

french fries

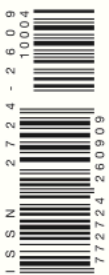
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BULGARI COCO KÖNIG





LAURA FONG PROSPER

In Laura Fong Prosper's *Mater* (2020), her firstborn holds a turtle stuffed toy while he eyes the bathtub. Her youngest in a stroller attempts to grapple her camera with his stubby fingers. Her hand scrubs the burnt marks on the stovetop. Her laptop, planted beside a rummage of office items, displays a video editing software, the rolls of music files and clips waiting for her to work on and save them. Laura's domestic work has consumed her creativity, vitality, and visibility between her personal and artistic life. With *Mater*, she delineates the time she spends at home versus at work. "Does a mother's domestic work have any economic value?" she asks, her hopeful tone meshing with the grievances the art industry has bestowed on her as a mother and an artist.

The pleasure and pain of motherhood and femininity and its relationship with the art world have chosen Laura as its contender. As she speaks with French Fries, the audiovisual artist shares how just a week before the call, a project demanded her commitment to art over her vow to take care of her family. "The institutions in the art field are not entirely aware of the circumstances

INTERVIEW

BY Matthew Burgos

FRENCH FRIES

mother artists have to face," Laura begins. "They expect you to be there for them and perform the same amount of time like you used to before you had your children, but that is just not possible. For me, this is now my fight. As caregivers and homemakers, we also need to have our spaces. I am fortunate that I have a partner who also takes care of our children, but he cannot do it all the time, so I have to carefully choose the projects that I will work on. Some institutions lack the care of and thorough cooperation with the mother artists."

When Laura birthed *Mater*, she was under the spell of postpartum depression and merited the daily life of a housewife by documenting raw videos of her family, a deviation from her usual glitches-infused audiovisuals. Here, she cleans, buys groceries, takes care of the kids, accompanies them to school, and breastfeeds, all while firing off emails and editing videos for some upcoming deadlines.

When Laura published *Mucus Blood Milk* (2021), a collaborative video research with her then 5 years old son Kian and sound artist Niko de Paula Lefort, she reflects on the relationship between motherhood and hydro-feminism as a union, recognition, and affirmation of femininity, self, and sensibilities with all bodies of water. "I was still breastfeeding when I took a bit of my breastmilk and put it under a microscope. I showed it to my firstborn and he was fascinated with it. In a way, I was also enlightening my son about the female body that he may not otherwise know as men may not be well-educated about the female body. I want to raise my children to be as open as possible, to be interconnected with the living beings, and to see everyone as equal," Laura shares. Using a toy microscope, Laura drops her breast milk, a sample of mucus, and spots of menstruation to adopt an almost educational character as a result, explanatory to viewers and cathartic to the artist.

Photography: Guxor



This experimentation escorts the viewers back to her original signature of glitches and video manipulations. The shifting and overlapping neon hues over her films create a psychedelic ambiance that tugs whoever casts their eyes on her footage. The transcendental hypnotism Laura casts in her videos leaves a lasting impact, a remembrance of the 80s' synthpop and new wave while infused with questions of cultural belonging, longing, exile, displacement, identity, memory, ancestry, and motherhood. As she continues this style, the audiovisual artist shares how her third work fixating on feminism and motherhood bridges the distance between her in Panama and her sound collaborator Ela Spalding in Berlin. Titled *Vida* (2020), the two friends exchanged voice notes through WhatsApp to bounce off ideas and give birth to the five-minute video art. For their first collaboration, they reflected on the effects of the pandemic on family life as well as society as a whole. *Vida* drafts up a personal response to how to approach life today as mothers and humans.

"At the beginning of 2020 and before the pandemic, I was with my family in Panama for the holiday. We were at a beach when the first lockdown happened. The airports closed down and the flights were canceled in Panama, so we could not go back to Germany. We were stranded on that beach for six months. I have to say it was paradise! I felt grateful to live through that time, so close to Mother Nature since, in the end she is my biggest inspiration", Laura says. Forming a bond with and embodying nature has always been the vital force of Laura's works and wisdom. In her words, what she captures strays from just a single image of a plant or a tree, but a moving picture of nature that becomes distorted and disrupted with colored graphics and techniques. A lingering element of psychedelia drifts into every film she produces, a testament to her deep-seated connection with nature and the universe.

„The soundtrack is a Tibetan mantra recorded in situ in the Shangri-la region”

