

Jennifer Bailey
*Will I Make a Good Father,
Mother, Sister?*

09.07.16 – 04.09.16

Will I Make a Good Father, Mother, Sister? is a new exhibition by Glasgow based artist Jennifer Bailey, developed as part of Satellites Programme 2016 and presented during Edinburgh Art Festival.

Jennifer's practice explores and questions the permeability of art production to patriarchal structures, desire, capital and paid work. Often revealing the conditions of its making, her work investigates the visual codes that constitute authenticity. Departing from an interest in the productive body at work, the exhibition includes a new wall drawing, a series of ceramic sculptures and a photographic work.

Jennifer's relationship to paid and unpaid work as a flexible, cultural worker forms an important thread within the exhibition. The wall drawing, *Will I Make a Good Father, Mother, Sister?*, rendered with paint and using the artist's own body as a stamp, recalls flow charts used to represent a thought process or system, but also a graphic representation of a spell or ritual action. At once tethered to the language of work – to training days in which simple diagrams are used to aid workers to perform more efficiently – it also points towards a flexible body, an implication of being stretched in all directions. Exhibited alongside the wall drawing are ceramics titled *B1* (edition of 24) – flat tablets embellished with ladder rung-like forms. This tonal shift in the exhibition invites us to look closely at the materiality of clay and the traces of touch in the hand-sized forms.

The title of the exhibition – *Will I Make a*

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Good Father, Mother, Sister? – resounds as a personal, even confessional question and, for Jennifer, 'implies a subject that is in development, or in the midst of a process of becoming'. As she frequently takes her family as a participant or subject, the title is also suggestive of this familial context and the production of gender roles within a family unit. Sarah, Jennifer's sister, is a reoccurring figure in her work and in *Will I Make a Good Father, Mother, Sister?* she is cast as an indeterminate corporate worker – the smiling subject of a glossy head shot.

Jennifer Bailey received an MFA from Glasgow School of Art in 2013. Recent exhibitions include: *A brief history of girliness*, Space in Between, London, 2016; *Flats*, Intermedia, CCA, Glasgow, 2015; *That's Genetic*, 16 Nicholson St, Glasgow, 2015; *Mood is Made / Temperature is Taken*, Glasgow Sculpture Studios, 2014; *Display*, Flip Project Space, Bari, 2014; *Sarah*, Space in Between, London, 2014; *Marbled Reams* (edition), 2013; *Quantum Leap*, Embassy, Edinburgh and Malmö Konsthall, Malmö, 2013 and Bloomberg New Contemporaries, Liverpool Biennial and Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, 2012. Jennifer will take part in the Autumn residency in Hospitalfield, Arbroath in September 2016.



Being outside and within, hidden and present Anastasia Philimonos

A lilac schematic female body is painted directly on the wall in a precise and trim manner. Its torso is an elongated circular form and its limbs are straight lines, which diagonally pierce the torso ending in the prints of artist Jennifer Bailey's hands and feet. This diagrammatic body is pulled (and, hypothetically, is there to be pulled more and more) to conform to the dimensions of a wall – for that matter, the latter alludes to an unavoidable fixation with a rigid, pre-described *way of being*, in which the former appears to be *flexible*.

Gendered by the colour, the diagrammatic body speaks for what is commonly known as the *feminised* labouring subject of post-Fordism¹. Feminised partially because the contemporary worker experiences the blurring of the line between work and non-work, a distortion long omnipotent in women's lives. One aspect of the processes of feminisation related to, and explored by, *Will I Make a Good Father, Mother, Sister?* is that women often hold a waged (secondary) position that would allow them to perform their unwaged domestic labour; analogously, artists (being flexible enough) often undertake more than one job to support their underpaid or unpaid artwork².

