

# MOTHERHOOD – NO MOTHERHOOD

DELFINE FERRÉ & MARIE-HÉLÈNE LE NY



PHOTOGRAPH  
INSTALLATION  
& PAPER CUTS

# MOTHERHOOD – NO MOTHERHOOD

**Whether women are mothers or not,** motherhood is the cornerstone of a gender-based social organization. The representation of maternity remains marginal for centuries, as women have no place in these times as artists. Today, advertising and medical extension offer approaches to (non)motherhood that are most often watered down and consensual, far from the feelings of women and the many situations encountered, which range from fear to ecstasy. We have chosen to explore this subject through visual proposals - drawings, installations, photographs, texts... to compose a polyphonic and polysemic story that everyone is invited to discover and appropriate.

*The conception of becoming a mother as a state close to the firmament acquired in the moment, by instinct, is to be fought (...) for ourselves, in ourselves.(...)*

*No child will be born alive and healthy physically and psychically if it has not been carried by our humanity.*

*"Dans l'intime des mères", Sophie Marinopoulos*

**Delfine Ferré** - Graduated in Arts from the University of Paris 1 - Panthéon Sorbonne.

Drawing, lace and installations hold a very important place in her works made of polyethylene sheets chiseled with a cutter. In this exhibition, series elaborated over 10 years question women's feelings from motherhood and question the place of women in our society. Drawings, lace, collages and objects resonate with Marie-Hélène Le Ny's research.

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**Marie-Hélène Le Ny** -

*Graduated of the Art school of Rouen.*

Photography is her favourite tool -

often associated with polyptychs, texts or voices and sometimes objects.

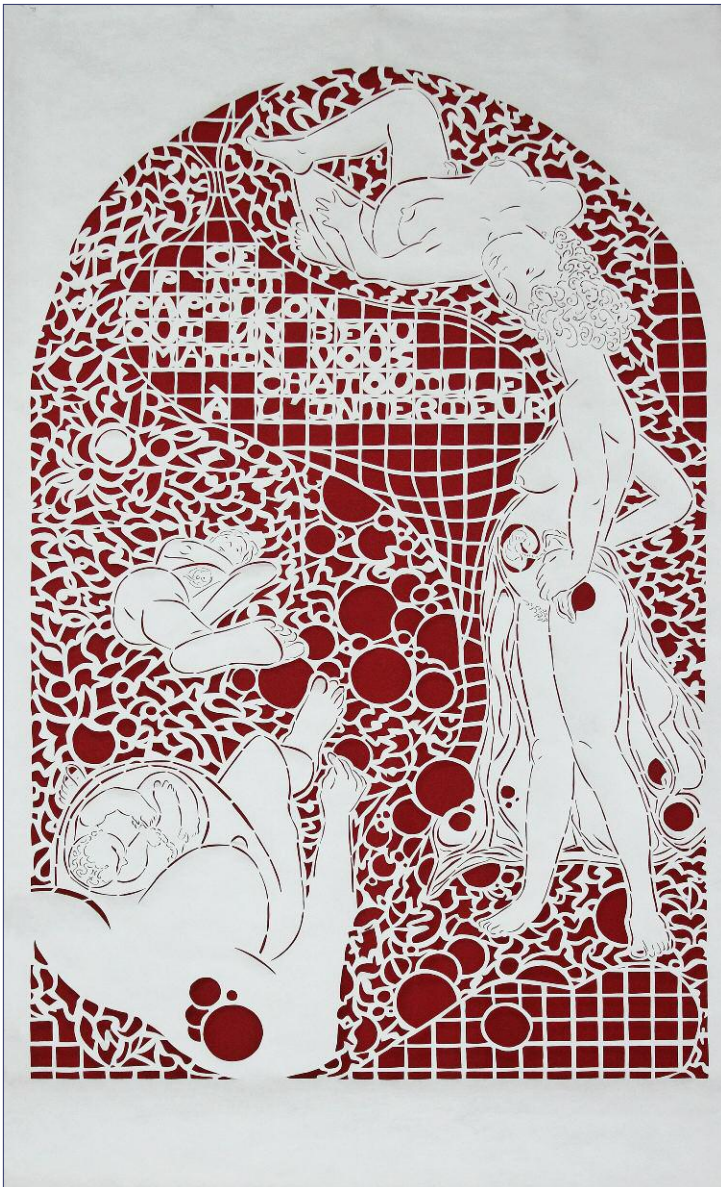
Marie-Hélène Le Ny questions the fate and image of women in the contemporary world for more than ten years - in particular with the series *One is not born woman, one becomes it...* and *Infinities Plurielles* which gives the floor to 186 women scientists. She began in 2012 a work on non maternity - chosen or suffered - and the different ways that women have to experience it today. The issues related to memory and transmission are at the heart of most of her research.

