

Mothering in Art: A Study in Contrasts & Care

by [Nicholas Frank](#) | September 13, 2025



Moms have been prominent in San Antonio art lately. Several recent exhibitions have centered the combined issues of motherhood and artmaking, illuminating interior conflicts and revelations artists who are mothers experience: reverberating from the necessity of splitting attention between a private, sometimes conflicted inner life, and the immediacy of caretaking demanded by outer life.

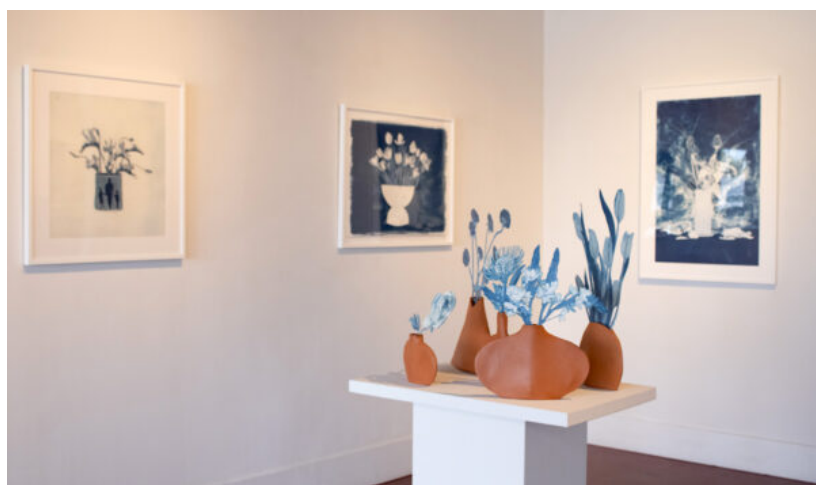


Daniela Oliver de Portillo, "En Mis Manos Estan/All The Wrinkles I Was Born With," 2025

Daniela Oliver de Portillo's first solo exhibition, *So Marvelous, De Nuevo Florecer*, at Ruiz-Healy Art presents an array of terracotta vases with sculpted

cyanotype floral bouquets, along with a suite of framed, editioned cyanotype prints. Expository wall labels speak openly about the conflicting hopes, dreams, demands, and desires for help and recognition in balancing the daily demands of motherhood with a blossoming artistic sensibility. Oliver de Portillo lightheartedly describes her process as confoundingly complicated, like motherhood, with the process largely invisible in its elegant results.

Oliver de Portillo's art career started ignominiously: her 2-year-old found her studio and scribbled in crayon all over the fine ink drawings she had been making in a postpartum effort to reconnect with her artistic selfhood. Whatever frustration, disappointment, sadness, or hopelessness she experienced in those moments of dispossession, she was later able to channel into a brilliant gesture. The result was *Invasive Species: A Collaboration with Toddlers*, a suite of "collaborative" drawings by herself and her two young boys.



Installation view of "*So Marvelous, De Nuevo Florecer*" by Daniela Oliver de Portillo. Photo: Maria Brown

With *So Marvelous, De Nuevo Florecer*, Oliver de Portillo has complexified and evolved in her work and self-identification as an artist, after studying art and working in public relations at an art museum prior to motherhood. She is still apologetic about her status, quick to say she has friends who are "real" artists, even as she has fully embraced the role both internally and in sophisticated material explorations. The unusual wall labels highlight her insecurities, anxieties, and fears, while offering insight into the metaphors she perceives as she observes her children, such as seeing her young son peeking through a window curtain as peeling back the veil of the present to peer into his potential futures. With such insights swirling through her mind even amid the grind of daily life, Oliver de Portillo has become adept at preserving those insights for when she finds time to dedicate to intensive studio work.



Casey Galloway, "The Thin Space: Deathplace," 2025

Casey Galloway's first solo exhibition at FL!GHT presents seven weavings produced on the theme of the pregnancy and birth of Ottis, her child with musician Torin Metz. Metz and sound artist Justin Boyd are a duo called Spectral Geezers, producing atmospheric improvised music made with guitar, keyboards, and a modular synthesizer system. In the recently-closed *Mama | Madre | Mother* at the McNay Art Museum, Galloway debuted a weaving inspired by recordings of the ambient music of the Geezers filling their home as they welcomed their son into the world. The McNay installation, titled *Meta-Sono-Morphe* (2023), incorporated a Spectral Geezers recording, and the FL!GHT installation featured not only that piece, but the live Geezers for two opening performances on Thursday, September 4, and Friday, September 5. Ottis was part of the show, occasionally at his father's foot, accompanying on keyboard.



