

To Live and Play with(in) Limits

In March, a PDF appeared offering digital tracings of photos by Louise Lawler. People could print the file at home and use the pages as a coloring book. The source photos date from as early as 1984, and Lawler's titles indicate when she 'adjusted' the images 'to fit' new formats and times. Such is the case with "Hand on Her Back (traced)," 1997/1998/2013, which shows a plaster cast of a crouching Aphrodite seen from behind, her head absent. The disembodied hand of a similarly absent Cupid is settled in the small of her back. The sculpture is poised on a wheeled, wooden dolly, signalling how artworks move in and out of storage and circulate through exhibitions and as images. The question of image rights, which Lawler's photos of other artists' works have long stood at the limit of the law on, in recent years drew the attention of museums looking to monetize their holdings in new ways. For the moment, though, the issue seems to have been tabled, as museums—like MoMA, who posted this print-at-home coloring book—reconsider their relation to (paying) audiences sheltered in place.

At home in her family's Berlin apartment weeks later, six-year-old Katharina Braegger reinvented the coloring book. She took the oil sticks that her artist-parents bought her, and colored in the decorative shapes and flowers perforated into a sheet of toilet paper. An innovative, do-it-yourself approach, the drawing is both joyful in its child-eyed creativity and economical in its means. Katharina proudly showed her creation to her father, Kaspar Müller, who acknowledged the art in it. Encouraged by him, Katharina embarked on several more toilet paper drawings. Müller had these photographed and printed digitally in large format, after which he drew on top of them with oil sticks. The image-object-drawing hybrids in the series "Mandala" expand and complicate, in a self-conscious form, Katharina's unselfconscious creation. In religious practice, mandalas are a focal point in meditation or ephemeral offerings produced through sustained concentration. New Age appropriations of them push the limits of what's acceptable. Here, Müller stipulated the production process, but he shares authorship with his daughter as well as the manufacturers of the toilet paper.

Katharina's original drawn marks serve as a photographic ground for Müller's new drawn marks. Twice over, the oil stick traces play with(in) limits: Thick, greasy streaks stretch across the large-format reproductions of Katharina's drawings in the same way her gestures play within, and in brief moments exceed, the lines of the designs. There is a sense of freedom to the "Mandala" works, but both sets of marks are circumscribed by the toilet paper's perforated shapes. Self-expression is encoded by the colors of available oil sticks. In one work, three multicolored butterflies flutter over a row of sunflowers. Wonder and calm are tinged with irony. This home-made coloring book is simultaneously base and excessive: Toilet paper is cheap, the literal ground for human waste. Yet in March and April of 2020, people bought out stocks, reselling what they found in stores either online or out of their cars. Katharina took what had become a precious commodity and misused it, repurposing it as a ground for her creative output.

Confined to their apartment except for essential activities, the Braegger-Müllers spent extra time together as a family. Schooling for the two children fell to the parents. Life at home is now surfacing in Müller's art. Katharina had collaborated previously with her mother, Tina Braegger: "Queen K," 2019, is named for her Katharina. Black strokes on ungesoed canvas, painted by Braegger, draw the outline of the smiling, striding Grateful Dead bear. Between, across, and slightly outside the lines, Katharina scumbled patches of green, red, orange, and blue paint. If Braegger appropriated the Grateful Dead design and had her daughter stand in to paint it in a recoding of repetition as biological

reproduction, then Müller turned this process around, assimilating Katharina's drawing into his art. This work involving Müller and Katharina also foregrounds a different metaphor for reproduction, one already familiar from art: where artistic production is seen not as genealogical, but scatalogical. "Mandala" is like a toilet-trained revision of Mary Kelly's "Post-Partum Document," 1973–1979, which includes diaper liners soiled by the artist's infant son, framed on the wall. The fact that, at her age, Katharina has both more agency and more autonomy makes Müller's reworking of her drawings complicated.

Müller relates his procedure to *Notrecht*, a Swiss-specific term (Müller and Braegger are both Swiss) referring to the suspension of democratic rights during a state of emergency. That's what this work is from start to finish: A perceptive revaluing of material and activity under a state of exception, both in Katharina's case and in Müller's. In the past few months, families have stood as a renewed basis of social interaction, but families always bear responsibility when social infrastructure is inadequate; wherever the state withdraws from a paternalistic function. Not just through homeschooling, but in providing healthcare, by being accountable for intergenerational student debt, and increasingly, by offering housing and financial support with employment scarce—burdens borne unequally between communities. One thing "Mandala" speaks to is our experience of limits and the interdependency this relationship inevitably entails. Just as Katharina's beautiful, vibrant drawings took form within existing bounds, familial bonds are what led to their recuperation via a familiar form—art, now on display.

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