

Home of the Brave: Karike Ashworth

Karike Ashworth is an over-sharer. Well, in relation to her work she is. She wants to tell you all about her intensely personal experiences, and she wants you to feel uncomfortable; she aims to produce social discomfort as a strategy for critique. Karike wants to break the silence and prod you to question why her subjectivity-come-collectivity makes you feel uncomfortable, and stay with this question, at least for a moment.

In Karike's recent experience of being a woman¹ in this world she moved quickly from the position of not wanting to procreate to one of reeling from the disappointment of broken IVF promises; from autonomous being to a failed baby-making-machine. Karike wants you to know without a shadow of a doubt that whilst we have come a long way as a society, women are still told, and many believe, that they are not whole without children. And if they are not 'naturally' able, women should do everything in their power, spend everything in their bank account (or further afield), to make this 'dream' a reality. With only a small chance of successfully conceiving as a result of In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) technology, women are expected to lay it all on the line.

The works in this exhibition come together with the intention of reminding you of the narratives and myths that continue to circulate in our society. Those specifically aimed at women, propagating age-old structures of gender-related roles that lead to unrealistic expectations and the subsequent pressure to *be* in this world in a particular way. Karike acknowledges that having children is not a universal desire. It wasn't even hers! Until it was. Many people of all genders have no desire to procreate. But in a society that privileges parenthood over autonomy, makes choices based on 'the children' and their future rather than those who are experiencing the world right now, and capitalises on the broken dreams of people of all genders, there is much room to highlight the pressures that are placed on people and the capital that is gained from these same people's feelings.

The theme of this exhibition, with its focus on gender and collectivity is not without its issues. The essentialism and privilege involved in conversations such as these is certainly problematic and in some ways continues to cultivate the binaries that perpetuate gendered experiences in this world. We as viewers must question who these works are for, and about. However, as we well know, the personal is very much still political in these times, and there is nothing like finding a community of your peers in which to find solace and strength. This investigation into IVF is but the first iteration of what is an intensely private-made-public event in Karike's life, and with the amount of work already produced, it is ripe for further exploration.

- Courtney Coombs

¹ Please note that when I am using the term woman and/or women, I am speaking specifically about a cis woman as per Karike's subjective experience of the world.