

Culture of Silence: arts parents accepting, rejecting or adapting to, an unfriendly workplace.

Jessie Scott, Nina Ross & Lizzy Sampson

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artistparentsurvey.wixsite.com/artistparents

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When & Why

This research was conducted in 2017, after conversations between Jessie Scott and Nina Ross regarding their experiences making and exhibiting art since becoming parents. They realised research in this area was insufficient and felt it was important to gather evidence to help navigate and sustain a career as artist/parents.

Jessie and Nina initiated research in the form of two surveys in the lead up to the [Women* Art and Feminism in Australia conference in 2018](#). This report is based on the paper presented at that conference, detailing and analysing the results of the two surveys.

How were the surveys distributed

Two surveys were conducted - one for artists and arts workers who are parents (Parent Survey) and one for galleries (Gallery Survey), asking how they accommodate artists who are parents. These two surveys were produced in Google Docs and distributed via targeted emails and social media. Respondents were given two weeks to complete the survey.

- 68 galleries were contacted directly, 20 responded.
- The parents survey was distributed broadly via email and social media. Though we can not be certain on the exact number of recipients, we received 111 responses.

Aims

The aim of this research was to devise a number of recommendations for galleries and arts institutions, based on the findings of both surveys.

Executive Summary

In our survey of Artist Parents over 60% said that they found galleries and art spaces to be unwelcoming to children, families and parents.

More than half of respondents cited access as an issue – not being able to physically get into a space with a pram for one, as well as the timing of openings, talks and symposiums being incompatible with family life. The lack of change facilities, toilets, seating, and the provision of child friendly food and drinks or a space to consume these were also a problem even if you could get in to a space or event.

More than a quarter of artist parents said that gallery culture itself was unwelcoming – they perceived it as a quiet, elite space for adults where parents and children are made to feel like a nuisance or a disruption to this environment. They said they were given an unwelcome feeling from gallery staff or other visitors, felt watched by security or were not acknowledged at all.

Many of the respondents felt like they were taken less seriously as artists after having children. There was little to no acknowledgement or accommodation of their altered circumstances, evident in residency programs, funding opportunities or gallery processes. Many felt that they had to “hide” the fact they were parents, and definitely could not make work about parenting as it would be seen as not serious or too sentimental.

Overwhelmingly, the artist parents who responded, emphasized that this lack of welcome and accommodation contributed negatively to their ability to practice as artists and maintain their careers. The main reasons were simple but intertwined and had crucial implications.

As parents they found they had less flexibility and less time because of both caring and financial commitments. This meant they had less availability to work excessive hours as they had before children – often seen as a mark of “seriousness”; they also found it harder to maintain a studio-based practice and harder to attend art events.

These two factors meant they were immediately excluded from a huge amount of networking opportunities – they could not meet curators and interact with other artist peers, leading to a direct loss of opportunities, and also social isolation. Conversely, despite a lack of availability and access, most of the respondents said that they did not experience a lack of desire to make art after having children. In many cases, they were finding ways to adapt their parenthood to their practice and vice versa. However, the inability to access opportunities, especially residencies, put a hole in their CV that became very hard to bridge as time went on.

Over 90% of the respondents to the survey were women. Although male artist primary carers cited experiencing the same types of exclusion and discrimination, the reality is that most primary carers are still women, and caring is a feminised, gendered activity that is allocated less importance in our culture than other types of work. Therefore, artists who are parents are being discriminated against for sexist reasons and motherhood in the art world is generally not accommodated for even where it not actively discriminated against.

This exclusion is very challenging and isolating and artist parents often “drop out” of their practice for several years while their children are young as it is too difficult to manage both sets of expectations – parenting and art practice. This leads to the aforementioned “gap” in their practice that gives them a disadvantage when competing with younger, childless or male artists for opportunities. The breadth of perspectives that are brought to our collective art culture are also narrowed, excluding those of parents, particularly mothers.

Recommendations

Despite the challenges facing many galleries and art spaces currently, based on our survey findings, almost every space could do something to make artist parents more welcome – as visitors and in their programs.

