

# POINTS OF ENTRY

Hettie Judah : “Artists often feel they need to hide their parenthood from the art world.”

Hello. I’m Katie Kheriji-Watts and you’re listening to Points of Entry - a conversation around re-imagining cultural organisations in a rapidly changing world.

My guest today is [Hettie Judah](#), a journalist and art critic based in London. She’s the author of a new book, *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and Other Parents)*, that looks at the difficulties and discriminations that artists face when they have children. We talked about how this is an international issue, about what artists with care-taking responsibilities might need when they travel for their work, and about what cultural organisations could do to be more parent-friendly.

I’m thrilled to say that this episode was commissioned by On the Move, an information platform and a network for international cooperation that works to support the mobility of artists and culture professionals. As a companion to this episode, On the Move has started to compile a list of resources on the intersection of parenthood and mobility. And they’ve also helped me create a written transcript of my conversation with Hettie, and a translation of that transcription into French.

Let’s get started !

---

## **Hettie Judah**

I lived for a long time in Turkey and my father’s from the Baghdadi Jewish community of India, so most of the food I cook is along the Middle Eastern, Eastern, Mediterranean kind of lines.

## **Katie Kheriji-Watts**

That sounds delicious !

Okay, Hetti, you have said that you come from a family of artists. What was that like for you as a child?

### **Hettie Judah**

So I should clarify that my parents weren't artists, but my great grandmother was an artist, and she was one of the first generations of women in Britain to train at the Royal Academy of Arts. And there's a fantastic photograph of her intake year, I think she started in 1907. She would have been one of the first women in Britain to academically study the nude, which is quite extraordinary. So I grew up seeing these amazing life-size life studies in my family's homes. And of course, to me, that was just what I grew up with as something normal. But then, as I've gone into the art world, I've realized that actually, that was something really special to grow up with. And I was also very lucky to be taken by various aunts to go and see exhibitions and really to grow up around quite a lot of creativity as well.

### **Katie Kheriji-Watts**

I was curious how you would begin to describe the general attitude towards parents and parenting that was sort of in the air around you when you were young.

### **Hettie Judah**

I mean, again, it's really difficult to get any kind of perspective on something that you're experiencing as you're growing up, because that's your normal, that's what you've grown up around. I mean I'm 50 now, so that's all very distant for me. And really, I possibly wasn't even that aware of the parenting culture when I was a young parent myself.

So in terms of my own parenting culture, I was pregnant at the end of the 1990s, which was a horrific decade for feminism. In the UK we had a phenomenon that was known as "the new lad," which was this idea that as a young woman, you were meant to go out and get drunk and participate in sexist banter and flash your boobs and behave like the worst unhinged boorish, blokey culture of the time. And I think it was an era of feminism that very much gave men permission to indulge in a lot of very misogynistic activity. And the idea was very much (certainly in the UK, I don't know if this was the case elsewhere) that you were meant to go around saying, well, you know, "being a mother is not going to change me. I'm going to still continue to be the same person I was." And it wasn't particularly fashionable to say that you enjoyed being a mother or that you liked your children at all. And as a young woman, certainly the idea was that you were going to have a baby and then you were going to go back out partying and downing pints and being one of the lads again, because the idea that you might allow yourself to be changed by the experience of motherhood was not a cool thing to admit at all. So there definitely wasn't a kind of a nourishing supportive kind of maternal culture present at that point when I was a young mother.

**Katie Kheriji-Watts**

One thing that's very interesting to me is this idea that you're not supposed to be changed by motherhood or even that you would have a choice in the matter somehow. If you don't mind me asking, did becoming a parent impact what you wanted to write about or how you approached writing?

**Hettie Judah**

It didn't at all, actually. I've never written about being a parent or being a mother, really up until now. I wasn't really engaged in any kind of first person writing. I think that's something that's really changed. There's been a generational shift during my time as a writer. Certainly when I was starting to write about art in the 1990s, it was very much in the wake of Roland Barthes' idea of the death of the author and the idea that you were meant to separate art out from the personality of the artist and any kind of first person response wasn't seen as being particularly interesting or valid. So, certainly when you were writing about cultural subjects, it was always meant to be from this supposedly rather objective perspective to which you, of course, brought your own knowledge and experience, but you didn't start bringing your own life experience into it particularly. And I think you know there's been this enormous wave of autobiographical writing that's happened, I guess, in the last ten years, and that's quite different from the era that I grew up in. So I was certainly not drawing my own experience at all in writing. So I really haven't written about parenthood at all.