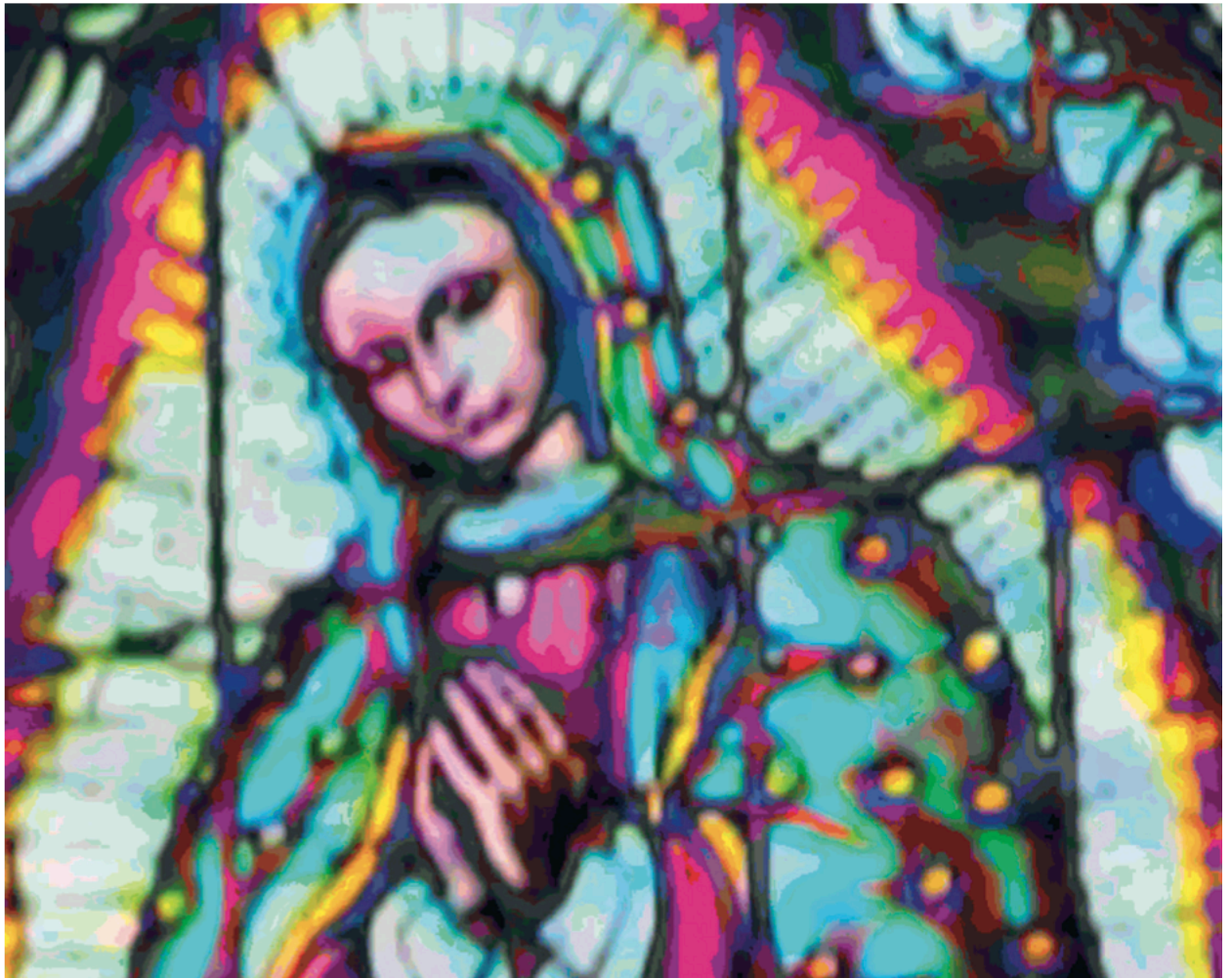


“I am not a religious person, but I was raised as a Catholic in a Chinese household, so my religious upbringing was part Catholic and part Buddhism,” she says. While she marks herself as non-religious, she abides by the nature of her spirituality that keeps blossoming. To pay homage to spirituality, she devoted the video art *Mantra* (2020) to the faithful servants of prayers and omens. In her description: “Montage in collage form with images shot in China that

were later processed with old analog synthesizers. This piece is my interpretation of ritual, prayer, and temple and can be regarded as a video altar - for those who need to pray to a screen, display, or monitor - or as a simple decorative light object. The soundtrack is a Tibetan mantra recorded in situ in the Shangri-la region.”

As one rifles through the updated portfolio of Laura, they may witness a video clip where lines of women wearing the same uniform march at the same pace and swing their arms at a rhythmic beat. It seems projected over a white cloth, but after learning Laura’s approach, it might be a multitude of glitches and color overlays. The video transitions to women raising their arms, kneeling on an unseen platform, and tilting their heads sideways, a part of their dance routine. Laura slaps a layer of pink-hued graphics over the clip to generate her trancelike mark as an audiovisual artist.

As she narrates the backstory behind the upcoming work: “I have a friend who asked if I wanted these 200 metal cans of 16mm film rolls he had salvaged from the Soviet Bloc years. They were a treasure that one cannot just give to anyone, so I decided to keep them. During my first few years as a mother, these film rolls took up a lot of space at home, and I was not doing anything with them, but I could not put them in the cellar or else the humidity would tamper them. When I finally got myself back on track with my video art practice, I tapped fellow artist and friend Tina Wilke to collaborate with me in this time-consuming work,” Laura says.



For over a year, the duo watched the videos captured in the 200 film rolls and selected the ones they felt would generate impact and speak of their works. After the deliberative process, they digitized the videos, and worked together with VR artist Matías Brunacci, and transformed them into a virtual reality presentation of the bygone Soviet era. “I told Tina that what we went through is almost as giving birth. It may have been mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausting, but seeing the final outcome renounces them all.” Soon, they will be releasing the VR project for the public viewers to consume.

A mother and an artist, Laura defies the standards the art industry has set for women creatives in the swing of motherhood. The omnipresence of her unfiltered opposition against demands of authority over her snakes through her visual bugs and mosaic-like images. “Some male artists have children, but who takes care of them while they go off working on their art? Maybe their partners, the mothers. I do not think the art institutions consider the male artists as caregiver figures; mostly the women. At the same time, they expect the mother creatives to work for them while assuming the caregiver role. We need to go against that,” Laura says.

A stallion in the art battlefield, Laura Fong Prosper keeps on punctuating her reverence for motherhood, feminism, displacement, and immigration - to name a few - through her kaleidoscopic body of work. The more distraction she receives, the more disruption she gives.