

COMPARATIVE STUDY

Jenny Saville and Mary Cassatt

by Jessica Russo Scherr

Teacher Example



MARY
CASSATT

The Caress
Oil on canvas
1902

83.4 cm x 69.4 cm



JENNY SAVILE

The Mothers
Oil on Canvas
2011

106 5/16 x 86 5/8



The Reproduction
Drawing IV (after
Leonardo da Vinci
Cartoon) charcoal
2010

FIRST IMPRESSION

The works of both artists display similar subject matter but my reading of each scene varies greatly especially the emotional content.



Chaotic
Raw
Primal



Religious
Maternal
Focused on the children



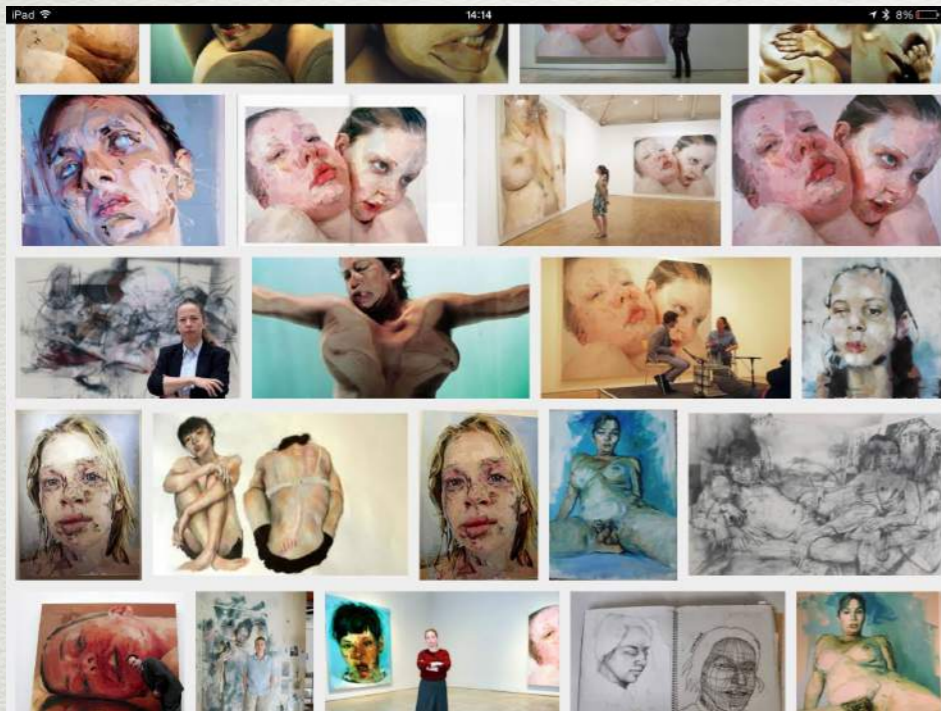
Peaceful
Loving
Idealized

Cultural Context

Saville: Contemporary, young, British, female painter. Supported by her family in her pursuit to study art and become a professional artist. She is a mother.

Subject Matter: large scale depictions of naked women.

Works challenge viewers



Images:google search screen shots

Cassatt: Female, American painter and printmaker. Studies art in the States and Europe. Lived in France

Cassatt was one of seven children, of which two died in infancy. Friends with artists. Never had children.

Main body of work created in the late 1800's

Subject matter: Social and private lives of women.

Part of the Impressionist movement. (her father declared he would rather see his daughter dead than living abroad as a "bohemian"),