**Katie Kheriji-Watts**

Until now ! But as far as I understand, before you started writing professionally, you did your university studies in Glasgow, where you do a lot of performing and you also run an arts festival. What did those experiences teach you about working in the arts?

**Hettie Judah**

Well, the performing was great fun. Back in those days, it was obviously before the hideousness that is Brexit. And, as a student in Britain, I did get to travel around Europe and participate in festivals, so it was very perspective broadening. I got to travel to Romania and Lithuania, to the Eastern block quite soon after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and encountered lots of different people from different life experiences. In terms of organizing an arts festival, I think that when you work with artists, you have to have a lot of patience because they don't behave like business people, they don't do what you ask them to do, they don't follow rules, they have their own timetable on things. So I think you need to be okay with accepting a certain degree of chaos and self-will in everything and allowing and essentially creating a space for people to do

what they need to do. But it was great because I was very curious and I was a voracious reader, and I got to experience lots of different forms of performance and art-making at that time. There was a lot of live art happening in the 1990s and because I was traveling to a lot of European festivals I was lucky enough to experience some great stuff ! And also some terrible stuff, which gives you a benchmark.

### **Katie Kheriji-Watts**

Yeah, of course it does. So, continuing on this idea of you broadening your horizons outside of the UK, I know that from 2001 to about 2010, you lived in the US, in Turkey, and then in Belgium. And I was wondering how that decade or so outside of the UK really influenced your perspective on what it means to be both a culture worker and a parent.

### **Hettie Judah**

I was actually quite glad to be outside of the UK at that point, with very young children, because I was living in Washington DC, which has a Southern sensibility. People are very friendly and people will talk to your children, they'll acknowledge your children. And then to move to Turkey, which is a culture that really prizes children, actually. Children are very welcome, they're welcome in restaurants and in public spaces. And, again, they'll talk to children, they'll communicate with them. And I came back to the UK and my kids, when they came back to London, they'd try to talk to people on the tube. But people would look away because the idea that you would talk to a small child on the tube or hold eye-contact with them was almost kind of forbidden. It was actually really quite horrifying, I think, as a child that you felt that you were not at all welcomed into the world of adult conversation. So it was very nice seeing them grow up in countries where, as a toddler, you could actually just chat to people in public space, you weren't feeling alienated.

But it was also interesting to see the different kinds of infrastructure that there are in place for families. In Turkey, children are very welcomed but there's not a great deal of infrastructure for looking after children. There weren't particularly good pavements, so it was really difficult to pram push children around Istanbul. There were playgrounds, but they weren't particularly well maintained. And although there are public parks in Istanbul, they're not particularly safe spaces for kids. Moving to Belgium after that was a real eye opener because they have a very high tax regime but, as a result, they have amazing public spaces. They have very well maintained playgrounds for kids. And there's also this understanding that all women are going to work after having children. It's completely normalized and so there is a really good infrastructure in place to support women who are working. There are very well supported play schemes during the

holidays. All of the schools have a garderie service at the end of the school day. All of the public transport is really well set up for traveling with a pram or with small children.

It's made incredibly easy to be a working parent in Belgium in a way that it's absolutely not in Britain. We've got incredibly expensive childcare over here. There aren't inexpensive holiday courses so, during the long holidays, it's really difficult trying to juggle being a parent and continuing with your working responsibilities. And generally children, as I said, (I mean I think it's changing a bit with the new generation) are not particularly welcome in the cultural sphere or in public spaces. So this is less to do with being a cultural worker, but just to do with being a working parent in general. It was very interesting to see the way things could be different in different cultures and the way that different cultures communicate whether it's normal and acceptable to be both a mother and a working person.

### **Katie Kheriji-Watts**

I have a followup question for you, but we're going to get to it a bit later because I really want to talk about your book, which is founded on some research. So, in 2019 you started a research project about the impact of motherhood on artists' careers. Why did you focus on motherhood and not on, I guess, the more gender-neutral term, parenthood?