Our recommendations, based on what artist parents told us, can be grouped in three areas:

Compassion: more active communication with artist parents in your spaces and in your programs - to acknowledge and facilitate the extra - often invisible - challenges they are facing and keep them in the loop.

Engagement: small additions to the gallery to facilitate the presence of kids - everything from providing a change mat, to making a kids activity corner, would help to welcome parents and children and allow them to engage with the artwork in galleries more freely.

Access: scheduling and budgeting for events that are child friendly - whether through timing (avoiding the dinner/bed time rush) or by funding or making childcare available on site so that parents can take part in events or installs unencumbered were cited as ways to increase artist parents' access to opportunities and networking.

Full details of the report findings and recommendations follow.

For a list of resources and further results, visit artistparentsurvey.wixsite.com/artistparents

The PARENT Survey: response overview

Who completed the survey?

- 111 artists completed the Parents survey
- 20 Galleries completed the Gallery survey
- over 60% of respondents were artists, under 30% of respondents were arts workers
- over 50% of respondents were aged 34-45, and about 26% aged 46-60
- 90% of respondents identified themselves as primary carers
- 10 % of respondents shared care with a partner or were not the primary carer
- 89% of respondents were women
- 11% of respondents were men. No-one identified as trans, non-binary or genderqueer
- generally respondents were from small families, with 80% having only 1 or 2 children

Elie - Tuesday

① Nap - 12.30 - 1pm / 1.15pm

- * Might want a bottle just before that nap.
- * First nap might only be 30-45min
- * Bring Winnie inside during nap.

1pm - 3pm Play, eat, walk.

- * Offer bottle when she wakes up, put back in fridge & give later if she doesn't want it then.
- * Lunch - add a little water from kettle to loosen it a bit
- * I will leave my key so you can take her out in pram.

② Nap 3/3.30 - 4/4.30

- * again, may want some milk just before, offer again when she wakes up.

PTO →

Participation in the arts after kids

“My old studio run by Local Council kicked me out 6 days after giving birth as I could not meet my attendance quota while pregnant. There was no affordance for maternity leave, and was a clear instance of inequity only affecting a mother. Really disappointing.”

- Survey respondent

The top two cited factors that impacted practice were:

- not enough time for practice, including making, viewing and admin (grant writing etc) **(55%)**
- gallery hours were inaccessible - both regular hours and opening events **(26%)**

Almost every other factor mentioned was connected to these two impacts.

Respondents cited:

- less flexibility and availability for arts practice or work
- financial constraints; having to privilege paid work because of carer responsibilities
- less capacity for “overtime” and out of hours practice or work
- loss of studio access (via decreased ability to attend, unaffordability, or being kicked out)
- restricted freedom; inability to travel or do residencies
- lack of networking opportunities, social isolation
- altered engagement - attending “family-friendly” events and festivals not necessarily beneficial to individuals’ practice or career.
- increased overtime to overcome lack of access - unsustainable habits, more pressure

The ‘opening’ was identified as an important site of formal and informal networking. Inability to attend these events resulted in social isolation and impacted ones’ ability to practice as a professional artist.

Although circumstances changed over time as children aged, in the crucial early years of parenting, respondents were very aware of these factors combining to result in:

- a gap in practice, resulting in professional invisibility
- loss of confidence
- the perception, self and external, of mothers not being “serious artists”
- other experiences of discrimination and exclusion

“It's been harder to find the time to devote to my practice, but by the same token I am much more focussed. Having children made me realise that my practice was vitally important to me.”

- Survey respondent

On a positive note, respondents also reported:

- more efficient use of time
- more ideas
- more motivation
- many had adapted their practice in various ways to having children - scale, subject matter, medium, frequency

But what starts as a trickle of factors over time can end up a deluge, that knocks primary carers out of their arts practice, often just as they are entering the 'established' phase of their career.

Knowing that the largest percentage of primary carers identify as women, this becomes very much a feminist issue, and an intersectional one cutting across a range of matrices of disadvantage and marginalisation.