Family objected to her being an artist



Mary Cassatt

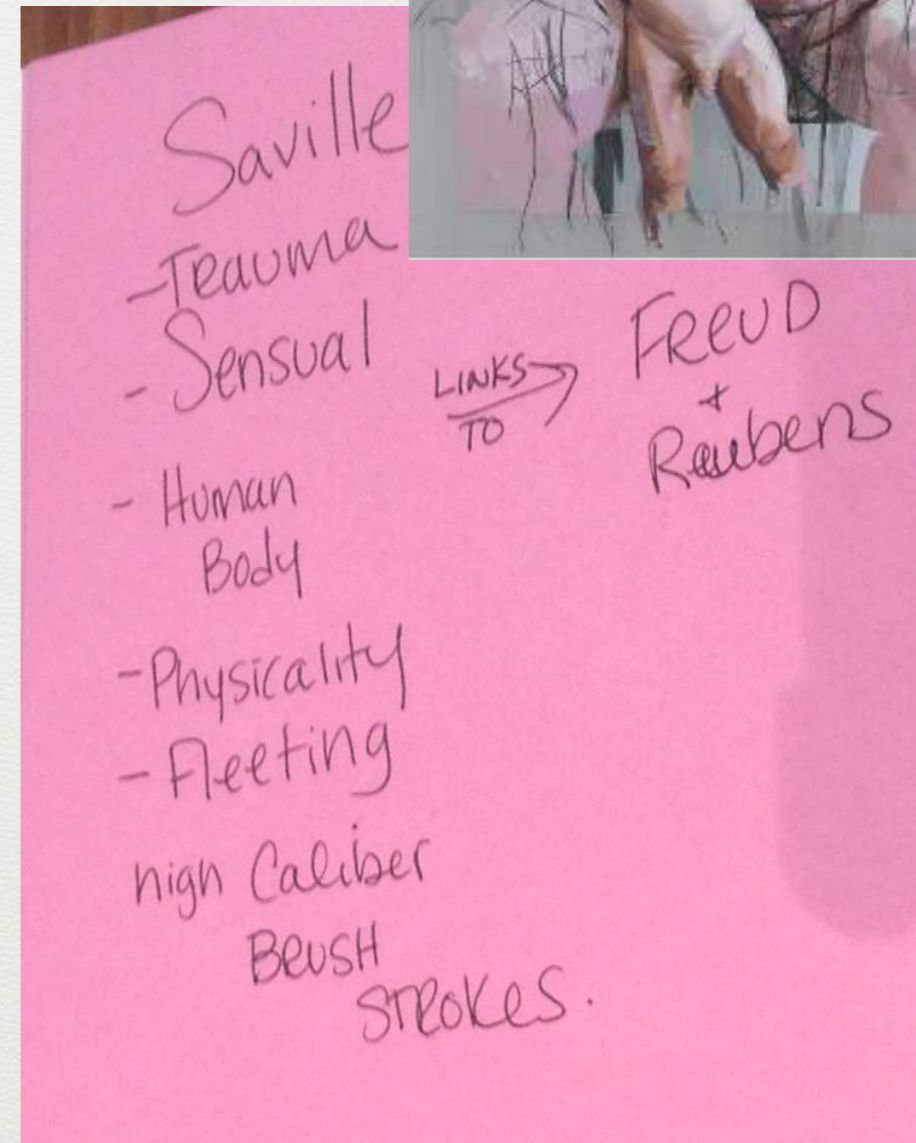
Jenny Saville's Work

The mood is chaotic, raw, primal emotion, maternal without over glorifying the role of the mother or the child.

She paints fleshy figures that fill her canvases. Works are not simply figurative but can be described as "post painterly" in merging abstract and figurative with clumps and drips which form blemishes rather than decoration. Her children are an important part of her new series. (Hudson, The Daily Telegraph)

Saville's had a friend photograph her as she gave birth.

By focusing on details such as the navels and her own pregnant belly she creates links to her children as another generation.



"I like the dirty side of things" Jenny Saville

Cassatt's Work

The majority of her work deals with mother and daughter relationships. There is attention to the caress. There is a tenderness in the works that allow the viewer to glimpse into the private lives of these families.



Mary Cassatt, *Breakfast In Bed*, 1897, oil on canvas, 25 5/8 x 29 in. (65 x 73.6 cm) (Huntington Library, San Marino, California)

Unlike the Madonnas and cherubs of the Renaissance, Cassatt's portraits were unconventional in their direct and honest nature. Commenting in *American Artist*, Gemma Newman noted that "her constant objective was to achieve force, not sweetness; truth, not sentimentality or romance."

Child in the moment.
↙ Mother's gaze is off somewhere else as in "The Caress". Visible brush strokes. Arm forms like a seatbelt. The limbs are very important to the composition. (Harris)



↑ *Mother and Child (The Oval Mirror)*, ca. 1889 Oil on canvas; (81.6 x 65.7 cm)

This painting is often referred to as "The Florentine Madonna" because the pose is reminiscent of a typical Italian Madonna and Child. (Met Museum).

Function and Purpose

What are they? What do they mean?