### **Hettie Judah**

Well, it was specifically motherhood that I started to look into because there had been some really brilliant studies into gender balance in the arts. There were reports looking at the balance of museum collections and how present work by women artists was in museum collections, how visible it was. There were studies looking at the price of art by women at auction and there were also studies looking at gender balance and also class mobility in the arts in general. And what emerged in some of these studies was that there was a rough balance between men and women (or girls and boys) studying art in high school and at college. And in the early career awards there was, again, rough gender parity. But then there was this big split that happened when it came to representation by galleries. And quite often artists get gallery representation in, let's say, their early thirties. And it suddenly seemed that, from that point, their careers really diverged from one another. Men were getting far more institutional shows, they were getting included in more biennials, their art was being sold (in general) more but also sold for higher prices. And I was curious as to what was causing that split, that parting of the ways. And of course one can say, "well, it's just old fashioned sexism," but it also occurred to me that there's something that happens to women (to many women, not all women) in their thirties, which is that they quite often start families. And I was curious as to whether this was a factor that had

any impact on gender balance in the art world. And I felt that it was a question that needed to be asked.

I was commissioned to write a short essay for one of these studies, for [the Freelands Foundation study into the representation of women artists in Britain](#). And I basically put out an open call to artists on social media asking if anybody would be okay with me asking them about the impact that motherhood might have had on their careers. And I got a huge number of responses ! People were sharing my call-out all over the place. So I ended up doing about 50 interviews and they were quite comprehensive. It was a very emotional experience and it really turned out that this had not been a question that artists had been asked about before. They felt that they essentially needed to hide their status as mothers in the art world and they clearly felt it had a huge impact on their careers.

This question of "motherhood" versus the more gender-neutral "parenthood," it's a question that comes up quite a lot. People have quite strong feelings about it either way. Some people feel really strongly that "mother" is a term that we need to retain. I mean I've asked, for example, contemporaries of mine working in India – or from other cultures where the mother is an extremely important figure – and they feel very strongly that we should retain the term "mother." And I think also there was a feeling that in losing the term "mother," we lose sight of this legacy of hidden labor that mothers have had to do over centuries. But there is equally a feeling that in using the term "mother," this ends up becoming a women's issue rather than a societal issue. And that really what we're working towards here, is gender parity and the idea that there should be a balance in labor of bringing up children. I feel both of those perspectives quite keenly. Of course, the long-term goal here is to work towards greater equality and to make sure that this is seen as a societal issue, rather than just a women's issue. But I do think it's also important to acknowledge the fact that there's currently a huge gender pay-gap, there's a huge gender care-gap and that (particularly as we saw during the pandemic) the bulk of childcare still falls to women.

### **Katie Kheriji-Watts**

It just speaks so much to some of the larger tensions of our time, which is the policing of language and making sure that you're conveying the right sort of values. So I appreciate that you tackle this because finding the right balance between the two and trying to include as many people as possible is not such an easy task. So, continuing in this vein, you've summarized the findings of your research in a book which is called [How Not to Exclude Artist-Mothers \(and](#)

*Other Parents*) which, I have to say I've had the privilege of reading before it officially launches in October 2022. Who is the title of your book meant to address?

### **Hettie Judah**

It's really a very broad title. I think, as I say in the introduction, the parentheses contain more people than sit outside the parentheses. So by "and other parents" I don't just mean fathers and parents who don't identify as mothers. It then extends also, I think, to other art workers and really to other people working in many different cultural spheres. Although my background is specifically in visual art, I think that a lot of the issues that come up in the book are ones that are probably keenly felt by people working in the theater, in film, in music, for example. And I know that I've experienced (in different ways) a lot of the same issues as a writer, as somebody working in publishing and in magazines. And indeed, as a kind of corollary to this book, I'm about to start a new enterprise called the Artworking Parents Alliance over here in the UK, which is really a support network for parents working in the arts, because there's a lot of stuff that's really not addressed very well, there aren't well-established protocols around things like maternity leave. And there's also an expectation that people can be available all the time. And so I think that this book is not simply going to be (hopefully !) useful for artists, but hopefully it will be, at the very least, inspiring, galvanizing, infuriating possibly even, and useful for all kinds of people working in the cultural sphere.

### **Katie Kheriji-Watts**

One of the chapters in your book focuses on residencies, and it's a chapter in which you make an important distinction: the difference between being child-friendly and being parent-friendly. What's the difference?