Do you find galleries welcoming to children, families and parents?

We asked artists whether or not they find galleries welcoming to children, families and parents. We focussed on gallery spaces in particular as these are the locus and focus of the visual art world - the places where the outcomes of our practice interface with both the public, and the rest of the art world - they are our workplaces.

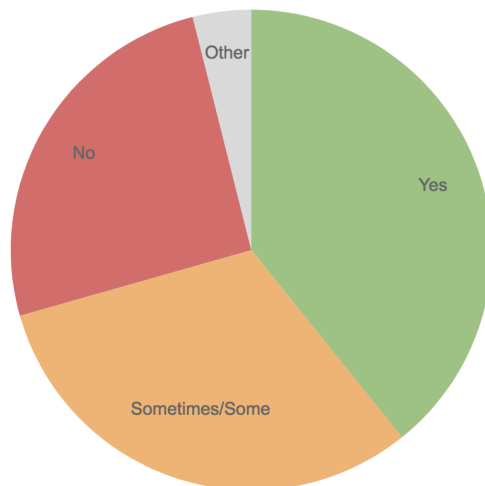
Respondents said:

Yes - 40%

Sometimes - 32%

No - 26%

Other - 4%



YES

40% of respondents told us they do find galleries to be welcoming environments. However it's worth noting that a quarter of the Yes responses specified major or public institutions such as the NGV when responding to this question.

SOMETIMES

The *Sometimes* responses were more nuanced. Several people said that particular types of galleries are welcoming, for example Artist Run Spaces or Commercial Galleries, while others mentioned that some galleries try to be welcoming, or others are improving

NO

26% responded with an outright No.

We can conclude that 60% of artists surveyed indicated they do not always find galleries welcoming to children, families and parents for one of many reasons.

In what ways are galleries not welcoming?

Cited examples included:

- an unwelcoming feeling from gallery staff and/or visitors
- being watched by security
- not being acknowledged by staff
- galleries actively excluding children
- children making noise as problematic

One person mentioned being asked to leave a gallery with her child.

More than 50% of respondents cited access as an issue.

This included:

- timing of openings, talks and symposiums
- lack of pram access
- lack of change facilities, toilets or seating
- the provision of child friendly food and drinks or a space to consume these

“The culture of quiet contemplation and occasional elitism doesn't lend itself to children's outbursts”.

- Survey respondent

More than a quarter of parents said gallery culture in itself was unwelcoming.

Responses included:

- gallery culture is elite, quiet or contemplative
- galleries are perceived to be spaces for adults
- the nature of the space is unwelcoming
- feeling like it's uncool being a parent in a gallery
- one's own perceptions about galleries
- galleries take themselves too seriously

These observations, based on fact or perception, are barriers faced by artist/parents.

How can galleries be more child and family friendly?

Engagement

Almost 65% of people said the presence of children's activities make galleries welcoming.

Galleries who include holiday programs, dedicated exhibitions, works which can be touched or played with, interactive spaces, educational programs or dedicated space for children are very well received by artist parents.

