



Making kin N.A.J. Taylor

This edited collection both documents and critically reflects upon a three-year painting and drawing project by Jahne Pasco-White. Titled *Kin* the project arose from the artist's experience of pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and parenting, yet—as the texts in this volume by the artist and eleven other contributors attest—it is the impulse to be actively making kin beyond the nuclear family that braids the threads of this volume.

Whereas the everyday meaning of kin, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, refers to 'your family or your relatives', Pasco-White calls for an expansive sense of kinship 'activated across blood ties as well as be intergenerational, not confined to any prescribed limits of the nuclear family.' Thereby situating her body as enmeshed and co-constituted with other living and non-living beings and things, for Pasco-White making kin has decentred rather than entrenched human-centeredness. Although the artist's role in the unfurling of a life was a transformative moment for Pasco-White, for many people it cannot or need not be (see Taylor 2015). For Pasco-White, this heightened state of ecological attunement has transformed how, when and with what each work has been made, whilst simultaneously demanding that the artist reappraise the applicability of these ideas within the confines of a contemporary painting practice. Through paint(ing), Pasco-White's kinship

connections are not merely to her body and those held in relation to it, but to those impacted by the industrial processes that manufacture, package, distribute and deliver the very materials she incorporates into her paintings. Hence, Pasco-White's most recent works—long-having addressed the themes of materiality and temporality through her labouring of delicate supports—now feature fleshy tones from boiled avocado skins and the earthy tones from feral fruit, whilst still evidencing traces of more toxic matter, such as oil pastels, PVA glue and cement oxide.

The paintings and drawings profiled in this book survey the period from January 2017 through to November 2020, including a long-form essay by the artist titled 'To accrete a surface' that I decided to republish (Pasco-White 2018). This body of work signifies a significant period of change in the artist's life and practice, but also a remarkably productive one. Whilst numerous paintings have been omitted having been acquired by private collections prior to public exhibition, several of the artist's most celebrated and adventurous works *are* documented in this book. Among them is a twenty-five-metre triptych that enveloped all four gallery walls, as well as the artist's first in-situ wall works that variously span up to twelve-metres in length, and a network of more than thirty works draped from gallery ceilings in a loosely procession—entirely eschewing the wall

now and rather activating the space between them—so as to affirm the idea that Pasco-White’s art practice is relational yet somehow also unbounded.

The texts in this volume are suitably unbounded by either academic discipline or personal experience. This is not a book of art theory. And nor is it a book about mothering. Rather, this is a book in which the artist and her interlocutors interrogate the possibilities and obstacles to being ecological at painterly scales. As such, this book intends to forge new connections between Pasco-White’s practice and such diverse things as border walls, parasites, composting, fermentation, contamination, microbes, housework and eating. Affirming the knots of kinship with which the artist and her interlocutors are entangled, as well as the interplay between text and images, I have arranged the book according to four streams of thought: *embodiment*; *relationality*; *vulnerability*; and *care*. Drawing on Pasco-White’s palette, rather than attempt to contain these four streams using formal sections headings, the transition is marked by different paper hues drawn from the artist’s palette.

The notion of *embodiment* continues to inform many strands of feminism, and that is no less so than for the distinct visions of feminist environmentalism that appear in this volume. Pasco-White’s exhibition, *messmates*, consisted of eleven overlapping panels spanning more than 25-metres in length across all four gallery walls, thereby inviting gallery-goers into Pasco-White’s expansive notion of kinship which encompasses those populous bacterial companions *in* and *of* the body. Originally published as the catalogue essay accompanying *messmates*, the painter Helen Johnson confronts the startling confession that art about motherhood tends to be boring. Yet the vivid image of Pasco-White’s painting that Johnson ultimately evokes of the artist feeding her paintings so that they ‘digest and excrete’ is anything but. Taking Johnson’s image of Pasco-White ‘feeding’ her paintings one step further, the fermentation theorist and practitioner Maya Hey positions eating as a relational act, and one that—like painting—can be ‘attentive modes of making kin with messmates’. Yet painting and eating are also simultaneously sites of vulnerability to potential and actual harms, Hey reminds us, and for this reason the artist’s practice has been transformed both in its material choices but also the domestication of its production to accommodate the needs of the child and demands upon the parent. Through shared experience as a new mother, the feminist cultural theorist Redi Koobak reflects upon the resurgent interest in the interplay (or tension) between making kin and meaning-making in one’s life and work.

In particular, Koobak claims that ‘the looming threats to our planet turn attention to mothers’ as carriers of both life and death, and thereby the ecological being *par excellence*.

