



BEATING
THE BOUNDS
EMILIE
TAYLOR

BOSSE
& BAUM 10 November 2018–19 January 2019

...strange bodies are produced through tactile encounters with other bodies: differences are not marked on the stranger's body, but come to materialise in the relationship of touch between bodies.
(Ahmed 2000, 15)

...maternal subjectivity presents us with particular philosophical and ontological conundrums, not only in terms of the pregnant and lactating body that is both singular and multiple, disturbing notions of unity and the bounded self, but also because maternity is an experience that I maintain is impossible to anticipate in advance, one that unravels as it proceeds, and that one is always chasing the tail of, never become expert at, or even competent, and that always alludes our attempts to fully understand it. It involves relations with a particular and peculiar other whose rate of change is devastatingly rapid, who is always, by definition, "developing", shifting, changing, and yet it is another to whom one is "linked" in an equally particular and peculiar way...

(Baraitser, 2008, 22-23)

Beating the Bounds is a tale of two halves. Or at least that's what it seems on the face of it. The long imposing torsos elevated on plinths mark familiar territory, but are at once darker and messier. The messiness of the work, the looseness, speaks to a central theme – the emergent maternal subject – as the work constitutes something of an artworking-through the viscosity of this maternal becoming, this transformation.

These imposing, embellished pots on plinths, constitute the first half, sharing familiar features with Taylor's previous clay works. Inspired by ancient forms, these larger forms, more like slabs than pots, are altogether human body-like. Body images are present on the pots too; bleached human-female bodies carved into the clay, suspended and contorted as they pose questions: which body? whose body? the maternal body? These body images are awkward and distressed in their free-falling state calling forth (or calling out) a subject in crisis.

The large pots give way to something of a departure: two boulders. They share elements of previous works and with the pots with which they share gallery space. They are clay works with decorative images, shimmering 9ct gold leaf, a lighter but still earthy palette, English slipware, mud rich with iron, telling gently political stories of otherness located in a western, postindustrial urban-scape. But these are boulders, not pots. Large solid dome forms, more abstract and sculptural. These new objects also speak more directly of a practice that has become concerned with exploring a different, more nuanced and personal politics, a productive collision perhaps, or a generative interaction of the private and public, the personal and political, between the institution and the experience of the maternal – towards (m)otherness.

These boulders can be seen to function as monuments to an artist working through, and with, new maternal experience – with the materials. The suspended images are of a new mother and older woman, as they embrace and hold one another. Carrying and bearing witness, sharing *jouissance*.

What is created are vital objects; places where voice, experience and knowledge are as much material as the clay, iron and gold. In the process of making and assembling, working with and through representation, Taylor creates a diegetic space and the narrativisation of space – emanating from, and through, the materials.

These assertive pots and boulders that create and claim space – public space, gallery space – are inspired by the Kudduru used by the Kassites of Ancient Mesopotamia. With the Akkadian meaning of 'frontier' or 'boundary', Kudduru's were stone blocks or slabs functioning as documents of land grants with their mostly image-based engravings holding the clauses of the contract. Here the forms are vessels as well as boulders. The Kudduru starting point is evident in the large torso pots, with their references to re-claiming land by free-falling feminine forms. With the boulders, the Kudduru might still be the muse, but these are different objects, solid and grounded, they are transformed as something beyond boundaries to become thresholds; vibrant forms with shapes and stories that seek to undermine their own borderlines. For if carrying children tells us anything, it is that bodies are not discreet and bounded objects. Bodies can change, and change with others – they are bundles of affects that shake and quiver, that are fluid and changing with each new encounter.

And what of the material and the maternal? Taylor's use of clay (in the context of these body pots and boulders that explore something of the emergent maternal subject) is important. The clay put to work generates something of the significance of the (maternal) stuff that exists before, outside or alongside (patriarchal) language. Clay is the material of the earth, primordial, accessible, everyday, tactile. It is also malleable and transformational. With clay, Taylor starts to open a Pandora's box into the world of feminine-maternal difference. The maternal subject is a contested site for artist-women to explore. Here the maternal is storied through the experience of the artist-mother, as she moves from contorted images of m(o)therness towards togetherness and difference, as she reclaims the city as well as herself. The situatedness present in this work allows it to transverse several possible maternal voices, that take place through time and space, partially taking on the matrilineage of other artist-mothers. The maternal is thus represented in the work as well as imbuing it with maternal affect – as such, it functions as a contest to maternal (phallogocentric) silencing and instead gives voice to the maternal-feminine.

– Dr Paula McCloskey

Ahmed, S. 2000, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality*.

Baraitser, L. 2008, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption*.