

The background features several overlapping, hand-drawn style blue loops and swirls on a solid yellow background. The text is arranged in a vertical stack, with the first three lines forming a main title and the last two lines forming a subtitle.

Policy recommendations
for art institutions,
galleries, and residencies
to ensure equal access for
artists and cultural
producers who
are parents

Mia Degner
May 2026

Colophon

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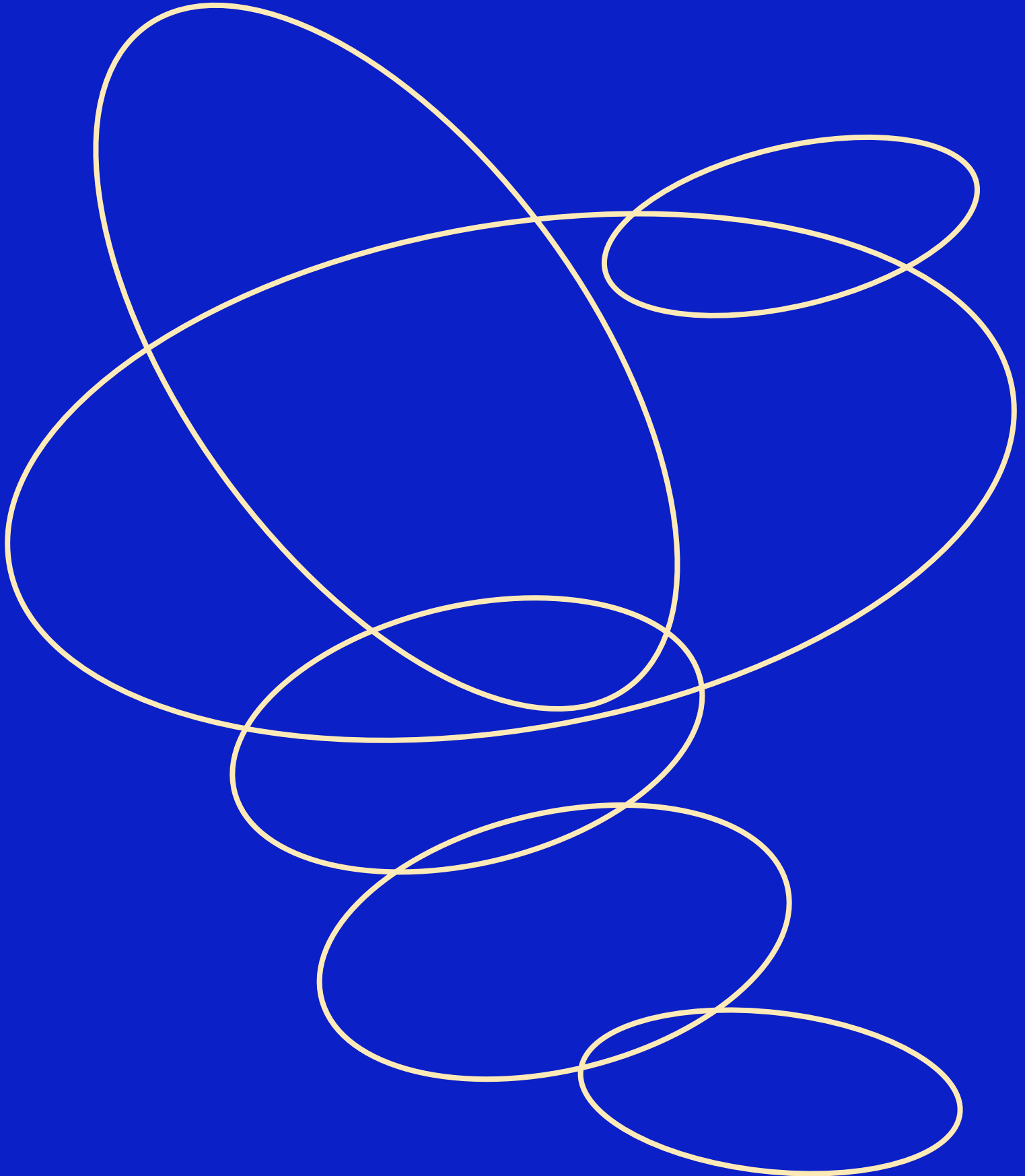
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Introduction





CENTRO DE ARTE MODERNA
GULBENKIAN

Photo from CAM (surroundings), photo credit: Mía Degner

About

These policy recommendations, made in the framework of *Institution(ing)s*, are addressed to art institutions, galleries, and art residency programmes that wish to ensure equal access for artists and cultural producers who are parents.