Relationality—via commensalism, mutualism and parasitism—is central to all notions of ecology, and the generative dimensions of being in relation to human and nonhuman others predominates the artist’s work. Jahnne-Pasco-White’s exhibition *becoming-with* was designed as an assemblage or network of more than thirty artworks hung from the gallery ceiling, thereby implicating the gallery-goer in a sequence of painting installations that mimic symbiotic relationships in the way swathes of paintings overlap and intermingle each other, not as discrete works, but rather informing the next as in a web or matrix of painting. As Pasco-White remarks in her artist statement for her exhibition *becoming-with*, ‘[h]ow each painting transforms is not predetermined, however, but conditional, and thereby agential.’ Originally published as the catalogue essay accompanying *becoming-with*, the curator and director Amelia Wallin examines the domestication of the artist’s process, including the manufacture of dyes from household waste and feral fruit, but in the very conditions of its making, where the home and the studio become inseparable. For Wallin, the installation of Pasco-White’s paintings within the exhibition space ‘recreates the limitations of Jahnne’s studio, wherein the body of work far surpassed the wall and floor space. Here, the body of the viewer is drawn into intimate proximity to brush up against or bear witness to the matter and the material in detail.’ The question of relationality also calls for intersectional answers—from indigenous and queer perspectives, for instance—according to the art theorist and curator Abbra Kotlarczyk who situates the task of making kin within a ‘queer world perspective’ that has developed out of her co-curated exhibition *m_othering the perceptual ars poetica*. Following months of bushfires that ravaged the Australian continent, as well as the imposition of social distancing measures in a post—COVID19 world, the feminist ecocritic Jennifer Mae Hamilton interrogates further ‘the terrain between house and work’ in the artist-as-mother’s working conditions and process. What results is an essay that seethes against the image of the mother—and artist—as ‘trained to devalue their work as they are supposed to love it’, suggesting instead that Pasco-White’s art offers ‘a revised domestic ecosystem’ in which the labour of home is afforded value, not merely as an art-work.

Vulnerability is a fundamental part of life and death processes, and much continues to be written about both its positive and negative aspects that are germane to the pregnant, birthing, breastfeeding mother. Pasco-White’s





Being Here is Everything was first painted directly onto the gallery wall at Gertrude Contemporary over four days before being later destroyed and remade again after being shortlisted for a major acquisitive prize at the Art Gallery of South Australia. Pasco-White retitled this later version *Being Here is Everything (What a Pity)*, referencing the experience of modernist painter Paula Modersohn-Becker who, at age 31, died from an embolism just nineteen days after giving birth to her daughter with the final words: 'What a pity.' Similarly, for her Shepparton Art Museum drawing wall commission, Pasco-White's resultant work *becoming other* transformed fragments of her earlier work *becoming-with*, alongside pigments and dyes made from the waters and waste fruit from the region. Here decay and renewal, so central in Pasco-White's *oeuvre*, take on new meaning when one considers the decision to simultaneously (de)construct the works several times. Serving as the volume's interregnum—contrasting the processes behind Pasco-White's entire oeuvre of in-situ wall works completed pre- and post-pregnancy so as to further evidence the transformative potential of making kin—two photographic essays by the border theorist Umut Ozguc and Pasco-White comprise the book's second stream. Pasco-White's essay, which is republished from the 2017 edition of the scholarly periodical *Unlikely: Journal for Creative Arts* (who also serve as co-publishers of this book), reflects upon her first experience of in-situ painting in an abandoned suburban block in Melbourne, titled *Motion in the Opposite Direction*. As a theorist of borders and security, Ozguc explores the archive of her lived experience of the Separation Wall in Jerusalem, finding surprising parallels with the fine art of Pasco-White through a shared interest in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a 'holey space', by which Ozguc and Pasco-White refer to indeterminate spaces that operate as vehicles of relations. 'In deeply Spinozist terms', Ozguc finds, 'Pasco-White highlights the body's constant movement and variation, its capacity to change in its affective relations with others.'

Care is often positioned as being affective, ethical and practical, yet also entwined with processes at once generative and harmful. Pasco-White's exhibition *inter-giftedness* offers a point of departure yet also an opening to a continuous process of debt and obligation that befalls the artist as mother, as indeed the mother as artist. Originally published as the catalogue essay accompanying *inter-giftedness*, the curator and art historian Tara McDowell emphasises the importance of experiential qualities of the artist's recent works, in both material form and presentation.

XV In so doing, connections are made between Pasco-White

and a pattern in contemporary art for approaching 'canvas-as-textile and its relation to body and environment'. The environmental humanities scholar-activist Kate Wright offers a deeply moving account of how she has transformed from experiencing vulnerability 'to view pregnancy, childbirth and the nurturing of human young through the lens of symbiotic coevolution'. A resolution, for Wright, which rests on the notion that 'we neither make nor own our children—our kin—because they are gifts from the world to the world.'

To map the contours of how these four streams of thought and action flow together—embodiment, relationality, vulnerability and care—I commissioned two short concluding essays. In the coda to the book my long-time collaborator and friend, the feminist international theorist Stefanie R. Fishel, draws on the poet Rainier Maria Rilke and her own research into microbes to ask how far making kin can take us. In the book's afterword, Pasco-White's mentor and art theorist Jan Bryant offers an intimate portrait of how and why the artist clings onto hope whilst grappling for an ecologically attuned artistic practice.

Throughout the project the artist has been generously supported by numerous fellowships, grants, and prizes. Pasco-White was a Gertrude Contemporary Studio Artist whilst holding the 2018-20 Australia Council for the Arts' Marten Bequest for Painting Fellowship. In addition, the artist—and her family—completed an Art Gallery of New South Wales Mora Dyring Memorial Studio Fellowship at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris for May and June 2019. At various junctures, Pasco-White's *Kin* project received project funding from the Yarra City and Moreland City Councils, as well as Regional Arts Victoria and the Victorian State Government. Pasco-White was also a finalist for several major acquisitive prizes, including the Art Gallery of South Australia's Ramsay Art Prize, and the winner—as director Jessica Bridgfoot outlined in her generous Foreword to this volume—of Australia's richest open painting prize, the 2019 Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize at the Bendigo Art Gallery for her work *messmates #1*.

As the artist's editor and partner, my hope is that Pasco-White's first artist book—and my editing of it—affirms the idea that making kin can be generative in both life *and* work, and that our very reflection on it may spring from and forth in all manner of directions.

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