- Depict everyday life of women.
- Created in France
- Roles of women in the late 1800's in France
- Mother and daughter relationships
- Oil on Canvas
- Late 1800's



- Referencing Italian Renaissance master, Leonardo da Vinci.
- It was painted in England after studying da Vinci's famous cartoon.
- Connecting the artist's childhood connection to an artwork, to religion and to her own role as a mother.
- Charcoal
- Early 2000's



- It was painted in England after the art gave birth and was also pregnant.
- Physicality of motherhood and children.
- Oil on canvas
- Early 2000's

Subject Matter

Mother and Child(ren)

A common theme in art evoking both maternal and religious connections.

"... some artists idealize motherhood while others seem a bit more traumatized" (Huffington Post)

"I had thought about doing mother-and-child images because I have never done anything with children before. I've tried to stay away a little bit, about the issues surrounding biology being determinate and that women are here to have babies. But, it's so powerful and I thought, well, I quite like tackling grand, old subjects. It's a challenge to make a painting with a child that isn't sentimental. It's a real challenge to actually make the sort of physicality of a baby's body, and not be cutesy and Baroque and bubbly; to find a dynamic within the body. Children are quite animalistic and that is difficult to create." Saville (Mother and Children)

REFERENCES TO DA VINCI



da Vinci Virgin and Saint Anne Cartoon
(The Burlington House Cartoon)

1499-1500 charcoal on tinted paper. National Gallery, London



Saville's nod to
DaVinci and
Michelangelo is visible.



daVinci's drawing was a reproduction in Saville's home and constant source of inspiration..

3/4 turned head is similar in all 3 works.

Light and shadow on face's of daVinci's were of particular interest.

Saville's comments on how daVinci's depiction of beauty is from a different time in history. She comments that contemporary beauty is more temporal. (Durante, The Times).

Images of Mother and Child in Art Throughout History

Leonardo da Vinci

Virgin and Saint Anne Cartoon
(The Burlington House Cartoon)
1499-1500 charcoal on tinted
paper. National Gallery, London



A couple examples

Well established male artist living in Italy during the Renaissance.

Subject Matter: The Virgin and Child with St. Anne which was a common theme of the time.

Complex composition. Knees and feet establish strong vertical rhythm. This is similar to the legs in Saville's painting. The lines of the bodies lose clarity as they approach the head's and cause a bit of confusion about whose head belongs to what body.