The recommendations respond to a structural challenge within the art world, namely that of combining a career in the arts with caregiving responsibilities, and seek to point out concrete ideas and possibilities for art institutions to create better and more inclusive working conditions for artists and cultural producers with children.

The recommendations are grounded in, informed and inspired by fieldwork that I conducted in Lisbon from the 2nd to the 9th of May 2026, during which I interviewed artists, museum directors, and cultural producers about the conditions for parents working in the arts. The recommendations also draw on my own previous and ongoing research and interviews with international artists and cultural producers about the same subject, and on the important and trailblazing work of the British writer and curator Hettie Judah, who, in 2021, along with an international group of artist mothers, wrote the manifesto-like guidelines “How Not to Exclude Artist Parents: Some Guidelines for Institutions and Residencies”¹. Judah’s ten to-the-point guidelines, along with her subsequent book, *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)*², have inspired me deeply, and although the policy recommendations that I have made in the framework of this fieldwork are first and foremost informed by the conversations with the interviewed artists and museum directors in Lisbon, I am also very much indebted to Judah’s pioneering work which I strongly recommend anybody with an interest in this subject read.

Finally, I owe huge thanks to Renea Behluli, whose work, input, and collaboration during the Lisbon fieldwork and in the subsequent process of writing these policy recommendations have been invaluable. I feel that this is just as much Renea’s work as it is mine.

1 Available at: <https://www.artist-parents.com> (last checked 18 June 2026)

2 Judah, Hettie (2022). *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)*, London: Lund Humphries.



Photo from Mané Pacheco's exhibition *Brama* at Galeria Quadrum,
photo credit: Mia Degner

The Challenge

In the contemporary art world, artistic authorship and opportunities are still largely constructed around ideals of constant availability, uninterrupted production, and access to networking; conditions that are not always easily obtained for artists or cultural producers who are parents. At the same time, often limited access to parental leave subsidies and other social security benefits, combined with precarious working conditions, are contributing factors that risk pushing artists and cultural producers with caregiving responsibilities to change careers, ultimately limiting the scope of artistic voices and perspectives represented in contemporary art.

While all the museum directors interviewed during my Lisbon fieldwork expressed an engaged commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion, the everyday structures and cultural habits of the art world do not always support this inclusion in practical terms.

The interviewed artists, cultural producers, and museum directors agreed that exhibition schedules, residency formats, networking events, application criteria, and funding structures often pose invisible barriers to participation that risk excluding artists and cultural producers who are parents if not deliberately designed to include them.

The interviewed museum directors reported that many institutions already make individual accommodations for artists and cultural producers who are parents; however, such accommodations are often informal, inconsistent, and dependent on the awareness, goodwill, or personal commitment of individual staff members. This creates a fragile and inconsistent structure where access can vary significantly from one institution, project, or artist/cultural producer to another.

Many interviewed artists described declining professional opportunities, postponing projects, limiting travel, avoiding residencies, missing networking events, or experiencing prolonged interruptions to their careers when having children. Some also expressed concern that periods of parental leave or reduced productivity could have lasting effects on visibility and future opportunities.

All of these dynamics reveal the difficulties faced by parents within many areas of the art world.

