

Artist Statement for *Black Mountain*

Rose Wind Jerome

My work has grown from a continued interest in the dynamics of relationships, specifically those formed within a shared domestic space. For the project *Black Mountain*, I photographed my family after the arrival of my daughter in our home in Black Mountain, North Carolina. By photographing, I was able to observe and reflect on my relationship with my daughter, my strained relationship with her father, and the role of motherhood.

For every family, having a child brings with it a complex set of issues, and with motherhood comes a long line of cultural expectations that are deeply rooted in a patriarchal family structure. This structure typically defines fathers as “breadwinners,” whose focus and energy are directed outside of the home and toward their career in order to support the family financially, and mothers as “caregivers,” whose focus is solely on the home and childrearing. This photographic series explores those dynamics and the role of photography in describing domestic expectations, investigating the intersections of sociology and photography as a method of understanding how gender norms are perpetuated through photographs of family. Common conventions of family photography have censored the complexity of the domestic experience. This project expands on those limited perceptions of family life, offering an alternative to an idyllic home that most families cannot uphold. By rejecting the “sameness” of romanticized domestic and familial bliss, the work offers more complicated conceptions of caretaking and domesticity from the perspective of the mother.

Exploring the challenges I faced as a new mother in a relationship with a difficult partner, my photographs focus on the ways photography can function to mediate emotional experiences. The images are made with both a journalistic and directorial approach, creating a narrative sequence that is intended to reinforce overarching themes present in the work. Motherhood, connection, protection, and power are prevalent as well as the notion of expectations, entrapment, innocence, and destruction. Rejecting sameness and investigating the way gender norms began playing out in my own home, I wanted to create images that capture resilience and explore my struggles through narratives common to the human experience. I explore the history of the female/male dichotomy through widespread cultural influences, such as the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. I explore the oppressive nature of hierarchical gender relationships through an ambivalence towards the male’s presence, whereas the mother figure is repeated. Her form is revealed and suggested as a dual identity – one that was once independent and is now deeply connected to the child.

In this series, photographing became an active form of communication and desire for connection from within the home. Photography is used to describe, transcend, mediate, meditate, and ask questions, rather than answer them.