



T I N Y

BY SUSAN WITTSTOCK

MUSES

Parenthood inspires two artists to take creative risks

The clay is ruddy and round, shaped into a heavy, bulbous object that supports a tall brass pump at one end and sprouts copper wire and clear tubing on the other. Dangling from the tubing, supported by the wire, a bright, red pacifier hangs jauntily.

The cotton paper is cream-colored and thick. On each page appear black, pink, or silver words such as love, baby, doubts, laundry, and bonding. On one page, a baby smiles out from a black and white photograph. On another, lines of blue and pink stitches are interspersed with the lyrics to a Spanish lullaby.

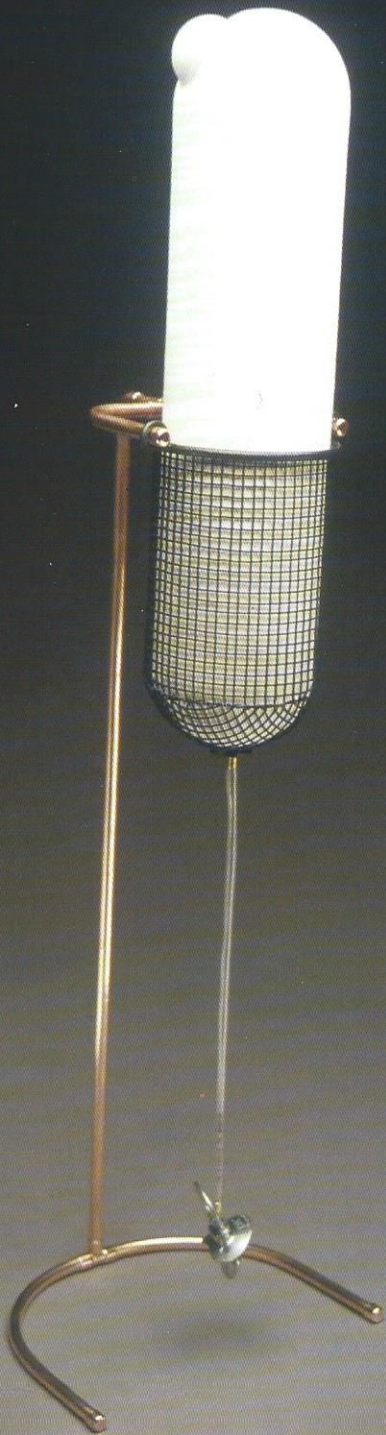
Though the results are wildly different, tiny muses have been inspiring two artists at Ohio University. Their names are McKenna and Julia, and although small, their lives are having a profound influence on their parents.

McKenna has proven to be a muse for Robert “Boomer” Moore, an instructor/technician in ceramics in the university’s School of Art, and Julia is muse to his colleague Patricia Cue, an assistant professor of graphic design.

“At first, I did not want to jump on that band wagon of ‘I gain inspiration from my child,’” says Moore, 35, his voice taking on a self-mocking tone. “That seemed rather cliché, a bit done, but after a while it really became a huge source for me.”

Cue, 39, was less resistant to the idea of using her daughter as inspiration. “I had to digest it somehow. I had to analyze what had happened to me in those first few months,” she says. “You tend to forget everything that happened, and I didn’t want to forget.”

Before McKenna’s birth, Moore’s challenges as an artist came from his adherence to a high level of craftsmanship and the creativity of determining the best process to make unusual forms. Although all his ceramic pieces could fulfill conventional, utilitarian functions, they were shaped unconventionally — like a bowl resting on clay wheels with sides ringed by large, bubble shapes — or pitchers that had similar, bubble-like curves attached, with arm-like handles that gave the vessels the appearance of sassy, cartoon characters.