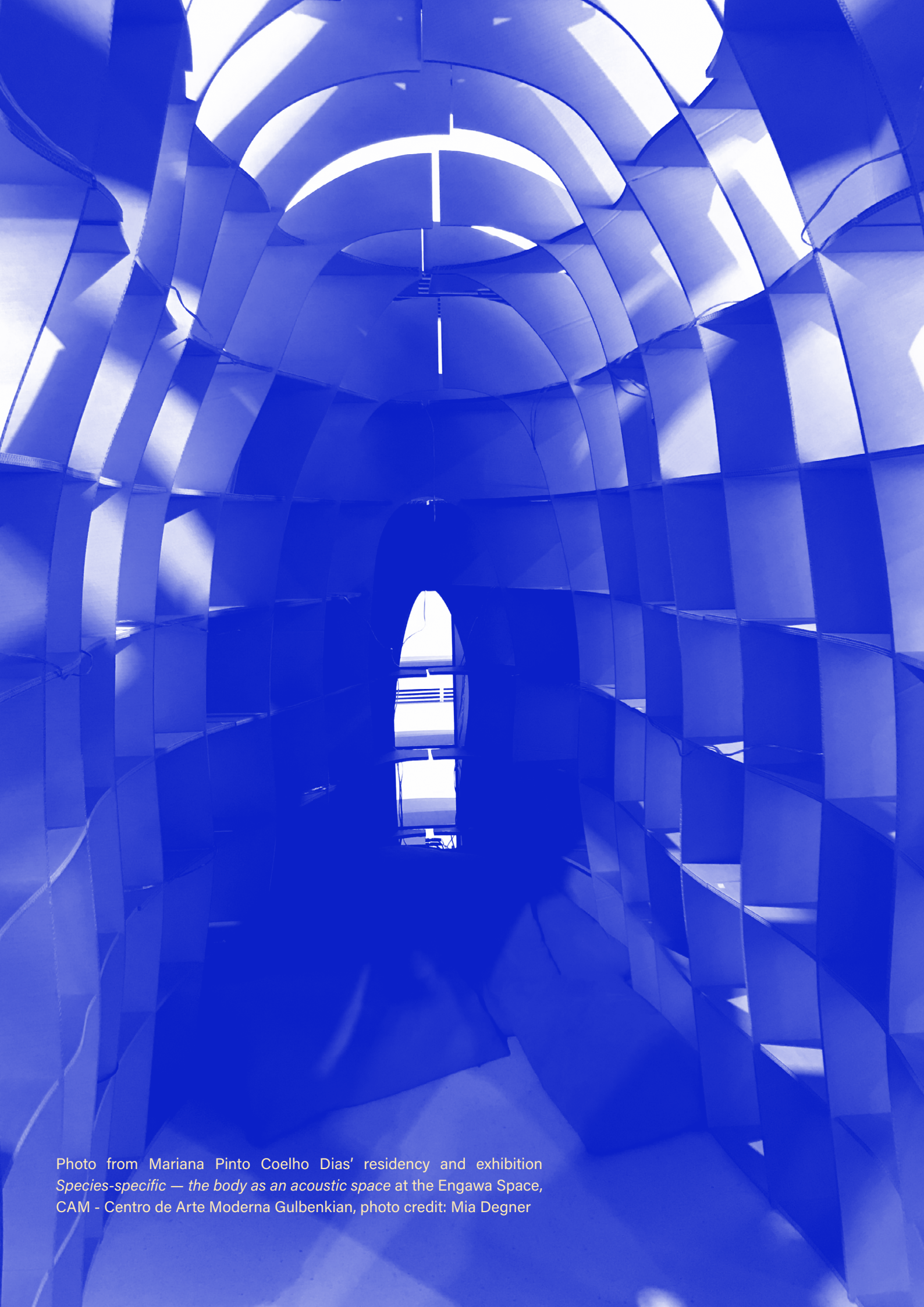


Photo from Mariana Pinto Coelho Dias' residency and exhibition *Species-specific — the body as an acoustic space* at the Engawa Space, CAM - Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian, photo credit: Mia Degner

The M-word

In order to be inclusive and to acknowledge that these are issues that are and should be of equal importance to all, I have used the gender neutral term “parents” throughout these policy recommendations. However, it is equally important to note that the fieldwork conversations and much of the existing research on this topic centre on the experiences of artist *mothers*, reflecting the still disproportionate burden of caregiving that falls on women and the ways in which structural disparities in the art world related to parenthood continue to affect artist mothers the most.

