

Kate Just

Artist's Statement

At the age of twenty-six, I was shaken by the death of my cherished, adopted younger brother Billy. After the funeral, my mother taught me to knit. Looking back, this obsessive loop-making was a solemn tribute to the social as well as biological weaving of our family. It also operated as an act of resistance against any further unravelling. As I knitted, I repetitively felt the sadness, the silence, the clicking, the counting, the sadness, my mother's breathing, the clicking, the closeness of her body, the sadness, the counting, the clicking, the clicking, the clicking.

Travelling full circle between that moment and now, the knitted and photographic works featured here narrate my own experience of mothering, and my bond to my adopted daughter named Hope. These works were developed during a residency in Barcelona, where I was accompanied by Hope and my partner Paula. In Spain, the usual neat divide between family time and studio time collapsed, stimulating an unexpected and deeply personal reflection on Hope's and my own experiences of love, loss and renewal.

The Armour of Hope is both a knitted armour for Hope and a photograph of her wearing it. It materially manifests a vision I first had of Hope in armour when she joined our family at the age of two. During her two week transition into our family, Hope revealed herself as someone who had protected herself from many hurts, while remaining truly open in the face of new experiences. Knitted on tiny needles in a soft thread bearing two intertwined strands of metal and silk, the armour exemplifies these dualities. Suspended from the ceiling by fishing line, Hope's lacy silver suit resembles the outer shell of a crustacean. With tiny mitten shaped hands, slipper shaped feet and a rounded hood, the armour also takes the form of a child's snow suit or pyjamas, underscoring the particularly diminutive scale of the body for which it is made. The knitted armour stands as a relic of the bravery Hope mustered, and will continue to muster in the face of the loss of her biological mother. However, the medium of knitting, and its associations with contact and nurturance suggest the potential to craft new connections. The transformation of pain and lack into connection is channelled through the rhythmic action and processes of knitting. Through the sounds and presence of my body knitting in the Barcelona studio, and the act of measuring her body, Hope and I made contact. As I cast each loop of her suit between my hands, dressed Hope's body in this 'special' layer acknowledging her strength, and positioned this work as central to an exhibition, I performed and transmitted to Hope her belonging in my life, the value of newfound maternal contact.

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Studies in the Maternal, 5(1), 2013, www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk

The photographic work *The Armour of Hope* brings Hope to presence, and presence to the suit. Featuring a child just out of toddlerhood, *The Armour of Hope* seems to also suggest a parental desire to wrap or cover one's child in cotton wool or offer excess protection from the outside world. However, Hope's classical pose on a Moorish tiled floor also conjures an image of other brave young women in armour, from Athena to Joan of Arc. This iconography also refers to my own subjective experience of being mothered. I was taught to fight, work for and claim a meaningful existence in the world. By dressing Hope in armour, I express my own intention to forge female genealogies of strength.

This fierce stance continues with *The Arms of Mother*. The photograph depicts my torso; arms covered with knitted 'skin' scar embroidered with the words 'Hope' and 'Mother' are crossed in a posture of defence. The dual meaning of the word 'arms' in the title conjures a picture of a maternal haven or stockpile of weaponry, further reflecting my own experience of what motherhood requires. Manifesting the recent changes to my bodily and familial fabric, the stitches and scars sustain the indelible presence of my daughter in my world, and the optimism I hold for both our lives. Beside this photograph is a picture of Hope's softly arched arms, relaxed and contented. She almost appears to be hugging herself.

There is always Hope.