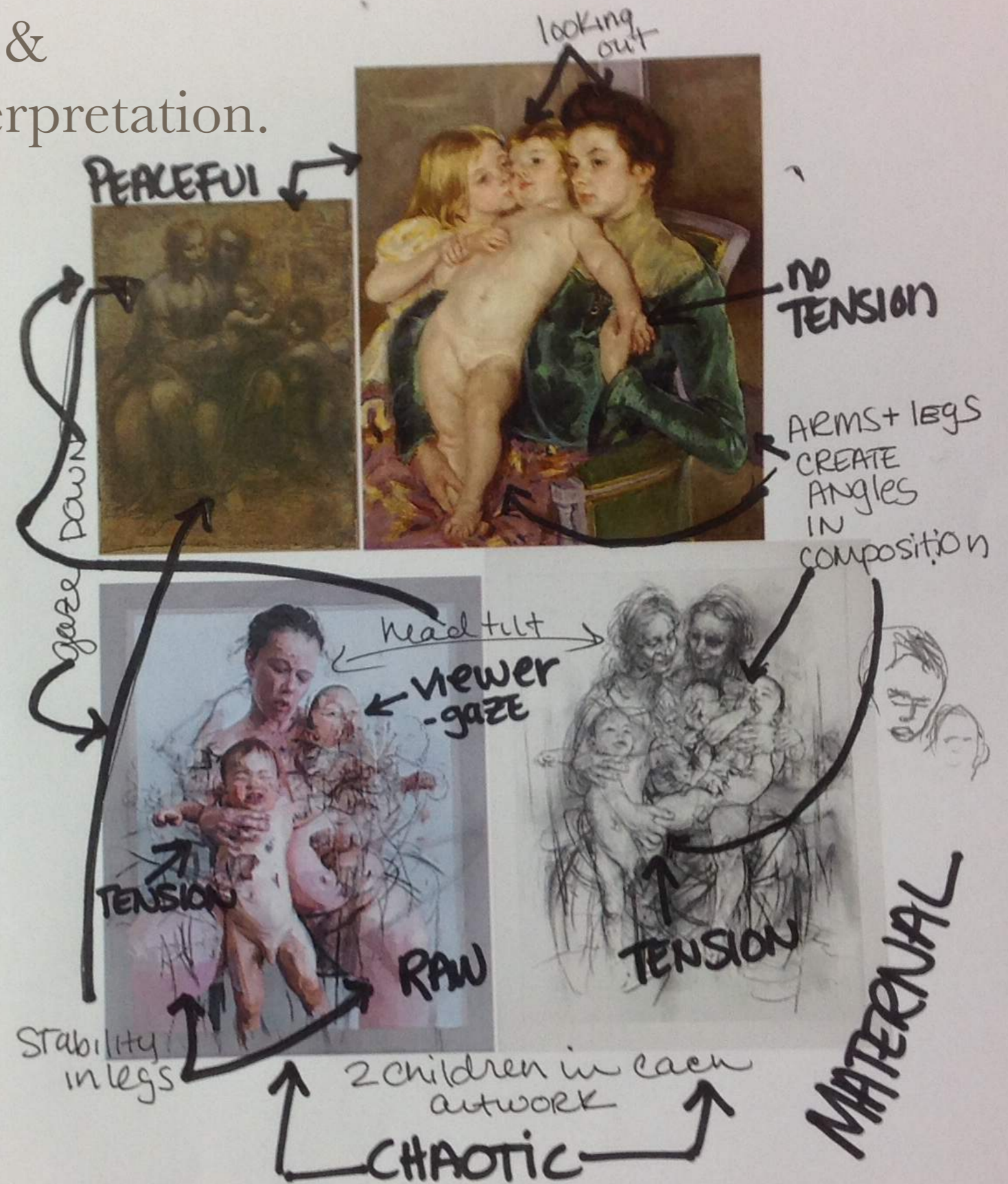
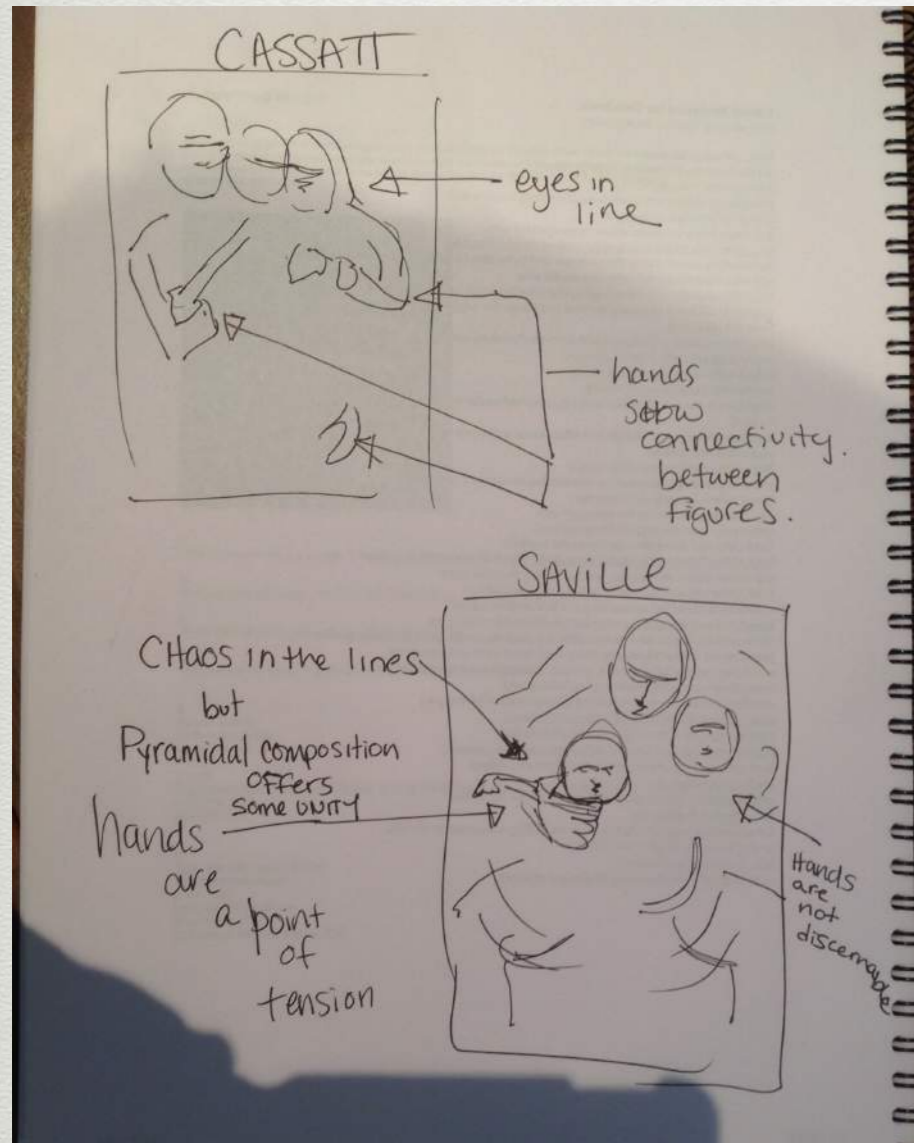