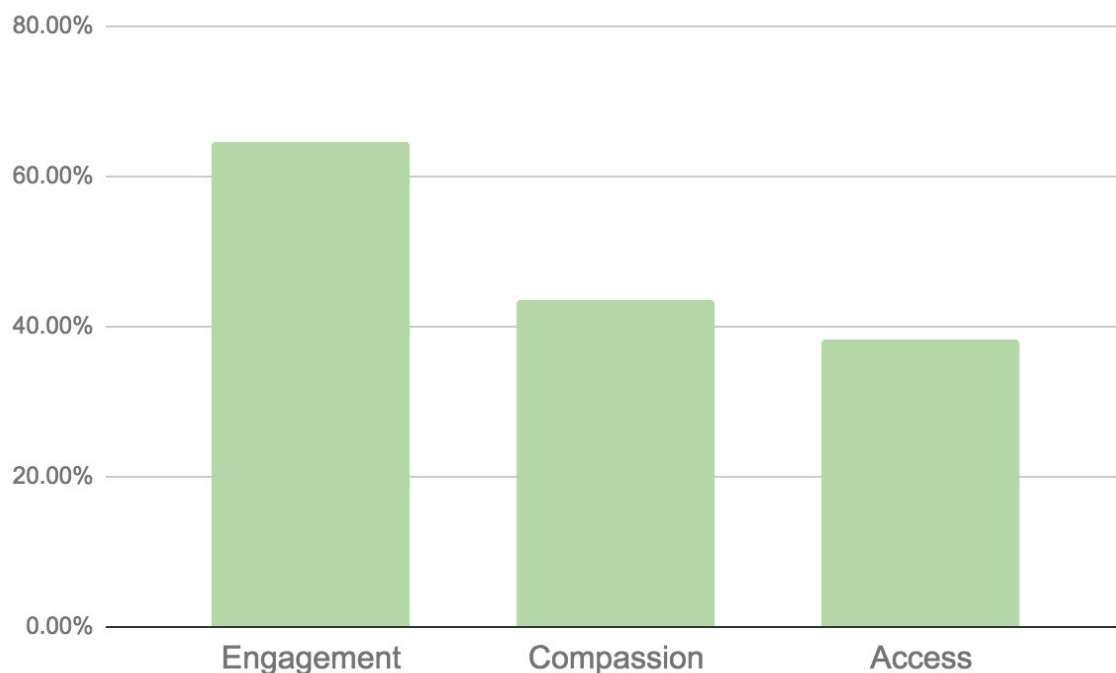
Compassion

Almost 44% of responses indicated that an environment friendly or accepting of children was a factor in feeling welcome.

Having helpful or friendly staff, being open to all ages of audience, being tolerant of children, not being watched constantly, ignored or treated differently, and being open to the noise and movement of children in the space were some of the ways in which parents felt they were welcome in a space.

Access

38% of responses cited access as a factor. This includes simply being able to enter the space with a pram, providing space to breastfeed or to change a baby, accessible opening hours including the timing of openings and events, parents rooms, access to appropriate seating and through the provision of child friendly meals or a place to eat home bought food.



I think the nature of the art world is quite cliquey. I'm not sure how to deal with this from the perspective of a perpetually 'emerging' practice. Rotation of the key gate keepers (curators) to include parents perhaps?

- Survey respondent

Any gallery, regardless of budget or size has the opportunity to make a positive shift towards creating a welcoming environment for artists and visitors with children

Acknowledging that not all spaces can provide everything mentioned here, it is clear that any gallery, regardless of budget or size has the opportunity to make a positive shift towards creating a welcoming environment for artists and visitors with children.