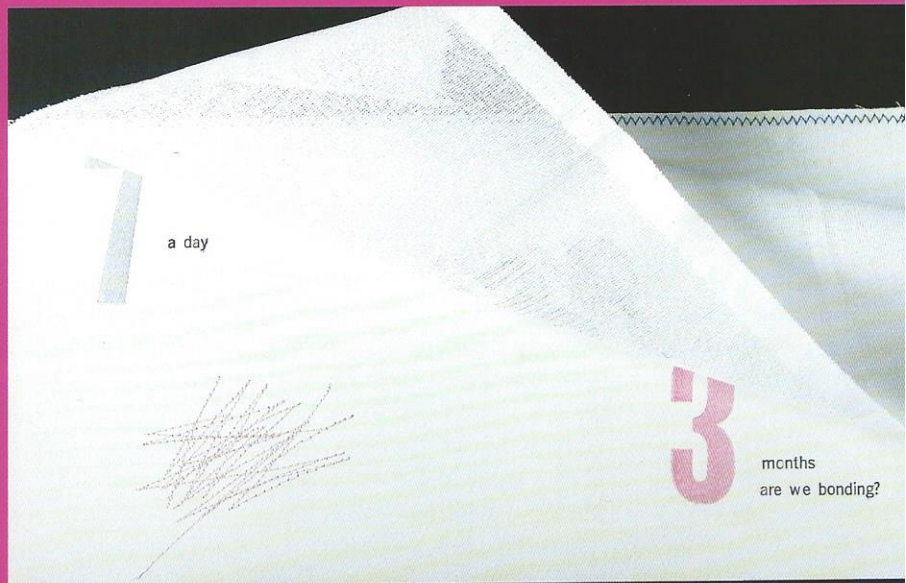


◀ **MILK TANK** Slip cast white earthenware, electric kiln fired, with copper tubing, lead pacifier, and a fabricated steel cage, 30 x 6 x 6 inches. Artist: Robert Moore, 2004.

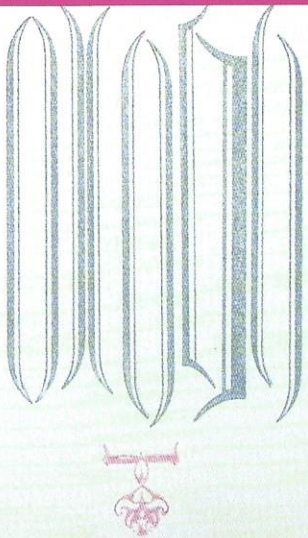
◀ ◀ **AMERICAN GREETINGS** Detail shot of page made using letterpress typography and ornaments on Arches paper, 15 x 7.5 inches. Artist: Patricia Cue, 2004.

▼ **BUNDLE OF JOY** Fifteen pages wrapped in diaper cloth and encased inside four flap portfolio with ties and cloth spine. The book was produced in an edition of three numbered copies printed and bound by hand at the Abycedium Press of the School of Art. Artist: Patricia Cue, 2004.

▼ **BONDING** Letterpress typography and sewing machine on Arches paper and diaper cloth, 15 x 7.5 inches. Artist: Patricia Cue, 2004.



A baby is today's special joy, tomorrow's
great hope, and yesterday's dream come true



American Greetings 125ABA 0032-09E

But, he admits, “there’s no deep thought in that.”

Before joining Ohio University’s faculty in 2001, Cue had spent 12 years as a professional graphic designer, mostly in book design. “I have done a lot of editorial work but always the content was given to me (by a client),” she says, noting that in her own project, she served as designer and author.

Moore’s pre-fatherhood art had gained him national and international attention, with inclusion in exhibitions as far abroad as Barcelona, Spain, London, England, and Auckland, New Zealand, and Cue also had experienced a very satisfying professional career, but neither artist had ever really pushed himself or herself to create art that was personally meaningful.

Enter McKenna and Julia.

CLAY CREATIONS

McKenna was born on April 30, 2002, and about a year later Moore began experimenting. He created pieces that use stylized breast pumps and feeding tubes to explore his sense of being left out when his wife, Trina, bonded with McKenna while breast feeding. He marveled at the sense of security McKenna gained from sucking on her pacifier, and began thinking about where he gains his security.

The resulting art is anything but ordinary. “Oral Satisfaction” has a red plaque with a breast-like yellow clay sculpture attached, and plastic feeding tubes leading to a lead, yellow pacifier. “Stim’u•lus” also features a breast-like sandblasted clay sculpture with an elongated nipple. A clay ball with raised circular bumps on it dangles from a cord attached to the nipple.

Once he got started, new ideas kept rolling. Soon, Moore channeled his overprotective urges into a series that parodies children’s toys. He created massive toy-like sculptures, such as a giant salmon baring a mouth full of teeth, a large monkey pointing a yellow gun, and clay and wood rattles that are 6 feet long. “I was trying to be a little sarcastic. Just trying to have parents maybe look at the toys that they are buying for their children,” he says.

He sometimes mulls over an idea for several months now before attempting to make it and he isn’t always happy with the result. “I’ve made a lot of pieces in this series that just didn’t work, where my idea wasn’t coming across,” he says.

That’s new for him as an artist. “When I was making my utilitarian stuff, other than for technical problems, I’d never really had a failure,” he says. “But now, I’m not regurgitating something over and over again.”