### **Hettie Judah**

I think we all know museums have, to a greater or lesser extent, provisions for families, for example. So you can go to a museum and – sometimes if you're in a really lovely museum like the Bozar in Brussels or The Art House in Wakefield – you can pick up a little box of activities to go and do with your kids and they can have a lovely integrated experience. That's a family friendly activity. It is an activity that is one in which the child is the focus of the activity. There's a crucial difference in having an activity that's a parent friendly activity because that is an activity in which the needs of the parent are also being addressed. And the needs of the parent aren't only to do with caregiving, they're also to do with having a life of the mind and having that life of the mind addressed. So a parent-friendly activity might be one in which the parent is attending, for example, an artist talk, or a screening, or some kind of live event or performance, and their

children are welcome but it's essentially the needs of the parent, the needs of parent to have a cultural experience, to have their life of the mind nurtured, that are being addressed. So that's a broad distinction that I would give to cover cultural experiences generally. And I think it's a really important distinction to make because parents aren't just there to look after their children. They're still thinking, responsive people that also have social needs. They've got intellectual needs, they have cultural needs.

When it comes to residencies, I mean this is something that's very particular. There are residencies that can be child-friendly that will invite an artist to come with their child (or children) and possibly also with a partner or with another supportive adult that can come and help care for the children. But there's also the potential for a residency to be flexible in the way that it addresses the needs of the parents. So that it's not necessarily bringing the children on-site but that it can offer a residency that allows a parent actually to have time away from their children, that can be flexible around the needs of that parent as a caregiver. So, rather than saying quite dogmatically, "our residency is for a month, it has to take place all in one go and that's that," it can perhaps work with the artist to create a residency that accommodates their needs.

So, for example, it might be quite difficult for a parent to leave their children with someone for an entire month but they could maybe divide that month up into, let's say, four weeks spread over the course of a year. And they could then maybe work with their partner (if they have one) or with their parents or with friends to kind of put together a network of care that can accommodate their children over that time so they could maybe come in four different batches. Or they could say, "well, you know, this residency is really important for me in terms of the recognition that it's bringing to my career. It's really important for me to have some special time away from my children, but it's going to be difficult for me to take all of that time. But I would really love it if I could benefit from some of the structure that's provided by that residency." So that might be mentoring, it might be working towards a specific goal. It might be simply in saying, "I'm going to set this month aside as a special time to think about my work in a particular way and it's working towards the end point of a show, but I'm not going to be able to do all of that on-site. Could you work with me so that I, maybe out of that month, spend two weeks on site and for two weeks I'm also benefiting from the mentoring that that residency is providing and that I do get to be represented in the exhibition that's at the end, and that I do get to have the prestige of this residency that I can add to my resume." So I still get some of the benefits of the residency. And believe me, as a parent, I will really make every moment that I'm working on site count for a lot and I will really benefit so much from the mentoring and other structures that you can support me with even if I'm not actually there on site.



**Katie Kheriji-Watts**

Although one of the things that you point out in your book, which I think goes a little bit contrary to general assumption, is that arts workers who have children, especially when they're young, don't want to or aren't able to travel. But your research shows that for many people this is simply not true. And you point out that being able to step away from the everyday is particularly important for many people with caring responsibilities.

**Hettie Judah**

Yes. Again, one thing I do point out in the book is that artist-parents aren't a monolithic block. They all have different wants and needs, they have different things they can feel comfortable with. I absolutely think that for anyone who's gone through any massive life change - whether that's an illness where they've come through an episode where they found their mental health to be very challenging, whether they've been caring for someone, or whether they've started a family - actually it can be incredibly important to have that moment of pivot, that moment of restart, that moment to kind of recharge the batteries, to reimagine what their career might be, what kind of art they might want to make. So I think, as you say, for a parent in particular, a residency can be a really important experience to have that kind of moment of reset, that moment of contemplation actually, a kind of step away from the everyday.

Some artists will feel really strongly that they want to do this with their family, with their children. And some artists will feel really strongly that they don't want to do this with their family, they'll want to have a bit of quiet time, a bit of head-space. Some artists really want to start making work with their children. There are artists that I interviewed for the books that have a really collaborative practice with their children. (And indeed, I'm putting an exhibition on and we will feature work that artists have made with their children.) There are other artists that are making completely abstract art, or they're making work that's really political, or they're making work that's looking at geological deep time and they want to keep that siloed off from their children and keeping that separation between their family life and their studio life is their way of staying sane. So people have really diverse needs. But yes, as you point out, the offer of a residency, a kind of pivotal moment to recharge, to rethink, I think can be incredibly important for parents.

