



Held, Not Spoken

Installation, Photography
and Material Practice

Stephanie Hayes

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Staffordshire University
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Artist Statement

Steph Hayes is a multidisciplinary artist working across drawing, painting, sculpture and installation. Her practice explores how material conditions, social expectations and emotional labour shape motherhood, care and identity. A central focus is maternal ambivalence, understood as the coexistence of love, exhaustion and loss, and the ways idealised narratives of motherhood obscure these lived contradictions. Grounded in lived experience and feminist thought, the work responds to the misalignment between contemporary society and the realities of care. Hayes works with materials that carry traces of use and fatigue, including worn clothing, altered textiles and fragmented text, reflecting the repetitive and often invisible nature of maternal labour. Through sculptural forms and immersive environments, she considers how care becomes absorbed and inscribed into the body over time. Her process-led practice is driven by repetition, play and bodily engagement, allowing meaning to emerge through making rather than predetermined outcomes. Hayes aims to create work that is physically and emotionally felt, generating tension, empathy and unease rather than resolution. Her installations open space to reflect on care, expectation and the emotional cost of idealisation.



Process and Investigations

Research into Mary Kelly's Post-Partum Document has significantly shaped the development of the practice. Her use of non-conventional materials associated with bodily care demonstrated how maternal experience can be communicated through objects, repetition and process rather than direct representation. Kelly's approach shifted attention towards personal materials carrying traces of identity, memory and lived experience. This developed into a sustained interest in nappies as both object and metaphor for caregiving, consumption and transformation.

All That Remains 2026



Sculptural Textiles Series

150x150 cm

This sculptural textile series transforms fragments of the artist's former self into reflections on the complexities of motherhood and identity. Constructed from garments once worn before becoming a mother, each handmade nappy carries traces of personal memory, loss and transformation. The act of cutting apart these clothes becomes both a process of mourning and reconfiguration, revealing the lasting shifts that accompany maternal experience.

The nappy functions as a central metaphor throughout the work. Associated with care, use and disposal, it reflects the ways maternal labour is often overlooked despite its constancy and necessity. At the same time, the forms speak to irreversible change — once altered, neither object nor self can fully return to a previous state.

Processes of sewing, repetition and construction mirror the cyclical rhythms of caregiving itself, embodying both tenderness and exhaustion. Through these suspended forms, the work invites reflection on visibility, emotional labour and the social expectations embedded within motherhood.