TURN OF THE PAGE

Three floors up from Moore’s office in Seigfred Hall, Cue was doing some experimenting of her own. Julia was born on October 10, 2002, and like Moore, about a year later Cue began working on parent-related art. As her days became filled with diapers and round-the-clock feedings, she found herself frustrated and anxious, even as she doted on her new baby.



it's a girl



▲ IT'S A GIRL When Cue found out she would be having a daughter, she developed an obsession with pink in all its variations. Letterpress and laser printer on Arches paper, 15 x 7.5 inches. Artist: Patricia Cue.



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— ROBERT MOORE



◀ **PUMP’R & FEED’R** Wheel thrown indigenous Ohio clay, assembled wheel thrown stoneware parts, multiple glaze, reduction fired, sandblasted, paint, forged steel, cast glass, lead pacifier, and aluminum wheels, 52 x 27 x 27 inches. Artist: Robert Moore, 2004.

▶ **PUMP-N-FEED** Assembled wheel thrown stoneware parts, multiple glaze, reduction fired, sandblasted, slip cast earthenware and coffee clay sagger, copper, tubing, rubber, 26 x 15 x 29 inches. Artist: Robert Moore, 2003.

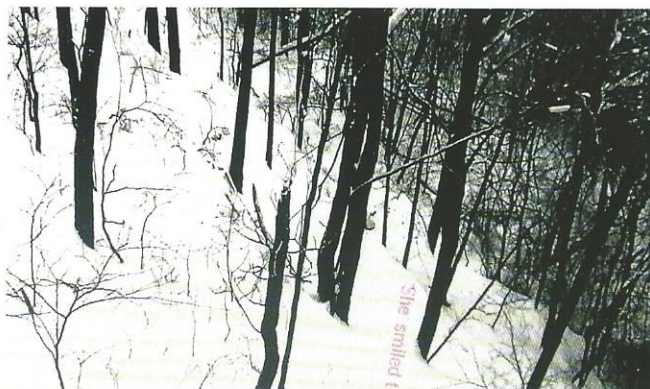
▶ **PARENTAL CONCERNS** Letterpress typography, laser printer on Arches paper, 15 x 7.5 inches. Artist: Patricia Cue, 2004.

Bush might bomb Iraq.

She smiled today.

She smiled today.

She smiled today.



Creating a book to chronicle those feelings felt natural. But writing a book was new territory. As both client and designer, Cue was free to determine the direction the book would take. As a starting point, she used the contents of a keepsake box of items related to Julia's first year — a tiny cloth diaper, greeting cards, a formula wrapper, burping cloths. Eight months later, Cue had created *Bundle of Joy*, a 14-page letterpress book she printed by hand on Ohio University's Abycendum Press, housed on Seigfred Hall's fourth floor.

Although she had some previous work using movable type on a press, printing a book on her own was a new challenge. Cue decided to use the press, her Macintosh computer (primarily for digital photographs) and her sewing machine (she stitched lines on a number of the pages) as her tools. Because much of the book is also a response to the way motherhood is marketed in the United States, Cue, a native of Mexico, attached some commercial items, such as the Similac label, to a few of the pages.

The book's loose pages sit in a handmade davy board box that resembles a large envelope or a package wrapped in diaper cloth. "Bundle of Joy" is printed in pink on the cover, and the edges are bound in matching pink tape. A white ribbon, tied in a bow, holds the box's two top flaps together.

Each page is unique. On one, Cue printed a line from a greeting card she received, "A baby is today's special joy, tomorrow's great hope, and yesterday's dream come true," and printed a series of ornamentations, similar to the lines that appear below the text in silent films, but presented vertically.

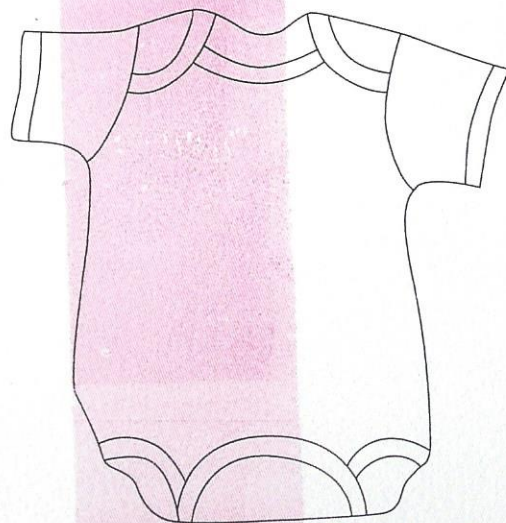
The page is different than what she originally envisioned. "With this process I love to be able to do it myself and to improvise things as I go along. I don't have everything figured out from the beginning," Cue says. "This page came from when I saw these ornaments lined up in a drawer in the letterpress room. I just loved how they all looked together and how they were relating randomly, but in a very coherent pattern."