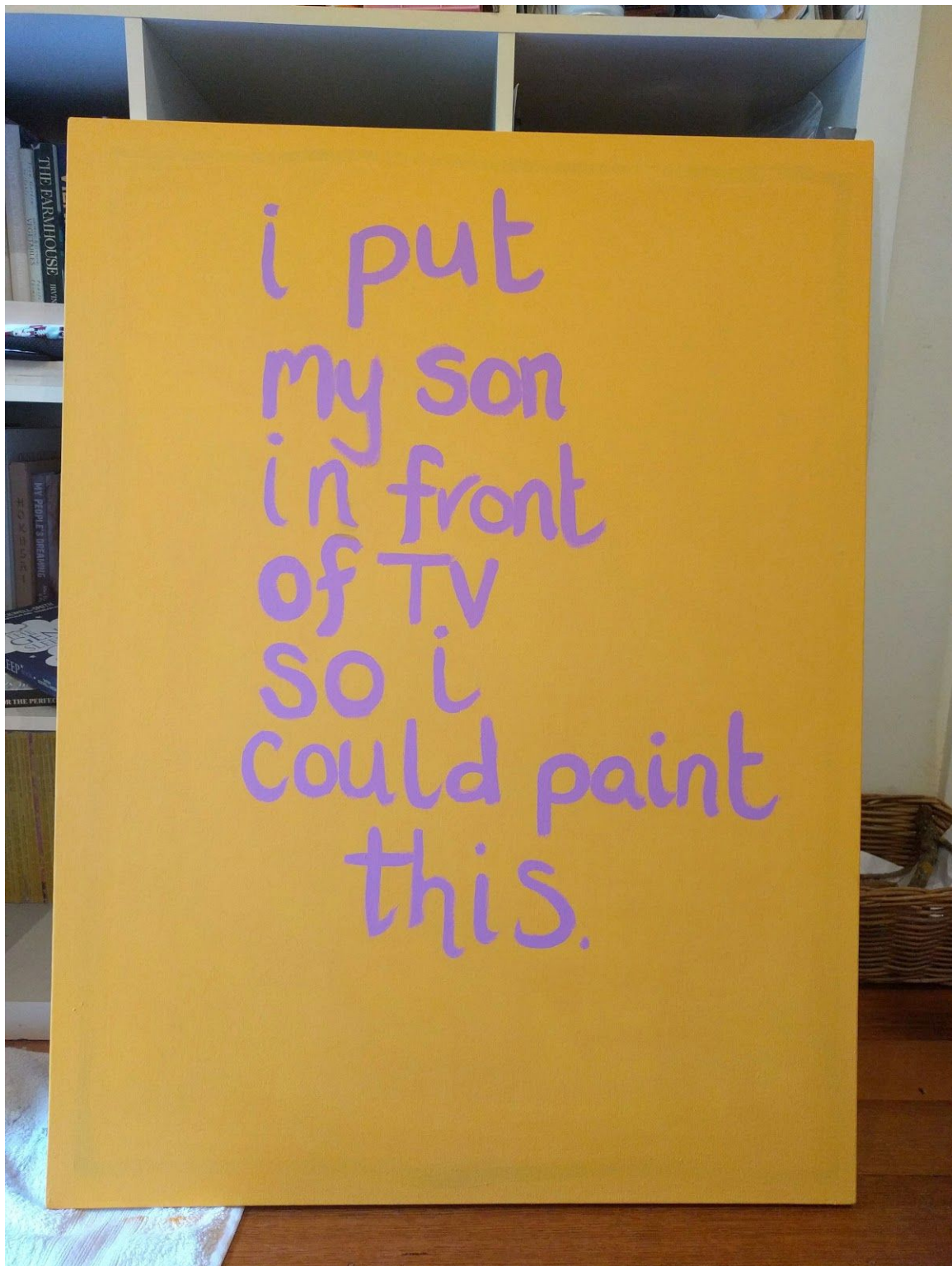
Along with the implicit recommendations we received in the survey, some specific examples include:

- opening galleries earlier than 11am to accommodate kids early morning starts and nap times
- don't always hold events and openings in the evenings
- consider the installation of works and hang child friendly didactic panels
- display signs to say breastfeeding is welcomed in their space
- say hi! Thanks for coming! Welcome! Let me know if there's anything we can help with!

“Events & openings rarely cater to the presence of children. Sometimes, but not always, women artists are expected to appear unencumbered.”

- Survey respondent

It's worth noting that many of the barriers to access facing artist parents are considered basic standards in most industries. As an example, a gallery operated by local council by law has to provide accessible facilities including pram/wheelchair access, baby change, seating and adequate toilets.



"I think the main barrier for women is curators who stop seeking or searching their work once they have kids. One way to help on this issue is for curators to actively look for women artists once they have children."

- Survey respondent

Reflections

-

“I have been doing work with a large regional art gallery to increase visitation of those from refugee/migrant backgrounds who can see galleries as being “where rich white people go”

- Survey respondent

“As an arts worker (gallery curator) I was surprised at the lack of support on offer coming back to work whilst breastfeeding (stories of women expressing milk in their car at work are all too common)!”

- Survey respondent

We are all aware that our industry has a huge attitude problem; one that reflects a lack of regard for artists and primary carers generally. This is indicative of a larger social dilemma, meaning the artist/parent must deal with two major obstacles.