**Katie Kheriji-Watts**

I think that one particular barrier (at least from my perspective) that people can have is that they're not sure exactly where to find residencies, particularly, that will be parent-friendly.

## **Hettie Judah**

Yes. Actually, we haven't talked about it, but I put together a manifesto about a year ago with a whole group of artists which was specifically aimed at residencies and institutions about [how to deal better with artist-parents](#). Since then, I've obviously been in touch with a really large number of artists-parents and artists-mothers organizations around the world. And there are organizations absolutely around the world. I'm in touch with people in Japan, in Indonesia, in Korea, in Brazil, because obviously this is... I hate to call motherhood an "issue," but this is a phenomenon that has an impact on artists absolutely everywhere. There are amazing organizations and networks absolutely everywhere but they're not necessarily very easy to find. I'm often contacted by new parents who say, "I feel completely isolated. I'm really lonely. I feel I'm the first person that's gone through this experience. I don't know where to turn. I can't make work, and none of my artist friends want to speak to me anymore because I've got a baby. What do I do?" And it's really sad because there are great organizations out there that they could be in touch with but they're very hard to find.

And so one thing that I want to do is set up a wiki site which unites all of these different organizations around the world. It would be self-governing and open-source so that each of these organizations can have their own page that links out to their website. It would be a central hub for people to go to – to find residencies, to find networks, to find prize-giving organizations. Whether it's people that can give them a bit of support or whether it's an international or a local residency, they could type in a couple of search terms and find something that would work for them. And I think that could really help people ! I don't, at the moment, have the wherewithal to set this up, but I think it would be really easy to. I've got a huge document with about 100 organizations that I can jam straight in there, and making it a wiki site would mean that people can add themselves if they're a new organization or they've changed the way they behave. But it also means that people can remove themselves or manage the way they're represented. There's no central organization, nobody's centrally responsible for it, so that people could really have some kind of agency about the way they appear on it. I think it could be a really valuable tool for people. If I could set it up that's one for the future, I think it would be a good thing to do.

## **Katie Kheriji-Watts**

But I think you're also speaking about just a broader point which is the need for organizations to really put it upon themselves to say, "we are parent friendly and this is how we can help you and these are the things that we put in place," and communicating in a very clear way that this is something that they're putting in place or at least trying to attempt to deal with.

## **Hettie Judah**

Yeah, the first and most important thing is just to say that you're interested in hosting children at your residency or hosting children at your institution. Just that very first gesture makes an enormous difference ! One of the things that I point out in the book is that actually this isn't about putting really expensive new infrastructure in place. Quite often it's about really basic courtesy. It's about being polite to people. It's about forethought. It's about asking people what they need and what they want. It's about being a little bit flexible. It's about having conversations as opposed to pre-supposing that, for example, an artist who's pregnant is no longer going to be interested in having a commission for the next year, that an artist who's got a young family is no longer going to be interested in a residency. It's all about asking artists what they want and just being a bit thoughtful.

Also, there's a really bad culture in the art world of demanding an awful lot of unpaid labor from artists – expecting them to be available and present 24/7, making last minute demands of artists, which is particularly difficult if you have caregiving responsibilities. So actually kind of stepping away from that, I think, quite toxic culture that's not good for anyone. It's not good for any artist, but we all feel that if we don't participate in it, if we don't feed the beast, that we'll be somehow excluded, we'll be thought of as difficult. So I think, for all of us, it's just more to do with treating one another carefully and being considerate. That's the thing that's going to make a big difference. It's not to do with making sure you've got safety guards on your stairs or having plug socket covers or something like that. Or you know, having to make loads of expensive changes. Really the biggest changes, as you say, have to do with just saying “this is a parent friendly residency, we can be flexible.”

## **Katie Kheriji-Watts**

I want to continue a little bit with this point you make about some not so great aspects of the art world and the way that people behave (in a really general sense). In your book, you also quote the artist Hito Steyerl who says that “free labor and rampant exploitation are the invisible dark matter that keeps the cultural sector going.” And I want to draw you out a little bit about how this particular truth intersects with your work as an art critic. I ask because last year I listened to a really great [interview with a food critic named Tejal Rao](#) and she said that she'd been thinking a lot about what makes a restaurant good. Meaning that if people are being exploited at every single point possible along the way, how good can a restaurant really be? And I was wondering if this particular issue has impacted how you think about or see your role as an art critic.