Artists can exemplify the flexible subject since their working habits – which are in a persistent precarious oscillation – are now hegemonic to broader labour conditions. Falling into the ideology of 'being exceptional', their (art) labour fosters precarity and often comes with the (romanticised) mythology of the creator who willingly sacrifices (and could also work for free because she is doing something 'exceptional').³ Flexibility is essential for succeeding in the (art) market as organised within advanced capitalism. As Marxist philosopher Paolo Virno put it, the subjects are "[...] being constantly confronted with a phantasmagoric ensemble of

simultaneous opportunities, to be negotiated with flexibility".⁴ This 'phantasmagoria' grounds the artist in the ideology of the possible. Namely, it is both likely and unlikely to find an (artistic) job.⁵ Therefore, she would cut across the world to find a job, move to find a fixed-term internship and move again to take up appointment at a residency, then send a few of her works to an exhibition. Naturally, those (artistic) occupations would be intermittent, would not come in a harmonious succession. Hence, the artist, to *enable her artwork* (and secure her reproduction), would seek another position, (ideally part-time) – to secure time for the production of her artwork.⁶

To underline the intersection between paid work and (sometimes) unpaid or underpaid art-work, *Will I Make a Good Father, Mother, Sister?* evokes office-environments: the drawing references mind-maps used by workers to increase productivity; the simple circle of the torso and lines of the limbs suggest shapes found on office-papers, whereas the X configuration – formed by the crossing of the hand-and-leg-lines in the middle of the elongated circle – points to the backgrounds of graphic-design software very often used by admin-workers. Furthermore, hung on different walls of the gallery, four white ceramics, each of them combines two distinctive and opposed parts: a base, which looks like a replica of what might be an electronic hand-device and straps that have on their surface the prints of the artist's fingers and nails; the base-device supports the straps shaped by the artistic, individualised sensitivity.

Additionally, a glossy, colourful photograph depicting a (professional) woman reservedly smiling, with her hands loosely crossed, resembles photographs of employees published on corporate websites or brochures. In this

instance, the artist, instead of creating an idiosyncratic photographic portraiture, appropriated the aesthetics of corporations to further emphasise the dependence of her artwork on the structures that support it. The knowledge that the portrayed woman is the artist's sister once again underpins the parallel between unpaid domestic labour and unpaid art-work by commenting on the entanglement between women and the home, and more particularly between women artists and the home.

Will I Make a Good Father, Mother, Sister? grounds our attention on the conditions of its making by disclosing them through its very form. The displayed artworks deplore these conditions by revealing the subject of art production – the body – to be uncannily stretched. The ceramics, by bearing on the surface the fingerprints of the artist – the artist's hand – contradict the office-aesthetics to expose, through their (aesthetic) clash, art as the result of the dialectical tensions between artists' desire to transgress socio-economic structures and their unavoidable confinement within them. In light of this, art is simultaneously outside and within hegemonic economic structures; and the social relations allowing its creation, albeit being often pedantically hidden, are always present.

Endnotes

1. Whereas a Fordist economy is based on the production taking place at the assembly-line of the factory, during which labour is orientated towards a defined result, a post-Fordist economy predominantly depends on the immaterial commodity (affective and intellectual labour). Post-Fordism, whilst bringing into the centre of economic development the so-called creative professions and the alleged liberation they promise, it also amplified and diffused the insecurity that characterises those professions. In this light, insecurity and absence of regulation, familiar to the intellectual labouring subjects, became the working reality of a significant part of the workforce. Simply put, post-Fordism is characterised by the expansion of the freelance market, long and malleable

working hours, the blurring of the distinction between leisure and production time, intermittent jobs and the obligation of holding more than one job to secure one's reproduction. For a thorough discussion about the contradictions within 'liberated' professions see Andrew Ross, *Nice Work if you Can Get it: Life and Labour in Precarious Times* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2009).

2. For a succinct discussion on this topic see Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd, 'Introduction: "The Last Instance" – The Apparent Economy, Social Struggles and Art in Global Capitalism' in Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd (eds.) *Economy: Art Production and the Subject in the 21st Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), pp. 1–30, pp. 18–21.

