

LENKA CLAYTON



MUSTACHES & MOTHERHOOD

MEGAN LYKINS REICH

*“Our baby is due tomorrow. I forgot this strangest of feelings
of waiting quietly for everything in the world to change.”*

—Lenka Clayton, *Studio Diary* entry, May 20, 2013¹

Lenka Clayton became a mother when she gave birth to her son, Otto, in April 2011. Five months later, I welcomed motherhood for the second time when my son Jasper was born. Motherhood changes you. Yet, you are still so much the woman you were before motherhood that it is often hard to reconcile the two realities. Right after my daughter Piper’s birth in 2009, I existed in a liminal space filled with joy, confusion, pain, and anxiety. This dramatic haze lifted when my daughter and I had a “moment”—a kind of intimate exchange, an unspoken affirmation of a new world—and something fell into place. A shift at the core. Perhaps the moment I accepted motherhood.

In September 2012, Clayton began an official Artist Residency in Motherhood, created by the artist and supported by The Pittsburgh Foundation. It was originally set to last until Otto’s second birthday, but was extended by the birth of Clayton’s daughter, Early, in May 2013. A steadfast experiment in combining two seemingly incompatible experiences, the project pushes together the open, autonomous freedom of artist residencies and the often isolating, bound routines of motherhood. It provides for things like materials and a travel allowance but also requires accountability. Through the residency, Clayton has produced numerous musings, artworks, project ideas, and collaborative activities. Reviewing this output as a curator, the work is prolific, smart, sensitive, relevant. Reviewing it as a mother, it is authentic, tender, bewildering, accurate.

Clayton works within the physical and emotional spaces surrounding her, often starting with a simple idea or mundane object. Nearly everything, from the items her son places in his mouth (an impressive range) to discarded ephemera in a tiny thrift store, is fodder for Clayton. She applies an intense, compassionate focus to these materials in order to draw out hidden, lost, or new meaning. Clayton’s subtle mediations yield significant, often transformative outcomes, as revealed in the suite of her found text works featured in *Realization is Better than Anticipation*.

Ta Da (2013) is a small blue spiral-bound notebook Clayton found at an estate sale in a child’s magic kit. The cover is hand-decorated with two pieces of electrical tape that form wonky vertical black lines. Inside, an unknown author hand-wrote only two things: an underlined header, “Magic Show,” and one bulleted phrase, “Find the Card.” Clayton had a tiny mechanism mounted to the book so that its cover slowly opens and then quickly shuts, allowing only momentary glances at the content within. *Ta Da* emphasizes the excitement and magic of discovery, both for the original author, finding a new hobby, and the current viewer, glimpsing the book’s “secret.” The work also signifies the struggle to maintain the energy and commitment required to transform curiosity into expertise.

For *100 Returned Postcards* (2013), Clayton resent 100 postcards dated from 1906 to 1992 to their original addresses, located in Cleveland and the surrounding suburbs. To each postcard, Clayton added MOCA Cleveland as the return address. Sent out three weeks before the exhibition, the cards may or may not return to the Museum; if and when they do, they will be displayed in the gallery and available for the audience to read.

Some of these postcards contain short greetings while others convey messages of deep love, longing, sadness, and hope. In its broad range of communications, *100 Returned Postcards* generates humorous, puzzling, and intimate encounters for readers. The work conveys a new notion of preciousness, one found not in each postcard's intrinsic value, but in the treasured relationships they represent. Each simultaneously symbolizes specific bonds and shared experiences.

Likewise, *Two Collections* (2013) and *Accidental Haiku* (2008) underscore the deep potential of personal significance. In both works, Clayton deftly infuses a discarded, commonplace object with enchanting potential. In *Two Collections*, Clayton displays a selection of tiny newspaper clippings that she found at a thrift store, upside-down and floating between two pieces of glass. A mirror positioned below the clippings reveals the collection's unifying element: the Pittsburgh Steelers logo. In *Accidental Haiku*, Clayton extracted chance Haiku poems from a set of anonymous diaries from 1975. In Clayton's hands, the diary's entries—short formulaic notes about the weather and daily activities—become poetic reflections on life:

TEMP 0° TO 20°/
CLOUDY/
TOOK JENNIE UP TO/
HAIRDRESSER

A record keeper herself, Clayton revitalizes these bygone collections, letters, and ideas with a kind of artistic “sleight of hand” that expands their meaning. Clayton's nuanced, incisive aesthetic results in works that are at once fresh and nostalgic. To experience them is to find yourself somewhere between being tickled and rapt. Although couched in daily life, Clayton's art transcends its origins and offers new visions of the everyday.