## **Hettie Judah**

There's been a huge amount of discussion in the UK recently – specifically by an organization called Industria which last year was collecting [testimonies from artists about the fees they were paid by various organizations](#). And quite often it was the more senior and prestigious organizations that were assuming that artists would do an enormous amount of labor for very low fees.

In terms of my role as an art critic, it's difficult because I think this really comes under the heading of institutional critique, which is less something that I engage in. I've written quite a bit about the lack of social mobility in the art world. And it does quite often really dismay me when I read about the kind of terrible practice that happens in British arts organizations when you realize that, for example, their diversity hiring policy just extends to the lower levels of an organization that they're not prepared to be changed from within by the brilliant young people they're hiring. That essentially, people felt there was a glass ceiling and they were there as window dressing. And it's absolutely shocking and disgusting when you hear reports of that kind of thing. And it really dismays me and makes me worry about the fact that I'm encouraging more young people to come into the arts. I feel deeply conflicted about reviewing exhibitions in organizations that I know have really poor employment practices and don't treat artists well.

But I think there's also an extent to which, as a writer, I'm also asking artists for quotes and to be interviewed all the time for the newspaper, and that's all unpaid labor. I guess there's an expectation that if you have an exhibition that you do do some press and publicity. But it is very much an artist's prerogative not to do that. And I really respect people that have the strength of will to say, “actually, I'm not going to do any personal press appearances, and I'd prefer that a critic came and responded to my work.”

## **Katie Kheriji-Watts**

Don't worry, I'm not trying to throw you under the bus. It was just very interesting for me to hear her talk about the idea that criticism could potentially include something larger than just a purely aesthetic experience. That it could include potentially, at least for some people who write criticism, an examination of the conditions in which that aesthetic experience is produced.

## **Hettie Judah**

It's kind of funny because when I used to work in publishing I actually did use a food paradigm when I was discussing the financial practices of a certain publisher (who shall remain nameless). And I remember a friend in food telling me that if you bought a chicken and it was

priced under a certain amount that somewhere along the line bad things were happening – the chicken was being poorly treated, it was not being given the right food, the people that were working to produce that chicken weren't being paid enough. And it's very much also the way with, for example, publishers who are constantly trying to get images but that they're not paying the artists the rights for the images. Artists are exploited a lot ! Most artists are paid very little. And unfortunately, as is the case actually in many ways in different sectors of society, those artists that have the wherewithal to make sure that their rights are being protected and that they are being paid are usually those artists that already have quite a strong infrastructure because they're already being well-remunerated for their work. So it's definitely the artists "at the bottom of the tree" that are having to do most of the unpaid labor. There's so much unpaid labor in the art world, it's quite astonishing.

### **Katie Kheriji-Watts**

I want to keep drawing you out a little bit on your broader perspective on some of these issues as someone who works in the media and in publishing and has for quite some time. And I specifically want to talk about this because your book has six main chapters, which are all great, and they detail different aspects of the visual art world ecology such as higher education, commercial galleries, and residencies (which we've already talked about). But I think I have to say that, for me, there was maybe one chapter missing – especially, as I said, knowing that you're a journalist and an author – which would have been about the media. And what I mean by that is that a lot of traditional or what we call "legacy publishing" outlets have, through their choice of subjects and how they treat them, been very much a part of creating this myth of the artist as detached, or not having caring responsibilities, or just not necessarily including that as part of the narrative or a story around an artist. And I was wondering, what's your sense of how this might be tied into the exclusion of artist-parents?

### **Hettie Judah**

Well, I do touch on that a little bit in the chapter called "The Artist Studio" where I look at the way that the studio has become this kind of mythic site that's very much fetishised in the media. There's this whole idea of the artist as this kind of free subject that's there in their studio, able to create away from the world of work. There's definitely been, of course, this kind of "lifestylisation" of the art world. When I used to write for The New York Times, essentially what they wanted was good-looking artists in an aesthetically drippy studio that they could photograph. There was this idea that an artist would have some cool house that you could photograph. And it's like, yeah, most artists don't have that kind of financial stability to live or work somewhere that you can go to and do some luxurious lifestyle shoot. I don't particularly

like this kind of “lifestylisation” of the art world. It's something that I've felt intensely uncomfortable about and didn't particularly want to participate in, which is partly why I stopped writing for certain publications. Because I think it also then becomes somewhat a part of that whole Instagram world in which it looks like everybody's beautiful and living this easy, luxurious life. And it's of course all a complete illusion.