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# DELFINE FERRÉ

# MOTHERHOOD

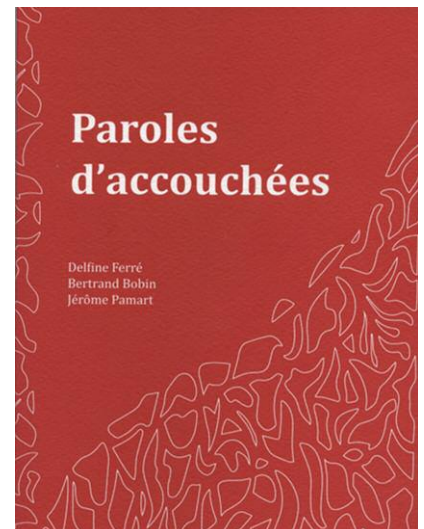


## Conception, Pregnancy, Childbirth

2012

3 sheets of polyethylene cut with cutter  
230 x 153 cm

These three cut-outs with 6 hands were created for the show "Words of the delivered" composed by the trio of the collective **n'Être**, based on funny, staggered and poetic testimonies related to the birth. The whole is included in the eponyme book.



## Paroles d'accouchées

2019

book with 300 copies, printing lycée André Malraux, Montereau-fault-Yonne



## Oh, Sainte Marguerite

Series of 9 photographs printed on grain paper  
12 x 12 cm

The black and white photographs in the series **Oh, Sainte Marguerite** are composed of a set of drawings by Sainte-Marguerite, the patron of childbirth, projected on the rounded body of a woman a week before her term. The granular appearance of the paper used for the photographs evokes the grain of the skin. The choice of a small format for these very tight frames calls for intimacy. Between shadow and light, between fear and joy, birth keeps its part of mystery.