In our survey, arts workers noted they suffer from similar stigma as artists. There is a culture of silence; a gallery may appear family friendly for visitors but it does not necessarily extend to their staff.

As mentioned earlier, the majority of respondents approached this survey from the perspective of how a gallery could support them as visitors, not artists. It made us wonder if this misinterpretation is inherent of mothers/primary carers thinking of themselves firstly as parents and secondly as artists?

“According to the Australia Council for the Arts, childcare is a valid expense. However, in the current funding climate I feel that it would be seen as asking for too much to assign this cost to a gallery or funding agency.”

- Survey respondent

It must be acknowledged that some government organisations support artists/parents however we have a long way to go to feel comfortable being seen and asking for what we want.

For example, if enough artists budget childcare costs into a grant application, the funding body can establish what we need and may find additional opportunities to accommodate. This has major implications in our ability to produce work and the longevity of our careers.

From our own personal experiences and anecdotal evidence, we know why this is important but there is something more at stake, and that is, what will galleries look like if artist/parents do not make art?

How can galleries support exhibiting artists?

A small number surveyed offered suggestions reflecting how galleries could assist exhibiting artists or arts workers generally. Some recommendations included:

- Provide a flexible workplace by adapting artist talks/opening events/workshops or installation times.
- Support artists with resources to apply for grants and funding opportunities.
- Create a child friendly workplace: make accommodations on a case by case basis to allow parents to attend an event with their child.
- Supporting workers with access to onsite childcare facilities so they can focus on installation or their talk/activity.
- Think holistically- family friendly workplaces encourage visitors, and would provide artists and arts workers the opportunity to create industry engagement.

Conclusions

Artists who are also parents are disadvantaged, discriminated against and excluded.

“Yes, I have felt excluded at times, and invisible, due to becoming a Mum. I have also been told by curators to 'not worry about it' and just to focus on the kids.”

- Survey respondent

A tacit understanding of all the respondents, though not necessarily named, is that the current idealised model of a professional practice does not accommodate part-time, casual or flexible practice, something which is inevitably necessary for artists and arts workers with kids.

Another implicit message was a general distaste in the arts community at large for “the maternal” - whether it be maternal themes in art, any open acknowledgement of maternity (as in actual pregnancy or parenting issues), or on a more pragmatic level, maternity leave and flexible work conditions.

It is also a bitter irony that whilst arts parents are largely made to feel as though having children is a choice, the impacts of which are theirs to bear alone, our children will be paying taxes to fund the safety net that we all will inevitably require in our old age, as vulnerable, super-deprived, female artists and arts workers.

So while on a personal level, and even on an artistic level, parenting may have potentially positive impacts on practice, these are not accommodated in the receiving culture of the art world and thus become negative impacts that are felt across a broad spectrum.

“A colleague, who is a very well-known contemporary artist with an international reputation and considers herself a feminist, introduced me to another artist. As soon as the introduction was made and I left, the artist who introduced me immediately dismissed me as 'just another suburban mummy artist'.”

- Survey respondent

The question has to be asked:

What is this idealised model of practice that excludes parents? Who is it modelled on, and who does it privilege? Who does it benefit? How does it skew the art and artists we understand to be “serious”, “professional” and who therefore go on to achieve greater success, and exposure?

And how are artists with children accommodating this dysfunction so as not to be discriminated against?

What can we do as individuals?

Do we accept the art world is unwelcoming to primary carers? What kind of an arts industry do we want? How can we go about creating a community for artists who are also parents within the arts?

- Seek out funding that accommodates artist/parents. Provide feedback if there aren't these opportunities
- If you are on a board or volunteer, implement child friendly practices such as legislation, provide funding and flexible working conditions or conduct research
- Promote child friendly residencies or provide feedback to residencies that are not accommodating. Melbourne artist Hanna Tai is currently researching which Australian residencies are child friendly (results not yet published).
- Discuss your experience with your peers, both positive and negative, until it becomes commonplace and widely known
- In our survey, male primary carers said they experienced the same attitude problem as female primary carers. Get men to share their stories openly with other men.