Dorothea Lange: American photographer
"A Destitute Mother: The Type Aided by
the WPA" 1936, Gelatin silver print
(25.5 x 19.6 cm)

The New York Times Collection
Destitute pea pickers in California. Mother
of seven children.

Formal Elements & How they relate to my interpretation.

- Saville: Large scale. Artist used a ladder to paint it.
- Cassatt: Smaller and more intimate



Formal Elements: Connections



Compare and Contrast

Cassatt

Cultural Context

Family did not agree with Cassatt's being an artist. Friends with Degas and Impressionist. American living in Paris.

Function and Purpose:

Depict the everyday private lives of women during Cassatt's time period. MOOD: is calm, sweet and loving.

-sense of tenderness in the connection between the subjects by their hands. The children have a more intimate connection. Her dress is more formal considering the baby is nude. The location appears to be in her home.

Media: Generally resolved imagery through suggestive and visible brushstrokes

Formal Elements:

Complementary colors. Asymmetrical composition is barely discernible. The children's arms create a visual line that allows the viewer's eye move throughout the painting. Shapes are mostly fully realized and representational.

Cultural Context:

Female, Young, Mother
Tounge English, Established artists in a competitive male dominated art culture, in Europe.

Function and Purpose:

Mother with 2 children sitting on a chair. Images of the lives of mothers as they relate to their children. Reminiscent of Italian Renaissance Madonna and Child paintings. Specific to the concept of motherhood at that point in history. The placement of the mother's right hand is key to the mood. The mothers' expression is slightly disconnected to the children. The mother doesn't look directly at the children. The youngest child is nude.

Media: Visible brush strokes/marks
Representational, Local color (mostly)

Formal Elements:

Attention to chairoscuro. Defined light source and rendering to appear 3D in most areas. A range of values depicted. Colors are not overly saturated. Brush strokes give real and simulated texture. Limited special depth in the environment.

Saville

Cultural Context:

She reference daVinic's work in the subject matter and composition as well as in the sketch quality. The role of care taker is still traditionally the mother however there is some more equality in parenting roles than there was during Cassatt's time. The mother's role is not limited to being a mother alone (career and other responsibilities).

Function and Purpose:

This is a self portrait. The scene is stressed and chaotic. The expressions are emotionally charged. The tension in the hands shows protection and a lack of control at the same time. The white non description space should feel serene but comes off as clinical. The mother is connected to the children in a raw and primal way. She is giving all she can to her children but it doesn't seem to be enough. She is covered by them and losing herself in her children. She is sitting in a way that conveys the preparedness to attend to the children. They are her and she is part of them.

Media:

Parts are fully resolved while other parts are sketched

Formal Elements: More symmetrical composition. More visible mark making. Line shows movement and rhythm. Limited palette, bordering on monochromatic. Emphasis on the face of the baby on left and expression of the mother.