Which brings me back to motherhood. One drawback of pouring over Clayton's recent residency activity is that it reveals to me my own lack. Not as a mother, but as an observer of motherhood. In preparing for this essay, I considered applying or adapting one of Clayton's actions to my own experience of mothering. It was a fruitless endeavor, in part because the impetus was itself fraudulent. This is important, as it points to the sincerity of Clayton's practice. Her work comes directly from her *self* and the things immediately around her—nearby physical things like people and objects, along with proximate concepts and conventions—in which she finds potential. In order to replicate her kind of earnest engagement, I would have to work within my own sensibilities.

Ultimately, it was my daughter who provided what I might call a “Lenka” moment of creative response. While driving to daycare on a recent muggy morning, Piper exclaimed, “Mommy, the car has a mustache!” I thought I heard her wrong, so I asked her to clarify: “Which car, baby? Did you say a mustache?” Unfazed, she replied, giggling, “No, our car, Mommy. Look, our car has a mustache!” I turned forward again to see a perfectly symmetrical pattern of condensation on the front windshield. Indeed, a perfect car mustache. Even if I wasn't running late or thinking of a million other things, I would never have noticed this humorously-shaped mist cloud. And, without knowing Clayton's work, I might have paid less attention to Piper's observation. I turned off the radio and told Piper that she had made the most creative observation of the day. She was thrilled. I was moved.

In the press release for the Artist Residency in Motherhood, Clayton defines as the primary goal that “fragmented mental focus, exhaustion, nap-length studio time and countless distractions of parenthood, as well as the absurd poetry of time spent with a young child, will become the artist's working materials and situation, rather than obstacles to be escaped from.” Motherhood changes everything. But a dedicated, purposeful look at motherhood (or collections, or neighbors, or old notes, or childhood hobbies), can change how you see and find meaning in life's daily routines.

¹ Details of Clayton's work are available on her websites, residencyinmotherhood.com and lenkaclayton.co.uk

LENKA CLAYTON



Artist's Statement

In common with all new parents, the birth of my first child in April 2011 changed many things in my life. One of those changes has been the way I and others think about my career as an artist. I find now that many aspects of the professional art world are closed to artists with families. Most prestigious artist residencies for example specifically exclude families from attending. Despite a legacy of public artist/parents it still seems to be a commonly held belief that being an engaged mother and serious artist are mutually exclusive endeavors. I don't believe or want to perpetrate this. I like to imagine the two roles not as competing directions but to view them, force them gently if necessary, to inform one another.

I will undergo this self-imposed artist residency in order to fully experience and explore the fragmented focus, nap-length studio time, limited movement and resources and general upheaval that parenthood brings and allow it to shape the direction of my work, rather than try to work "despite it".

This website will document my attempts.

Let's see.

L.C. September 2012

Lenka Clayton, *Artist's Statement for Residency in Motherhood*, 2012. Courtesy by the artist.

ARTIST

RESIDENCY

IN MOTHERHOOD

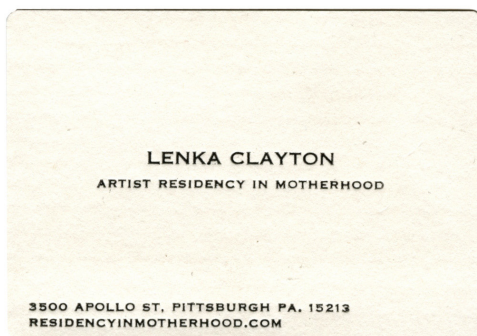
HOME ABOUT STUDIO DIARY ARTWORK INSPIRATION FEEDBACK CONTACT



Between 9th September 2012 and 24th April 2013, ***
Lenka Clayton is the official ARTIST IN RESIDENCE IN MOTHERHOOD,
a conceptual Artist Residency that takes place inside her own home
and life as a mother. This website documents the 227 day residency.

*** ARTIST RESIDENCY IN MOTHERHOOD EXTENDED ***

Due to the imminent arrival of her second child,
Lenka Clayton's term as the Artist in Residence in Motherhood
has been extended. It will now conclude on the occasion of the as
yet unborn child's first birthday. Exact date to be announced.



TOP: Lenka Clayton, Screenshot *Artist Residency in Motherhood*, 2012-ongoing. Courtesy of the artist.
BELOW: Lenka Clayton, *Artist Residency in Motherhood Business Cards*, 2012. Printed by Encyclopedia Destructica, Pittsburgh. Courtesy of the artist.