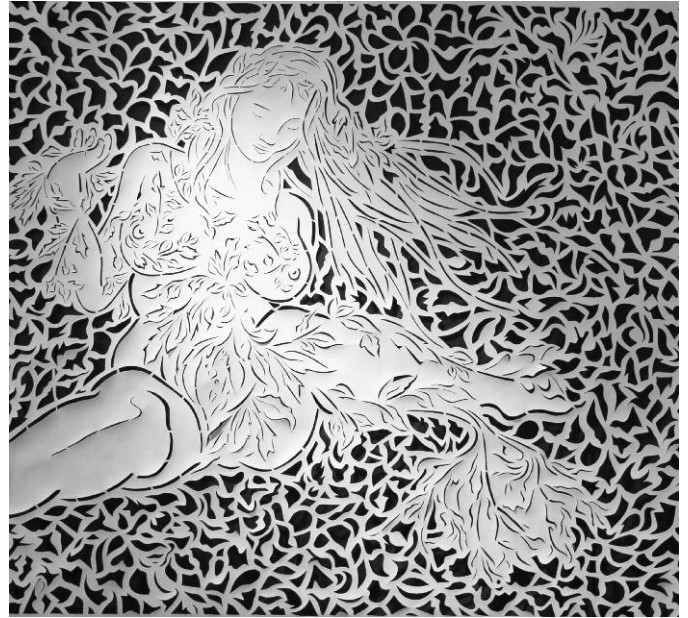


## Sheela-Na-Gig or Mother Nature

2014

Sheets of polyethylene cut with cutter,  
150 x 140 cm

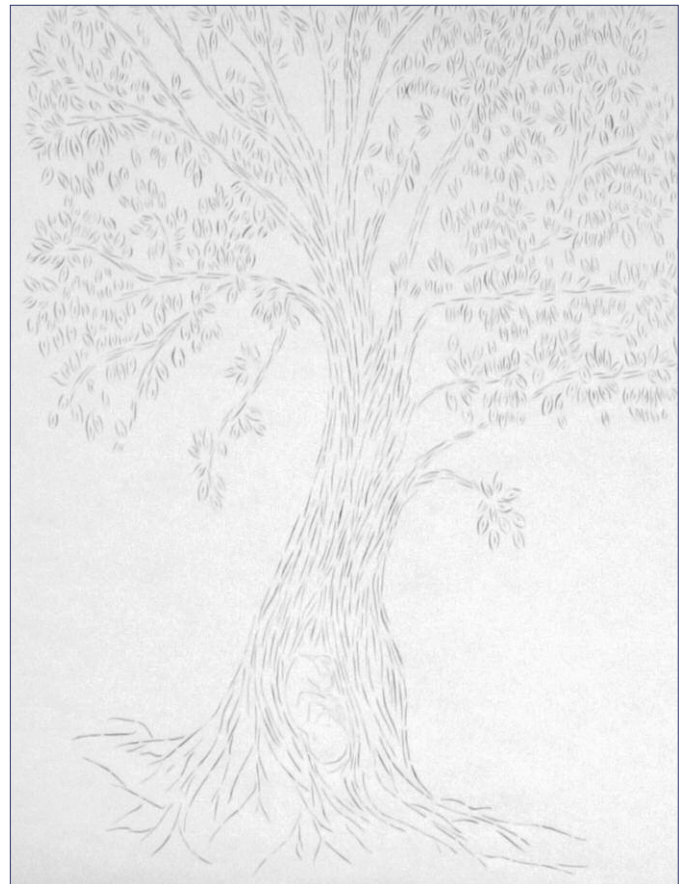
**Sheela-Na-Gig** is an allegorical and anthropomorphic representation of Nature. Images of women depicting our Earth and Mother Nature have been present in many cultures since prehistory with goddesses and other fertility fetishes like Sheela-Na-Gig. In the form of lace, this Mother Nature leaves her clothes grotesques for more generous forms and harmonious dressed in plants. Linked to a placenta, it takes root in our world.



## Flowers of Life

2019

Needle drawing on scratch card  
24 x 24 cm



## Tree Mother (detail)

>

2019

Sheet of polyethylene cut with cutter,  
230 x 153 cm

## < Tree of life

2019

Paper cut with cutter,  
21 x 21 cm



## NO MOTHERHOOD



## MARIE-HÉLÈNE LE NY

Initiated in 2012, this series focuses on the plight of women who have no children - whether chosen or sustained. Considered as a woman's affair - more or less mysterious and repugnant as regards pregnancy and breastfeeding - motherhood has been very little represented in art for centuries, except in Christian religious iconography and her Madonna - virgin with child or Mater dolorosa. Maternity remains a social norm relatively little questioned by the artists. After centuries of discrimination against nullipars considered to be failed, useless or incomplete women, I have examined the way in which this situation was experienced in our time, not so tolerant as to seem to face women who don't have children...

### **Role-model 1 & 2,**

photographs printed on canva, size 210 x 112 cm



In 2012, when I was invited - with four more artists - to occupy the Crépy-en-Valois museum, where religious statues were displayed, I first questioned the evolution of the identification models offered to girls. In the West, centuries during the dominant model for women was a model of an oblation mother with unlimited dedication. The choice was reduced compared to those offered to men, always invited to be valiant, curious, fearless or generous. Only Joan of Arc walked in their footsteps but she was driven to the stake for wearing man's clothes!

In the 1960s, the nursery was gradually replaced by a model of woman made attractive by the consumption of all the products supposed to make women more desirable in the eyes of men: cosmetics, clothing and other ornaments, regimes and cosmetic surgery.

