.

BLAKE SHELL is the Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Director and Curator of the Art Gym and Belluschi Pavilion at Marylhurst University, providing the artistic direction and leadership of the organization.

Mother

© 2017 Art Gym

Marylhurst University | 17600 Pacific Highway, Marylhurst, Oregon 97036

www.marylhurst.edu/theartgym

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission from the publisher, except in the context of reviews.

The Art Gym is supported by the Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Foundation, the Collins Foundation, the Oregon Arts Commission, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Art Gym's publication fund is supported by the Harold & Arlene Schnitzer CARE Foundation and Linda Hutchins and John Montague. Other individuals and businesses provided additional support.

ISBN 978-0-914435-71-6

THE ROBERT AND MERCEDES
EICHHOLZ FOUNDATION



MOTHER is the Art Gym's 77th publication. It was edited by **Allison Dubinsky**, designed by Adam McIsaac at **Sibley House**, and printed by **Brown Printing** in Portland, Oregon. It is set in Scotch Modern.



ISBN 978-0-914435-71-6

ART GYM *Marylhurst University, Marylhurst, Oregon*