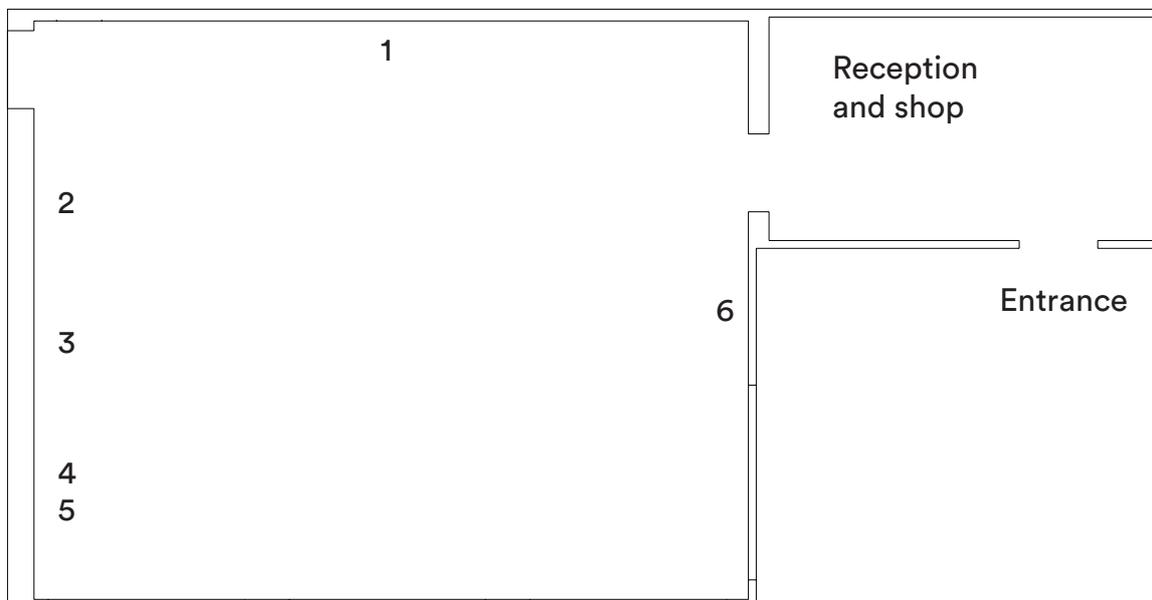
3. Sociologist and philosopher, Maurizio Lazzarato, pondered away the discontents of 'exceptionality' commenting on how the so-called 'exceptional flexibility' of the artistic subject is falsely used to justify a resulting exceptional insecurity. Maurizio Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014), pp. 150–153.

4. Phantasmagoria is a form of theatre during which frightening images are projected with the help of a lantern. The use of the word phantasmagoria has a particular significance, it implies something ostensibly positive that could be, however, deeply disturbing. Paolo Virno, 'Post-Fordist Semblance', *SubStance*, #112, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2007), pp. 42–46, p. 45.

5. Virno refers to the ideology of the possible to describe a set of beliefs that naturalise the uncertainty in which the (artistic) subject operates. This ideology sustains, and is sustained by, the promotion of self-actualisation, which, supposedly, entails the acceptance of self-responsibility. Ibid.

6. For an analysis specifically about the precariousness of artistic labour see Alberto López Cuenca, 'Artistic Labour, Enclosure and the New Economy', *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, #30 (Summer 2012), pp. 4–13.

Anastasia Philimonos lives and works in Edinburgh. She has a background in art history and recently graduated from MSc Modern and Contemporary Art: History, Curating, Criticism at The University of Edinburgh; and Art History and Theory at The Athens School of Fine Arts. Anastasia is an Associate Producer at Collective and has been commissioned to develop texts for each of the solo presentations as part of Satellites Programme 2016.



1. *Will I Make a Good Father, Mother, Sister?*, emulsion paint, 2016.

2. *Bagged Sister*, c-type print, 2016.

3. *B1* (15 of 24), ceramic, 2016.

4. *B1* (9 of 24), ceramic, 2016.

5. *B1* (7 of 24), ceramic, 2016.

6. *B1* (20 of 24), ceramic, 2016.

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Will I Make a Good Father, Mother, Sister? is part of Satellites Programme, Collective's development programme for emergent artists based in Scotland. Satellites Programme 2016 includes three solo presentations by selected artists Mark Bleakley, Jennifer Bailey and Hamish Young and two projects by Associate Producers Anastasia Philimonos and Katie Schwab. The programme is specifically developed to facilitate artists at this pivotal point in their career through peer review, professional development, mentoring, exhibitions and events.

Collective is a contemporary visual arts organisation that brings people together around the production and presentation of new work.

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