The Guardian UK

Review

Delightful and disgusting – Helen Chadwick: Life Pleasures and Caroline Walker: Mothering review

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The Hepworth Wakefield

Chadwick's work ranges across media, from molten chocolate to tonsils and intestines, while Walker's attentive paintings depict maternal pleasure and pain. Both offer startling insight into women's lives

Hannah Clugston

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Opening at the same time is Caroline Walker's Mothering, an exhibition that sits neatly alongside Life Pleasures, not least because mothering is almost the embodiment of pleasure and pain. But there are other satisfying links, such as Walker's own self-portrait where – unlike Chadwick – she is not holding a childhood moment but a child who will shape her just as much. And like Chadwick, Walker is interested in the experience of women; she has spent many years painting women at work. Mothering captures her time spent observing a maternity unit at UCL hospital, London, and her own personal experiences.



Exquisitely observed … Daphne by Caroline Walker. Photograph: Peter Mallett/© Caroline Walker. Courtesy the artist; Stephen Friedman Gallery, GRIMM, and Ingleby Gallery

Motherhood is exquisitely observed by Walker, who manages to document the quiet, dark shuffle of the sonography suite; the hazy, repetitiveness of night feeds; the coffee table clutter and half-consumed glasses of water that plague a new mother's life. One of the largest pieces is Daphne, a painting of the artist's daughter as a toddler captured through the lounge window. It is dusk and the exterior of the house has a blue hue, but inside the lounge is awash with warm, orange light and home comforts. Daphne stands silently, perhaps anticipating the return of her mother who is on the other side of the window. The two are separate for a moment – two individuals in a big world – but even unseen by Daphne, Walker is watching over her. Neither are ever truly alone.

In footage of Chadwick's degree performance of Domestic Sanitation, the viewers are predominantly men. On today's press trip it is entirely women, which hints at the success of work by artists such as Chadwick and Walker: if you allow women to be seen, if you focus on their desires, you make space for them to exist in the public consciousness.