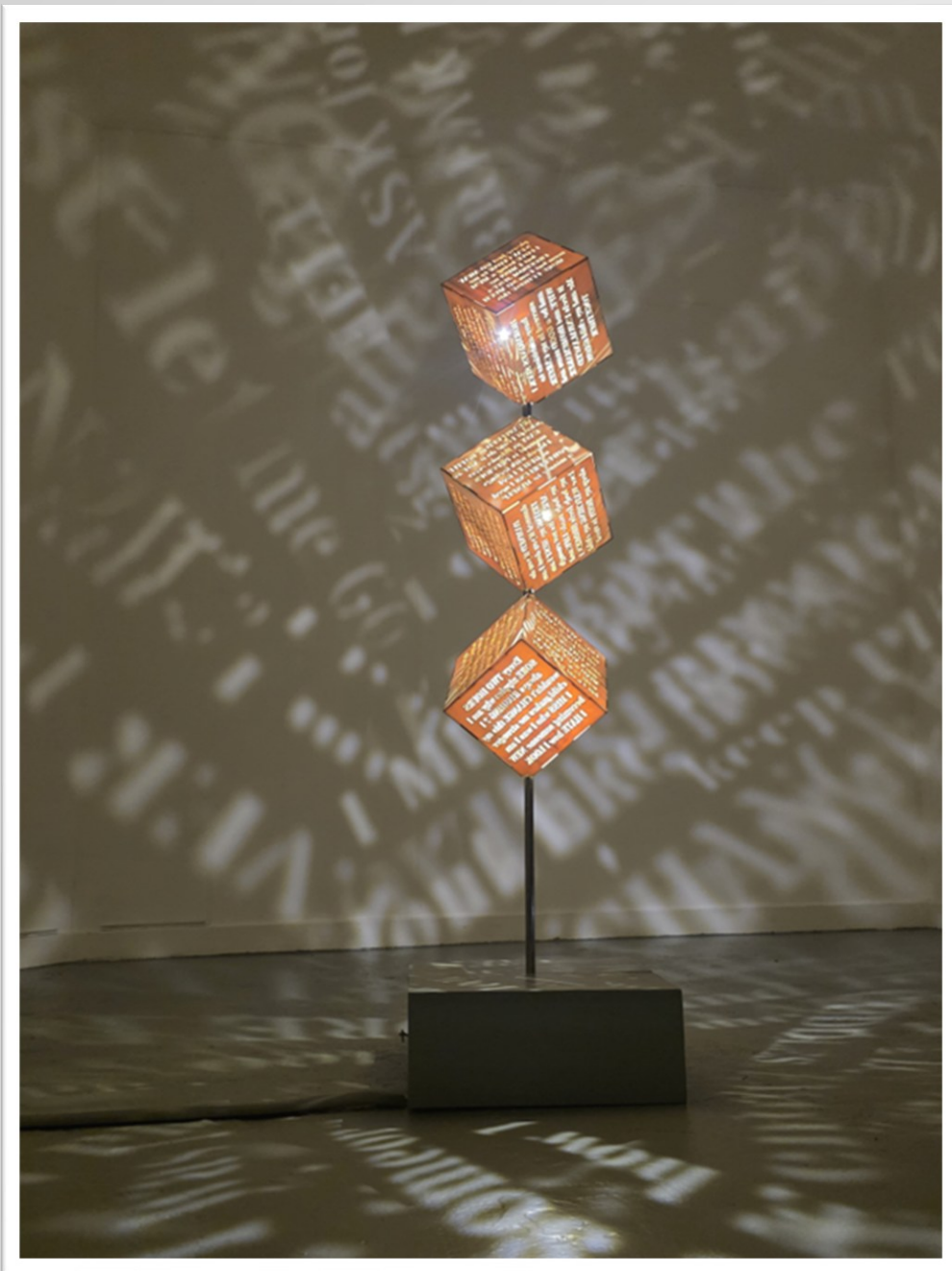
Out of Place (2025)

Photographic Series

A3

This photographic series, inspired by the work of Ana Casas Broda, documents a performance in which the artist wears her daughter's clothing, using the body to explore shifting boundaries between selfhood and maternal identity. Broda's unfiltered exploration of maternal ambivalence reinforces an interest in motherhood as a complex and contradictory condition rather than an idealised state, positioning embodied experience as a site of photographic enquiry. The garments function as intimate, loaded objects, holding traces of growth, dependency and care. When worn by the adult body, they become visibly strained and displaced, creating tension between presence and misfit. This act of inhabitation reflects the emotional and psychological merging that can occur within motherhood, where distinctions between self and child become blurred. The images capture a process of both becoming and undoing, where identity is negotiated through proximity, care and loss. Rather than offering resolution, the work holds space for the discomfort and ambiguity embedded within maternal experience.





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Light and sound installation, 3D work,

170x45cm

Audio 2:38

This light-based installation explores the cyclical and repetitive nature of maternal labour. Structured through a sequence of illuminated cubes, the work draws upon patterns of interruption, routine and endurance that shape experiences of care. Fragments of text emerge and recede throughout the installation, suggesting internal dialogues that remain largely unspoken. These partial messages reflect the tension of holding contradictory emotions simultaneously, persistent yet suppressed..

A lullaby plays continuously within the space, evoking familiarity and comfort, while fragmented light and language introduce a quiet dissonance. Resisting stillness, the installation mirrors the restless rhythms and ongoing demands of maternal experience. Rather than resolving these tensions, the work invites reflection on care, expectation and the emotional complexities embedded within motherhood.