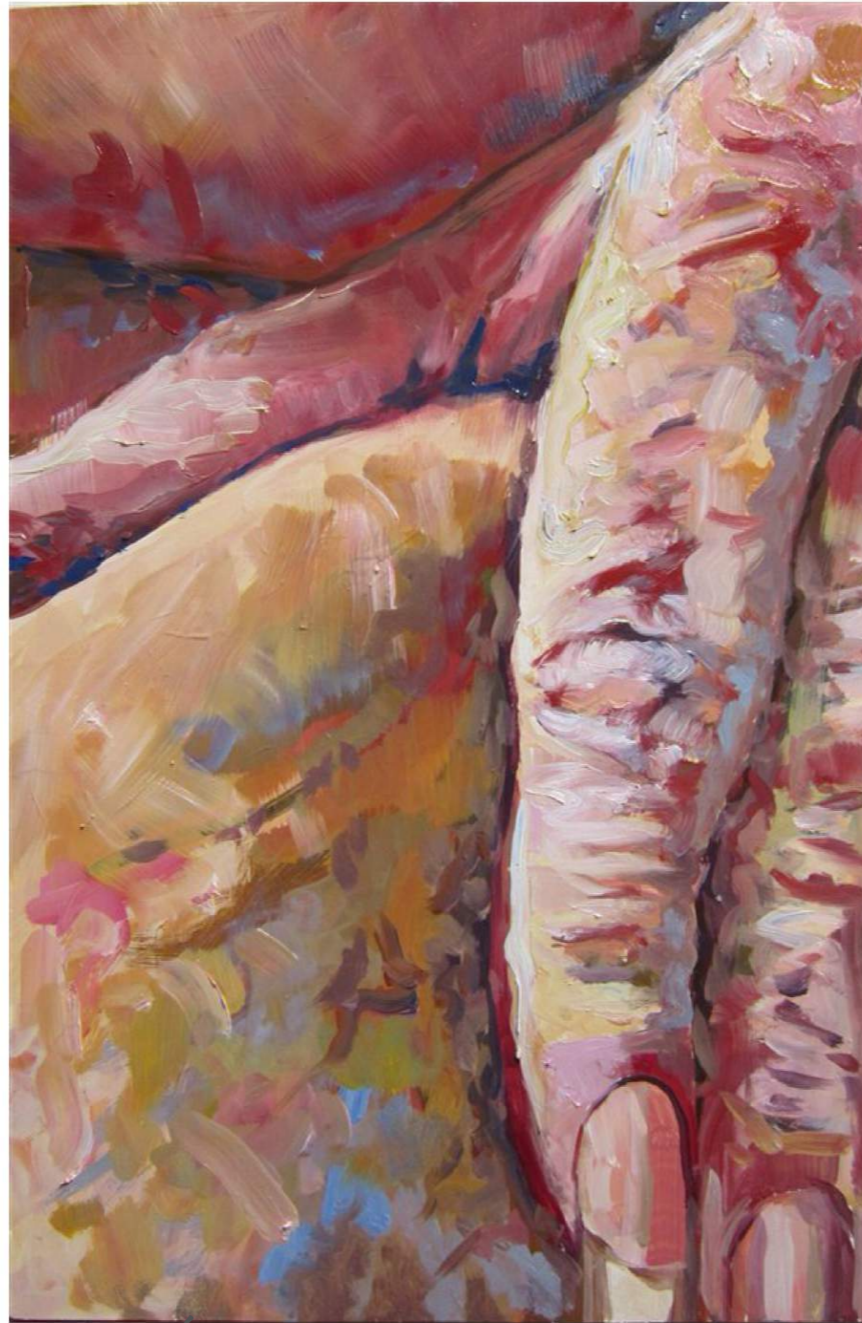
CONNECTIONS TO MY ART

A lot of my art has maternity and motherhood as part of the subject matter. Common themes:.. my relationship to my mother, grandmother, or great grandmother or my transition into becoming a mother.



Images: various works b Jessica Russo Scherr. L to R : Mother (20x30 Oil), Siena (20x30Oil), Nan (50x70 collage), In response to Robyn's Test (30x40 Oil)