SPARKING A DIALOGUE

Both Cue and Moore displayed their new work at a faculty exhibition last year. Moore has shown pieces at a number of exhibitions since then, and Cue is preparing to submit the book for reproduction in several art magazines. Because she made three copies, she's keeping one for herself, gave one to Alden Library, and the third will either go to a private collection or another university.

Moore, who was originally unsure about sharing such personal work with the public, now loves viewers' strong reactions. "I felt that was lacking in my other work. There wasn't any sort of confrontational value from a teapot," he says. "But when I'm dealing with the idea of what we should and should not do as parents, you can get people talking. It's really wonderful to get that interaction."

Cue also enjoys the interaction. "Through this book, I discovered that this could be not only a way of expressing myself, but could be a way of talking to other people



about an issue that concerned me," she says. "I think the messages marketed to us as mothers create a lot of guilt. I'm hoping this will maybe speak to somebody out there who, even though it was a wonderful experience, felt isolated and exhausted and bored at times. I'm just not sure that today women are allowed to feel those things."

Moore is up to about 25 pieces related to fatherhood. His art continues to evolve. "Two years ago, everything was clay. And now, it could be up to maybe 50 percent of the piece is clay," Moore says. "And that is a big relief, to be able to not worry about my materials, and enjoy the process of making, using whatever material is best suited to this idea."

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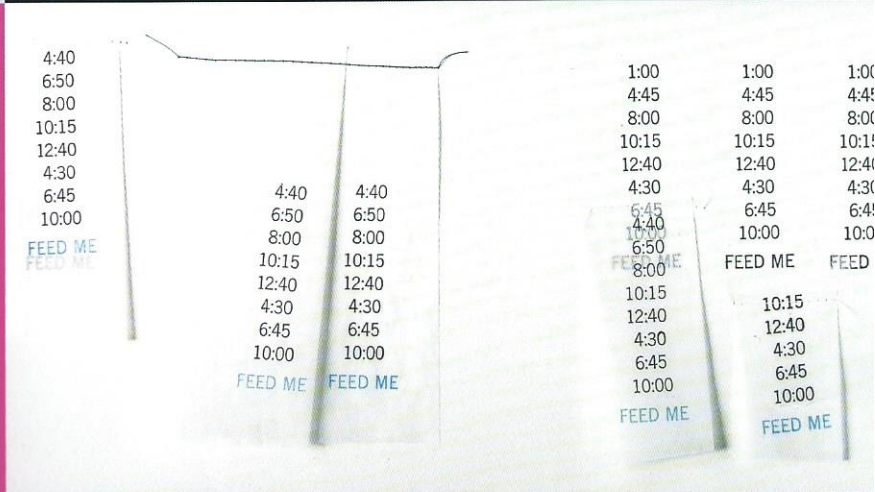
— PATRICIA CUE



▶ THIS IS YOUR BABY “In spite of the exhaustion, every time I undressed Julia I was marveled by this perfect little body as an extension of my own,” Cue says. Letterpress typography and metal fasteners on Arches paper, 15 x 7.5 inches. Artist: Patricia Cue.

◀ PARENT Hand built press molded indigenous Ohio clay, sagger fired, painted, sandblasted, cast aluminum wheels, 18 x 6 x 21 inches. Artist: Robert Moore, 2004.

▶ MILK BOXES Slip cast white earthenware, electric fired, 6 x 3 x 3 inches. Artist: Robert Moore, 2004.



He’s now thinking about the impossibility of sterilizing the world for McKenna as she explores it, frequently through taste, and is working on pieces that use pure white clay and polished silver, contrasted with indigenous, impure clay and rusted steel.

“There’s so many ideas that I want to do right now that I don’t know where to start. I don’t think I’ll ever restrain myself from my personal feelings like I did before,” he says. “It’s out there and I enjoy it.”

Julia is also exploring the world, and her mother is fascinated by the ways she plays with unlike things, like cheese boxes and doll clothing. “She puts together things that are surprising, and even beautiful,” Cue says. “So I want my

next book to be more three-dimensional and playful in shape. It could be a pop-up book or I could put boxes together with a string, and they could open up and have pages inside.”

Mom is having fun. “So many years I have been doing work that is so task oriented, so much work for a client, for a certain purpose. But now, I want to use the skills that I used commercially to play and explore,” she says. “This was for me an amazing creative outlet and I just feel that I have so much more to tell now.” ▲

For more information about the School of Art, as well as biographies of the artists, visit the Web at <http://www.ohiou.edu/art/>.