

TAMARA ZIBNERS



TOP: TAMARA ZIBNERS

'Moonlit Pincher'
Inkjet Collage
9' x 9'

www.zibners.com

Ziquita Riberdy: What is your process for creating an art piece?

Tamara Zibners: I start every piece with a simple photograph, usually taken with my phone. I'll select a photograph because of the tension between the characters - myself and my son - or because of the composition. I then make a loose contour drawing of the photograph in Photoshop, which becomes a line drawing. I fill this line drawing in with color, using the original colors from the photograph as a source, and then crank up the saturation. The result is an image that is recognizable as a domestic snapshot, but is degraded, cartoonish and abstract. Some drawings are finished works, and others I rework into collage pieces of various sizes, each an amalgamation of the myriad of colors and moods that are present in the digital drawings.

I slice up my drawings by following the positive or negative spaces found within the images, or I cut them up based on color. I assemble the cut pieces with matte medium, which functions as a glue and a surface protectant, and as I'm shaping and wetting these large pieces I do feel transported as an artist - suddenly I am a quilter or a baker, - it is no longer "just" paper and glue. These materials now move and fold and ultimately get caressed into their final position.

ZR: What inspired you to create the pieces in "Hold You"?

TZ: When my son was three months old I badly broke my shoulder, landing myself in the emergency room for two days. I couldn't nurse my baby because I was on narcotics. I couldn't hold my baby because I was in too much pain. About a week into this horrific debacle, I took a picture of myself and my child...him sleeping on me, me with my bandages and scar. I realized later that this photograph was a different conversation I was having with my camera and my child. It reflected on our relationship. It also showed my distant vanity, crushed by nurture. Since then, I have turned my camera on us a lot, focusing on the moments that I can touch, hold, and care for my child through physical contact.

I wanted to build a body of work about this fleeting period during early motherhood when my son and I are physically connected. I also wanted all of the sentimentality attached

to mothering, but also the honesty of the day-to-day grind - my relationship to my body being a vessel of milk, or how the constant touching gave me wounds on my body. Most of my work over the years has been loosely autobiographical. I believe I can make the strongest work when it is born from something I know personally. This said, I really want my work to be universally read. I'm not interested in specifically telling the story about me and my son, rather, I want to explore concepts that many parents experience. Additionally, I also don't mind if the concepts within this work ultimately disintegrate in front of the viewer, allowing the viewer to be viscerally affected by the colors and the scale of the work.

ZR: Explain how becoming a mother changed how you work as an artist and your career.

TZ: I wanted to have a child even though I knew it would make my life more difficult. I, like most female artists, thought a lot about the doom bestowed upon the woman artist who becomes a mother, but so far this major life shift has caused me to be more productive in the studio than in recent years past. For one, upon having a child, my husband and I made changes so I didn't end up returning to work as a full-time high school art teacher. As a stay-at-home mom, when my workday is done, I have hardly used any of my adult brain and absolutely crave getting into the studio.



Although I struggle with child care help and often have no choice but to hang with my kid and not be productive, the desire to produce work has only intensified since having my son.

Before I was a parent I continuously had this existential crisis about "what mattered" and "why I was doing the thing I was doing", but now that I'm a mom my ultimate concern in life is my child, and that prior existential suffering has dissipated. Ironically maybe, because so many artist tropes involve the struggling artist laboring with their mental health to produce the best work of their life. And though I certainly struggle with mental health, I also feel free, the dragging weight of "why should I be doing this" is gone. My new "why" is ultimately to be the best version of myself so I can model that for my child. I am at my best when I am creating work, and so if I can keep at it, I know my son will see me as a happy, productive person and hopefully he can translate this guidance into being his own awesome person in the future.

ZR: How has the pandemic changed how you work as an artist?

TZ: The pandemic has changed all of us, in ways I still don't think we fully understand. I keep wondering what cultural shift will happen post-pandemic among all creatives, but we are still inside of it, and I think it is too soon to reflect on what this cultural trauma has done to us.

My practice didn't have to change much - my studio is at home, I continued to have access to all the facilities I needed, and I continued buying materials online which I had been used to since moving to a rural American town.

Probably the most poignant change came within me and is found in the work. I drew pictures and cut and reassembled paper while listening to hours upon hours of news, taking my anxiety out with an X-acto blade, and gaining some semblance of control of the chaos around me by manipulating my artwork.

ZR: Tell me more about the "Roswell Artist in Residence Compound". What impact has it had on your career?

TZ: The Roswell Artist in Residency is a residency program based in Roswell, New Mexico. The artists who are selected for the residency - six a year - have a three-bedroom house, a stipend, a large studio, and access to facilities (a woodshop, metal shop, ceramic studio, printmaking studio and a digital lab) for a whole year. This is a serious artist residency, it is very competitive, and it is awesome.

LEFT: TAMARA ZIBNERS

'Creamsicle Gonna Get You'
Inkjet Collage
9' x 9'

I am not actually on the residency grant. My husband, artist Larry Bob Phillips, was hired as the residency director three years ago, and for this time we've lived on the residency compound as a family. I have been able to stay at home with our son and essentially have all of the benefits of the other artists in residence - a large studio, a house to live in, and access to facilities. I have been able to create a lot of work since we've been here, because of the incredible resources available to me at this residency. It also helps that my neighbors are excellent international artists who inspire me and help me.

ZR: *What artists are inspiring you at the moment?*

TZ: Louise Bourgeois is a guiding light for me right now. Her themes connected to life's most fundamental struggles - birth, death, mothering, our relationships with our parents, our sexuality, our mind, are explored throughout her work in what feels like every medium, hundreds of times. I love her repetition, humor, and confidence as an artist.

The tapestry work by Erin M. Riley (shows with PPOW Gallery, NYC) is absolutely incredible. The vulnerability that she shows in her photographic depictions of herself, dealing with sexuality and self-destruction, all in the intricate process of a woven textile, simply blows my mind. The prolific amount of work she makes always verges into the political, making clear what she stands for, but is also entrenched in her own story and struggles as a human.

Natasha Bowdoin is a former Roswell Artist in Residence (represented by Talley Dunn Gallery, Dallas, TX), who I was able to meet when she came to give a workshop at the local museum in Roswell. She invigorated me to take risks within my practice which has ultimately led to my current body of work. Natasha's absolutely amazing large-scale installations of cut out gardens are immersive -

in the same way that Louise Bourgeois' spiders envelop the viewer. All of her cut paperwork in the past gives me the chills with their intricacy and attention to detail, but her newer work is completely immersive in terms of scale, which I absolutely love. Her work is also happy, at times creepy, but mostly happy, which I want more of, I need more of!

Lastly, I'm really excited about being a part of an artist community or tribe of like-minded people. In my daily life, I am inspired by my friends who are artists, and from these friends, I peripherally learn about artists who inspire me. I yearn to be solidly part of a tribe, not to look at and admire other artists, but ultimately, to share and learn from each other.

RIGHT: TAMARA ZIBNERS

'Suck it Mountain'
Inkjet Collage
9' x 9'

