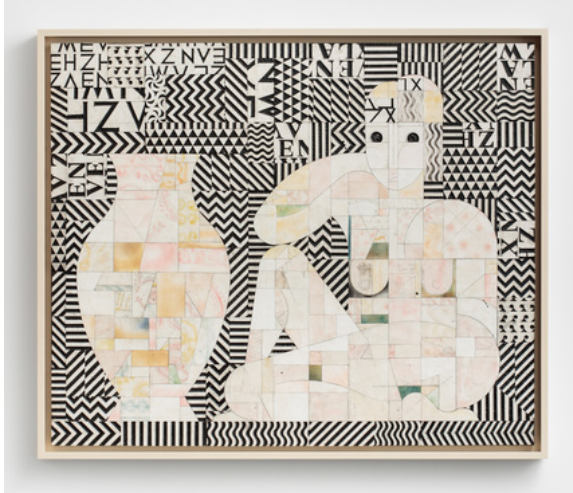


ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICK



Ruby Sky Stiler

Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

327 Broome Street

September 6 - October 7

Feminists have made a project of decoupling womanhood from motherhood, even going so far as to denaturalize it. This impulse informs groundbreaking bodies of work, such as Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*, 1973–79, a conceptual piece that records the parent-child relationship through various means,

such as diary entries and stained diapers. But there are fewer examples of how paternity might be reimagined—even celebrated—through this lens.

In “Fathers,” Ruby Sky Stiler applies her syncretic method to depicting the intimacies of fatherhood. Her reliefs, grids of painted foamcore panels, make history’s symbolic patchwork of references into a tangible object. Her style draws from the compositional techniques of antiquity. Here, she turns to the history of father-and-child portraits. One of her references—in fact, one of the few examples in art history—is Mary Cassatt's 1884 painting of her brother and nephew, *Portrait of Alexander J. Cassatt and His Son, Robert Kelso Cassatt*. As the father reads, the son perches on the arm of his patterned chair, slinging a hand around his neck. The Philadelphia Museum of Art added the metadata tag of “conjoined twin” to the painting’s collection entry, nodding to the way that the figures’ dark clothes seem to blend together.

Stiler’s *Father and Child* (all works 2018) reimagines the proximity of the two protagonists. In this relief, the child sits in the crook of the father’s elbow. They gaze at a vase on which Stiler has sketched line drawings of athletic men. Women appear in Stiler’s reliefs, too, but alone, in contemplation of similar objects. On some works, such as *Seated Woman (Facing Right)*, Stiler’s casual pencil notes appear on the figure’s torso, registering the (female) maker’s hand. We might imagine Stiler’s practice as part of a future archaeology, in which a more advanced society—one less terrorized by the gender binary—searches for a new lineage.

— Wendy Vogel