Spectral Geezers, with Ottis. Background: Casey Galloway, "Good Vibrations," 2025

Galloway's weavings powerfully abstract her lived experience transforming from person to machine supporting another lifeform to mother, fusing the time required to weave lengths of fabric together into patterns with the tiny and sometimes imperceptible daily occurrences that amount to a major life

transition, and a new life. Their power is subtle, perhaps greater for their austere silence, and emphasized by the limited color palettes she chose for each weaving. Some incorporate the soundwave patterning of *Meta-Sono-Morphe*, while others appear more as geometric abstractions, particularly *The Thin Space: Deathplace* (2025). Its counterpart on the gallery's longest wall, *The Thin Space: Birthing Room* (2025), crumbles any ego I might bring as an observer to its meanings and resonances, somehow conveying the ineffable experience of birth wordlessly.

Galloway's break from geometric forms, and her deployment of mostly white tonal shifts, indistinct and scattery with occasional points of emphasis in delicate peach and light grey washes, captures pure wonder at how a consciousness can feel distanced from itself and utterly unified with lifeforce in the same moment. Similarly contradictory, contrasting titles such as *The Grind* (2024) and *Good Vibrations* (2025) capture the moment-to-moment absurdities endured by young parents tending to infinitely changeable toddlers.



Casey Galloway, "The Thin Space, Birthing Room," 2025

As a non-birthing human, I am aware of my unbridgeable distance from the experience of giving birth. Consequently, I must be guilty of projecting my own meanings onto Galloway's weavings. When birth stories come up in social settings, I see moms lock eyes, each in full empathy with the other and needing no words (maybe some sounds, though) to describe their experience. And it seems all births are different, some flooded in all-absorbing, indescribable bodily pain, others nearly effortless and pain-free, sometimes by the same person with different kids.



Rebecca Marino, "Oven Mitts," 2024

The issue of postpartum depression, in this case unacknowledged at the time, burbled beneath the lighthearted, cheerful palette of *Twenty-Four Cakes*: Rebecca Marino at [Mercury Project](#). Marino revisits the journals of poet [Sylvia Plath](#), famous not only for her incisive poetry, but for her suicide as a mother at age 30. The journals contain an unformed idea for a short story, to be titled "[Twenty-Four Cakes](#)," describing a woman at wit's end with her spouse, desperately seeking order through the meted process of baking. Marino quotes the passage in wall vinyl, next to a pair of comically oversized oven mitts rendered in a pattern of brightly colored hexagonals. A long wall holds 24 cakes, similarly rendered in tufted yarn and twill textiles, creating an atmosphere of unrelenting gaiety in contrast with the subject's darkness, but keeping with Plath's fervent desire for relief.



Rebecca Marino, "Twenty-Four Cakes," 2024

Mama | Madre | Mother at the McNay also touched on the potential for grief in motherhood, most poignantly in the incomprehensible pain expressed by German artist Käthe Kollwitz, who died at age 77 just as World War II was concluding in a cascade of destruction. Kollwitz most famously confronted familial obliteration caused by war in inexpressibly sad drawings of mothers holding their deceased children. Each day for nearly two years, the unrelenting horrors of Gaza are conveyed in similar images posted to social media and

news outlets, and I can't help but see these sadnesses of mothers alone in their caring grief as holding all the sadnesses of our human world, bent as its leading patriarchs are on proving their capacity for destructiveness.

Galloway expertly treated the cycle of life in her installation of *Music for Ottis*, hanging the birth piece and death piece side-by-side, as these phenomena are sometimes so disjointingly paired in life — new parents seeing off their aging parents into sickness and death even as new life is brought into the world.



Artworks by Daniela Oliver de Portillo, detail view

Fleetingness in life and art were also captured by Oliver de Portillo in a monthslong project that concluded just as *So Marvelous, De Nuevo Florecer* took shape. In *Hidden Blooms*, she made sporadic treks to eventually place 40 of her terracotta and cyanotype bouquet sculptures at spots along the Mission Reach, the southerly extension of San Antonio's downtown River Walk. Each had a "note to strangers," inviting whomever happened upon the piece to bring it home with them. Quietly, mostly anonymously, *Hidden Blooms* gently conferred the capacity for generosity in the hidden or unrecognized labor of motherhood, giving away that which is most precious — selfhood — to bring other selves into maturity.

Another mom-themed show, *Madre_Land: South Texas Memory & the Art of Making Home* is set to open in San Antonio at Centro de Artes on Thursday, October 2, 2025, and run through February 22, 2026. According to a [social media post](#), "The exhibit is designed to feel like a family home – with a front porch, kitchen, children's room, and more."