LENKA CLAYTON



LISTS OF LENKA CLAYTON

DAN BYERS

Lenka Clayton makes beautiful use of people, places, and things. By counting, accumulating, organizing, disorganizing, alphabetizing, employing the possibilities of the post office, local newspaper, and the most common domestic objects—and doing all of these things often to their utmost—she transforms both the world around her (near and far), and the way we each see that world. It's no surprise, then, that museums are often the site of her explorations, being that they purport to provide order, but often end up accumulating and displaying with the same levels of subjectivity, exaggeration, subtly-laced playfulness, and even wonder, which are the hallmarks of much of Clayton's work. What follows is an inventory and classification of many of her projects. Most all can be found on her websites: lenkaclayton.co.uk and residencyinmotherhood.com.

Number of times Lenka counts things (and sometimes puts them in order): **12**

- *1/57th of Andy Warhol*
- *10,000 Pennies*
- *7,000 Stones*
- *Accidental Haiku*
- *Berlin Berlin*
- *Hello*
- *Local Newspaper*
- *Number of People*
- *One Million*
- *People in Order*
- *Same Age Sculptures*
- *Time = Money*

Number of times this counting has involved peoples' ages: **3**

- *People in Order*
- *Same Age Sculptures*
- *Time = Money*

Number of times the number 100 defines the set: **3**

- *100 Returned Postcards*
- *One Brown Shoe*
- *People in Order*

Number of times Lenka employs the number 2, mirroring, or a pair: **10**

- *100 Returned Postcards*
- *Artist Residency in Motherhood Business Cards*
- *Berlin Berlin*
- *Berliner Zeitung*
- *Conversation*
- *James to Lenka*
- *One Brown Shoe*
- *Same Age Sculptures*
- *Two Collections*
- *Voices*

Number of times Lenka puts things in ABC order: **4**

- *Alphabetical Shopping*
- *Berliner Zeitung*
- *Qaeda, quality, question, quickly, quickly, quiet*
- *The Top Deck of the Number 30 Bus*

Number of times when peoples' names matter: **9**

- *Artist Residency in Motherhood Business Cards*
- *Business Card (Adjustable)*
- *Business Card (Romanian)*
- *Hello*
- *James to Lenka*
- *Local Newspaper*
- *Mysterious Letters*
- *The Top Deck of the Number 30 Bus*
- *Women's Intuition*

Number of times Lenka might not finish a project because she is mortal: **2**

- *Mysterious Letters*
- *One Million*

Number of times Lenka makes magic happen in cities: **10**

- *10,000 Pennies*

- *A Walk with Erich Honecker*
- *Accomplice*
- *Hello*
- *Mysterious Letters*
- *Number of People*
- *Palm Tree Interviews*
- *Slow Magic Tricks*
- *Ta Da*
- *The Top Deck of the Number 30 Bus*

Number of times Lenka makes magic happen in the country: **2**

- *7,000 Stones*
- *Amish photographs*

Number of times Lenka makes magic at home: **1**

- *The Baby and the Magician's Suitcase*

Number of times Lenka directly uses her son in a beautiful, non-creepy way that articulates the complexities of motherhood, and the haphazard relationships we all have – to each other and the world around us: **6**

- *An Artist Residency in Motherhood Business Cards*
- *The Baby and the Magician's Suitcase*
- *Maternity Leave*
- *Mother's Days*
- *The Distance I can be from my Son*
- *Things Found in the Mouths of Babies*

Number of times Lenka directly uses her son and the results are uncomfortable, and express the complexities of motherhood: **1**

- *A Nice Family Portrait*

Number of times safety results in sculpture: **2**

- *Childproofing as a Sculptural Practice*
- *Dangerous Objects made Safer*

Number of times Lenka cuts up a perfectly good garment to conceptually resonant effect: **2**

- *1/57th of Andy Warhol*
- *Man, Baby, Boy, Man, and So On*

Number of times Lenka uses the post: **3**

- *Flock*
- *Kite Flown 7055 Miles*
- *Mysterious Letters*

Number of times the newspaper plays an important role: **5**

- *10,000 Pennies*
- *Berliner Zeitung*
- *Local Newspaper*
- *Mysterious Letters*
- *Two Collections*

Number of times Lenka takes trips using a "non-traditional" guidebook or map: **5**

- *Democratic People's Republic of Korea*
- *James to Lenka*
- *Lost*
- *A Day in New York City*
- *The Distance I can be from my Son*

Number of times Lenka gently tweaks the authority, behavior, collections, and atmosphere of museums: **10**