It's interesting that you talk about legacy media. I think that social media now, is actually much more toxic, perhaps, in the way that it gives this impression that everybody has this kind of beautiful life with lovely children who are always wonderfully dressed and looking cute and they're terribly productive and you're just seeing their points of success. And of course, there are people that kind of push against that quite hard. I think I'm quite lucky in that I had kids in the era before social media. But I think a lot of people who have young families in the social media era find "mumstagram" quite challenging and also kind of, at times, quite a toxic space. So I think in a way that's almost more pernicious these days than newspapers.

But yeah, certainly in terms of the book world, I've been trying to get an art historical book on art and motherhood published for a few years now, and it's constantly getting knocked back as a niche subject. So it's definitely not something that they consider to be of interest to people. You know, obviously motherhood has been portrayed a lot historically, but it's largely being portrayed by men. And certainly in Europe, it's largely been portrayed from a Catholic tradition where mothers are either the Blessed Virgin, or some kind of fallen woman who's out on the streets with their child having engaged in (god forbid !) sex for non-reproductive purposes, or it's the kind of Victorian angel in the house. And I think, actually to start looking quite seriously at the way that people who have experienced motherhood or parenthood at close-quarters first-hand is really important ! And there's lots of art, certainly art from the era of the feminist avant-garde, that's in danger of being forgotten because it was never written into the art history of that time. You know, it's that old thing. If you don't see yourself represented, it's difficult to locate yourself within art history, it's difficult to locate yourself in that art world.

### **Katie Kheriji-Watts**

I have one final question for you. Your professional and writerly interests go well beyond the topic of parenthood. And I do know that one of those interests is women's desires and how they're represented culturally. And so I wanted to ask you, what are you desiring most strongly right now for the art world on an international level ?

**Hettie Judah**

Oh ! Well, my interest in women's desire is quite specifically sexual desire, I should say, I don't think I particularly have a libidinal feeling towards the art world,

**Katie Kheriji-Watts**

Probably for the best !

**Hettie Judah**

But I think my desire for the art world... it's really interesting. Obviously, when the pandemic hit, there was lots of discussion about everything slowing down and people taking stock and developing more sustainable practices. And of course, as soon as things started to lift again, we went straight back to the bad old ways and everyone's flying around the world. It feels that we've gone back to the excesses of the pre-pandemic era.

My great desire for the art world, actually, is that it really does take stock and it starts to look at more sustainable practices. More sustainable from an environmental perspective, so less travel. But also more sustainable from a mental health perspective, because I don't think actually, for anyone, it's healthy to be constantly moving around, constantly having to overproduce. For the artists, this pressure to overproduce, to fulfill the requirements of galleries that constantly need art fair booths filled, it's an enormous pressure, it's really stressful and unpleasant. I think there's an enormous amount of art that's being produced that's ending up in freeports or in storage, that's just being bought as an asset class. I think this kind of hyper-accelerated art market, I don't think it's really doing anyone any good, actually, because I don't think it's necessarily allowing more people to come into the art world. I think it ends up putting pressure on a few people who are then developing a kind of factory-like production of work. So my great desire for the art world is, I'm afraid to say, not a sexy desire at all, but it's a desire that it becomes more sustainable, both environmentally and interpersonally and psychologically in the long-term.

**Katie Kheriji-Watts**

I don't know, I think health and sex kind of go together.

**Hettie Judah**

Yes, maybe if we stop having to travel around we'll have more time for sex, more energy for it !

## **Katie Kheriji-Watts**

Hettie, it has been my absolute pleasure to speak with you. I love this book. Well, maybe love is not the right word. I love that you wrote this book. A lot of the things that are in it are really difficult to read. But I'm so glad that you have written it. There are lots of things, books and other things really coming around this topic, so I think it's just an example of how important it is for us to really tackle this issue, talk about it, and listen to the people who are most concerned. So thank you.

## **Hettie Judah**

Thank you so much for having me Katie.

---

This episode was commissioned by [On the Move](#), produced with the support of the French Ministry of Culture, and edited by [Émilie Wadelle](#).

Points of Entry can be found online at [pointsofentry.com](http://pointsofentry.com) and [instagram.com/pointsofentry](https://www.instagram.com/pointsofentry).

commissioned by

**ON  
THE  
MOVE**

produced with the support of