Motherhood remains a biological destiny and mothers who work outside the home are often penalized in their career and salary development, while those who devote themselves to their home are often scorned. The productive economy needs new consumers to develop its markets but most countries are reluctant to surround mothers with the necessary attention and care. Too many of them are still dying to give birth. To avoid failure or rebellion on their part, women's access to contraception and abortion is often restricted. The men who write the laws are almost never worried about unwanted pregnancies, regardless of the consequences.

It is for all these reasons that I listen to the words of childless women while exploring the different ways of non-maternity, which range from contraception to infanticide through abortion, sterility or even the abandonment...

### **Role-model**

dolls on wooden base, size 30 x 25 x 6 cm  
*dedicated to young dead models*





## **In order to preserve and transmit the memory of the sensitive experiences of women,**

we imagined this exhibition which combines words of recent mother with the testimonies of nullipares. Motherhood and non motherhood are the two sides of the same fabric, which are arranged in a subtle way, according to a parentality that is not self-evident on the physical, psychological as well as psychic dimension. Choose to become mother or not, taking responsibility for bringing a child into the world or not are rarely choices questioned until the recent advent of reliable means of contraception. For most women, their destiny was to become a mother in their lifetime. In fact, in Christian civilizations, women had two respectable models: oblation mother or sacrificial virgin. If the role models proposed to girls today are more built on the learning of seduction than on that of motherhood, they are nevertheless a summons to exist only through physical appearance – often to the detriment of the intellect and emancipation - and of course always under “the male gaze”.

**Drawing many threads of this fabric, we made images of** what remains most often hidden in the folds of intimate memory. Taboos concerning women’s bodies remain perennial and incite them to silence. We resonate with different points of view that invite us to explore, experience and understand what is being played out and forged in these experiences, both personal and social. They involve the biological - which until the new techniques of medically assisted procreation was assimilated to the “natural”. They also affect the symbolic and the psychic who sometimes conflict and/or disagree.

**If at the dawn of humanity the ability of women to provide offspring to the human race** has probably earned them a form of devotion, motherhood has been more recently – and especially after the French Revolution - the pretext of their confinement to the home and their assignment to domestic tasks related to the survival of the family and the group.

This hierarchy has been consolidated by often passing through a devaluation of the female body to which have been lent all vices and all defects, by instituting its inferiority, its debility and its weakness in regard to a male body seen as the reference model. In fact, many religious texts, the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and even modern medicine rely on ancestral prejudices to “justify” the physical inferiority of women and instrumentalizing their bodies which remain the

main tool and stake of male supremacy. Women’s bodies are brought back to a state of nature, procreative and binding, that of men conferring on them the freedom of the mind (metaphysics and culture) or even the “creative genius”.

The female body and its fluids (periods, placenta...) are still and often considered as repulsive or even disgusting while male sperm is valued.

Pregnancy has been little represented by different cultures for millennia. Resulting from a sexual act it was considered with more or less ambivalence according to the times. His “product” (the child) - embodying the offspring given to man -, was valued on condition that he was *male*. The refusal of pregnancy and/or maternity by women has for a long time been criminalized, while for millennia women have used contraceptive or abortive remedies to maintain some control over their lives and not be subjected to incessant pregnancies bringing too many mouths to feed and often misfortune and misery. This refusal is perceived as an insubordination to the dominant power and still causes death, incarceration or stigmatization of tens of thousands of women in the world. However, more and more women are opting for a life of nullipare (about 10% of French women today). If they are less stigmatized than in the past, many of these women still suffer from the fate that is done to them; this feeling is exacerbated when no motherhood is not chosen, until they consider themselves incomplete or “failed”.

## **(No) Motherhood therefore continues to weigh heavily on women’s shoulders**

as a destiny, without paternity being the male counterpart. The body and sexuality remain one of the places of encounter. Sometimes this encounter opens the field of possibilities towards the creation of a new individual instilling a desire for parenthood to his parents – or not.

Complex and multiple situations, individual feelings and collective questioning, personal and artistic journey, the exhibition **Motherhood/ No Motherhood** questions the intimacy and freedom at the heart of our human existence.

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*Art in chapels of Léon, summer 2019, Chapel Saint Maudez, Lesneven (29)*

*Art center of La Ferté-sous-Jouarre (77), march/april 2019*