- *Herd*
- *7,000 Stones*
- *Childproofing as Sculptural Practice*
- *Coat Check Exchange*
- *Intact*
- *Iceberg*
- *Man Looking*
- *Maternity Leave*
- *Your Contribution to our History...*
- *Intact*

Number of times Lenka (potentially) breaks the law: **5**

- *Accomplice (Örebro)*
- *Accomplice (Vienna)*
- *10,000 Pennies*
- *Hostile Reconnaissance*
- *Mysterious Letters*

Number of times Lenka (might) make people mad: **6**

- *Accomplice (Örebro)*
- *Accomplice (Vienna)*
- *Hello*
- *Iceberg*
- *Hostile Reconnaissance*
- *Mysterious Letters*

Number of times Lenka uses something seemingly random that she finds in the world, and makes rational meaning and function for it through new context: **8**

- *7,000 Stones*
- *Accidental Haiku*
- *Man Looking*

- *Moons from Next Door*
- *A Day in New York City*
- *100 Returned Postcards*
- *Things Found in the Mouths of Babies*
- *Time = Money*

Number of times Lenka makes something with a rational function or meaning seemingly random or abstracted through a new context of display or organization: **9**

- *1/57th of Andy Warhol*
- *10,000 Pennies*
- *The Baby and the Magician's Suitcase*
- *Berlin*
- *Dangerous Objects Made Safer*
- *Herd*
- *One Million*
- *Qaeda, quality, question, quickly, quickly, quiet*
- *Two Collections*

Number of times Lenka makes art based on the occasion of someone conscientiously seeing something: **4**

- *Man Looking*
- *Number of People*
- *Slow Magic Tricks*
- *Typewriter Drawings*

Number of times Lenka makes poetic, humorous, critical, or whimsical use of the natural world: **7**

- *7,000 Stones*
- *A Piece of the Moon*
- *Flock*
- *Herd*
- *Iceberg*
- *Moons from Next Door*
- *Slow Magic Tricks*

Number of times Lenka talks to or writes to strangers: **20**

- *100 Returned Postcards*
- *A Piece of the Moon*
- *Accomplice (Örebro)*
- *Accomplice (Vienna)*
- *All the Art on Kopenhagener Strasse*
- *Amish Photographs*
- *Berlin Berlin*
- *Conversation*
- *Flock*
- *Hello*
- *Hostile Reconnaissance*
- *James to Lenka*
- *Local Newspaper*
- *Lost*
- *Mysterious Letters*
- *Palm Tree Interviews*
- *People in Order*
- *Sweden (Borrowed and Stolen)*
- *The Top Deck of the Number 30 Bus*
- *Your Contribution to our History...*

Number of times Lenka has built houses without building a house: **2**

- *House*
- *Repairing Lebanon*

Number of times Lenka takes things from people: **4**

- *Accomplice (Örebro)*
- *Accomplice (Vienna)*
- *All the Art on Kopenhagener Strasse*
- *Sweden (Borrowed and Stolen)*

Number of times Lenka has returned something: **1**

- *100 Returned Postcards*

Number of times Lenka gives things to people: **3**

- *7,000 Stones*
- *Mysterious Letters*
- *Your Contribution to our History...*

Number of times Lenka has re-created something using a wildly different material than the original: **5**

- *Amish Photographs*
- *Dangerous Objects Made Safer*
- *Intact*
- *North Korean Pointing Stick(s)*
- *Repairing Lebanon*

Number of times Lenka makes me feel pretty great about being alive, and generally positive about other people: **14**

- *100 Returned Postcards*
- *A Day in New York City*
- *Accidental Haiku*
- *Accomplice (Örebro)*
- *Accomplice (Vienna)*
- *All the Art on Kopenhagener Strasse*
- *An Inadvertent Collaboration*
- *Flock*
- *James to Lenka*
- *Maternity Leave*
- *People in Order*
- *Slow Magic Tricks*
- *The Top Deck of the Number 30 Bus*
- *Typewriter Drawings*

Number of times Lenka makes me feel (mostly) kind of sad, and frustrated with other people: **2**

- *Democratic People's Republic of Korea*
- *Hostile Reconnaissance*

Number of times Lenka makes me feel both pretty great about being alive, and kind of sad: **4**

- *A Piece of the Moon*
- *Conversation*
- *Deutsche Boerse - Anders Petersen*
- *Repairing Lebanon*

LENKA CLAYTON



Lenka Clayton, *Two Collections*, 2013, found collection of newspaper clippings, mirror, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