Limitations

Once we closed the survey, we discovered some limitations:

The majority of respondents approached the parents survey from the perspective of how a gallery could accommodate them as *visitors*, not artists.

The questions in the survey were open ended, resulting in some doubling up of responses across questions.

Responses from artists ultimately addressed artist run initiatives (ARI's), major public institutions and commercial galleries.

As a result, respondents were comparing different aspect of the industry against each other, and from different perspectives as artists and art workers, which made it more difficult to analyse the data. We should have surveyed each group separately, and focussed each question more narrowly.

However, despite these limitations, we were still able to identify many common themes to report on.

Links to Surveys:

PARENTS SURVEY

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1W2mGQmKdZSisUrYmDSVeWkncyvT9mnDcJ6c9BYtHNiA/edit>

GALLERIES SURVEY

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ZpT3AfnlAXDsP0AMQ7GtvE9RL9CymCx7k8YPFxnBSdA/edit>

LINK TO WEBSITE

artistparentsurvey.wixsite.com/artistparents

Image Credits:

pg. 1: Lizzy Sampson, *Objects found while walking (0 - 12 months)*, 2016-7, archival pigment print

pg. 5: Jessie Scott, *Instructions*, 2017, still frame from animated GIF,

pg. 13: Nina Ross, *I put my son in front of tv so I could print this*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 39 x 29 inches.

APPENDIX 1

KEEPING ARTIST PARENTS IN THE LOOP



SAY HELLO

If a parent comes into your gallery space - say hello! It might seem obvious, but a smile goes a long way for someone who feels out of place and has made a lot of effort to be there.



BABY FEEDING WELCOME

Display a "Baby Feeding Welcome Here" sign in your space near the entrance - and make seating available. This could be as simple as offering a chair in the office or behind the invigilators desk.



BIN

Have a rubbish bin visible in the space that parents can use to dispose of wipes, food wrappers, nappies and other baby-rubbish. This benefits you and them!



CHANGE MAT

Keep a cheap foam change mat in the office to offer to parents with babies - many artist parents have resorted to changing their kids nappies on toilet floors, and a change mat is a simple and cheap way to make life a bit less gross for them and their kids.



SNACKS

At openings, provide a non-alcoholic drink and a plate of snacks to keep kids occupied. Children's mealtime generally overlaps with opening times, so parents often have to stave off hangry children to try and attend.



ACTIVITIES

Keep a corner of the gallery as an activity station for kids - a table with some pencils /paper/colouring sheets. If you have the time and resource, you could make activity sheets tailored to the shows in your gallery for older kids. Anything that engages kids while they're in the space, will help their parents see your shows!



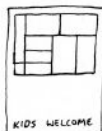
PROGRAMMING

Try to schedule a monthly event that is parent and child-friendly. This might be having a daytime opening or talk on a weekend during the day, or running the opening later than usual (to avoid clashes with kids meal/bedtime). Have one child friendly morning session of each show in your program (little kids nap in the afternoon), and ensure it's promoted. Think bigger: in your next funding round, budget onsite childcare, pizza and a DVD for a special evening event so people can bring kids. It may not be possible for all galleries, but it can be done, and will be appreciated!



INSTALL

Start budgeting to offer exhibiting artists financial support for childcare during install - childcare generally costs \$100-\$150 per day. Be aware that most artist parents are paying this themselves on top of everything else during installs, or leaning on friends, family and others to appear unencumbered.



OUTREACH

Actively seek out artists who have recently had children - encourage and support them to keep applying for opportunities, curate them into shows, don't assume they are not interested or not working anymore.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Talk to artists about their kids- ask about the extra challenges and obstacles they face. Even if you don't have the resources to assist them, let them know you understand those challenges exist for them.

You may assume that your space is child and parent friendly because you don't actively discriminate against them, but there are many passive, baked-in ways the art world discriminates against artist parents, and mothers in particular. If in doubt, be proactive! Your care and acknowledgement will never go unappreciated.

artistparentsurvey.wixsite.com/artistparents