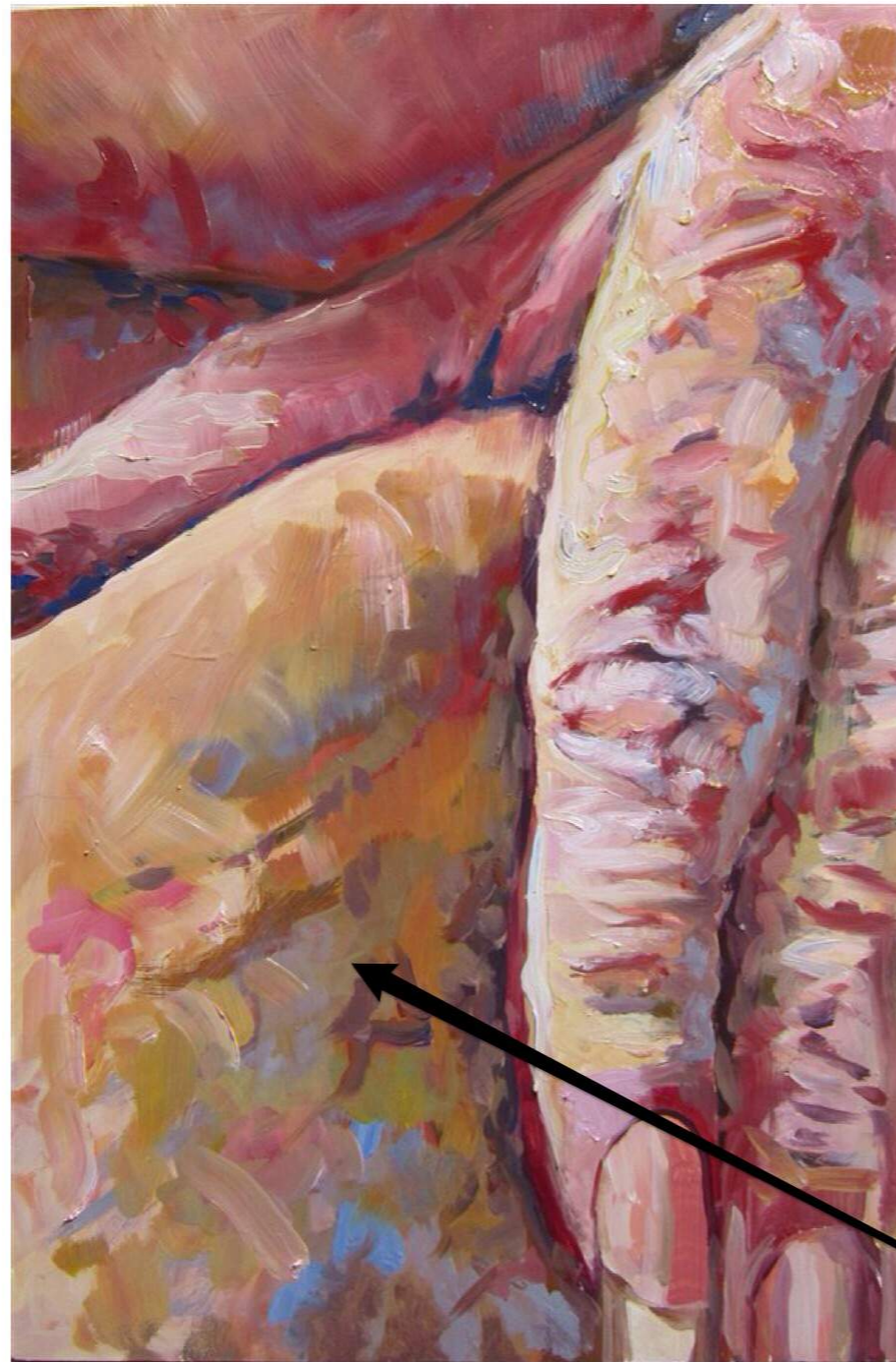
For this comparative study I will focus on my "Recovery Series"



*Recovery Series, Oil on Masonite 20x30 cm
By: Jessica Russo Scherr*

-series of works were created by the artist after becoming a mother. They investigate the physical and emotional relationship to a body when it endures physical transformation and the role of the body/mother has changed to a more primal physical form focused on support of children.

Placement
of hands is
crucial for
subject
matter



Intimate

Visible brush strokes

Subject hints at maternity/motherhood but
it is not overtly identified

Cassatt

Saville

American living in
another country.
From the North East
of the U.S.

Maternal, figurative,
Intimate and private scenes.
Visible paint strokes in oil
(commonality between 2 of the
3 works)
Woman living in Europe.
Around the same age when
paintings were done.
Study art at university.
The hand position is important.

Raw
Not idealized scene
A mother

Close up
No facial expressions
No children in this series but there
are children in others.

Me

Citations

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