In her groundbreaking book *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)*, Hettie Judah writes about women’s historically limited access to the art world and points out that although the number of women in contemporary art education and exhibition contexts has of course increased significantly during the past 100 years, structural disparities persist in relation to career continuity, visibility, and institutional recognition after motherhood.³

Judah writes: “While there are structures in place in the corporate world that defend pregnant women against prejudicial treatment, no such protection exists for self-employed people in the creative industries.”⁴ and goes on to address the equally important issue of maternal prejudice faced by many artist mothers: “Artists who have spent years building up good working relationships with curators and programmers find themselves abruptly dropped. Without any discussion, an assumption has been made that the artist has removed herself from the running; she is no longer offered commissions, perhaps because the curator is worried that she will not be able to fulfil them, or that once she has become a new mother, her work will become uninteresting.”⁵

3 Judah, Hettie (2022). *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)*, London: Lund Humphries.

4 Judah, Hettie (2022). *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)*, London: Lund Humphries, p. 17.

5 ibidem.

During my Lisbon fieldwork, I spoke with an artist mother who described how the gallery representing her terminated their collaboration after the birth of her last child, as the gallerist assumed that she would no longer be able to produce the necessary volume of work. Another artist recounted how she had temporarily withdrawn from the art world while her children were young in order to secure a more stable income, and a third artist observed that a significant number of her artist friends and former art school classmates had left the art world altogether after becoming mothers.

These are not individual cases: A recent study from the Association of Women in the Arts (AWITA) including a total of 2000 respondents showed that 64.3% of artist mothers aged 23 to 34 are considering leaving the art world within the next five years⁶ – pointing to the seriousness of the difficulties encountered by artist mothers specifically and to the need for art institutions to address them.

When gendered language is used in these policy recommendations, it reflects this specific context and not a limitation of who these policy recommendations are addressed to.

The policy recommendations are intended to support all artist and cultural producer parents and caregivers, regardless of gender identity, and also recognize that non-binary, trans, and gender non-conforming parents face many of the same structural barriers – and often additional ones that fall outside the scope of this document and deserve dedicated attention of their own.

6 Radda, Sayori (2026). "Are Women in the Arts Facing a Career Exit Crisis?", The Art Journal. June 2026 edition. https://www.theartjournal.com/articles/women-arts-career-exit-crisis-awita-artnet-report?utm_campaign=feed&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=later-linkinbio (last checked 18 June 2026)



Photo from Mané Pacheco's exhibition *Brama* at Galeria Quadrum,
photo credit: Mia Degner

What the fieldwork showed

As both the work of Hettie Judah and the ideas formed during the conversations of the Lisbon fieldwork demonstrate, relatively modest institutional adjustments can have a significant impact on improving the working conditions of parents in the arts.

Flexible scheduling, remote participation options, childcare support, family friendly residency structures, inclusive application criteria, and sustained contact during periods of leave were some of the topics that came up during the Lisbon fieldwork as areas to address that can substantially improve access for artists and cultural producers who are parents.

Another important finding of the Lisbon fieldwork was that while many of the involved art institutions reported making some accommodations when working with artists and cultural producers who are parents, none of these accommodations were formalized, structured, or consistent. The need to transform the current tendency of individual accommodation into a set of policies for structural inclusion is therefore addressed in the policy recommendations as a key point.

Overall, the policy recommendations suggest embedding parent inclusive practices into institutional structures, policies, and cultures, allowing art institutions to retain talent, broaden participation, and better reflect the diversity of lived experiences among all artists and cultural producers.

Although the recommendations focus primarily on artists and cultural producers who are parents, many of the proposed measures would also benefit individuals with other caregiving responsibilities, disabilities, chronic illnesses, neurodivergence, or other circumstances that limit their access to existing institutional frameworks. In this way, parent inclusive policies might help pave the way for a more accessible, equitable, and sustainable art world for all.

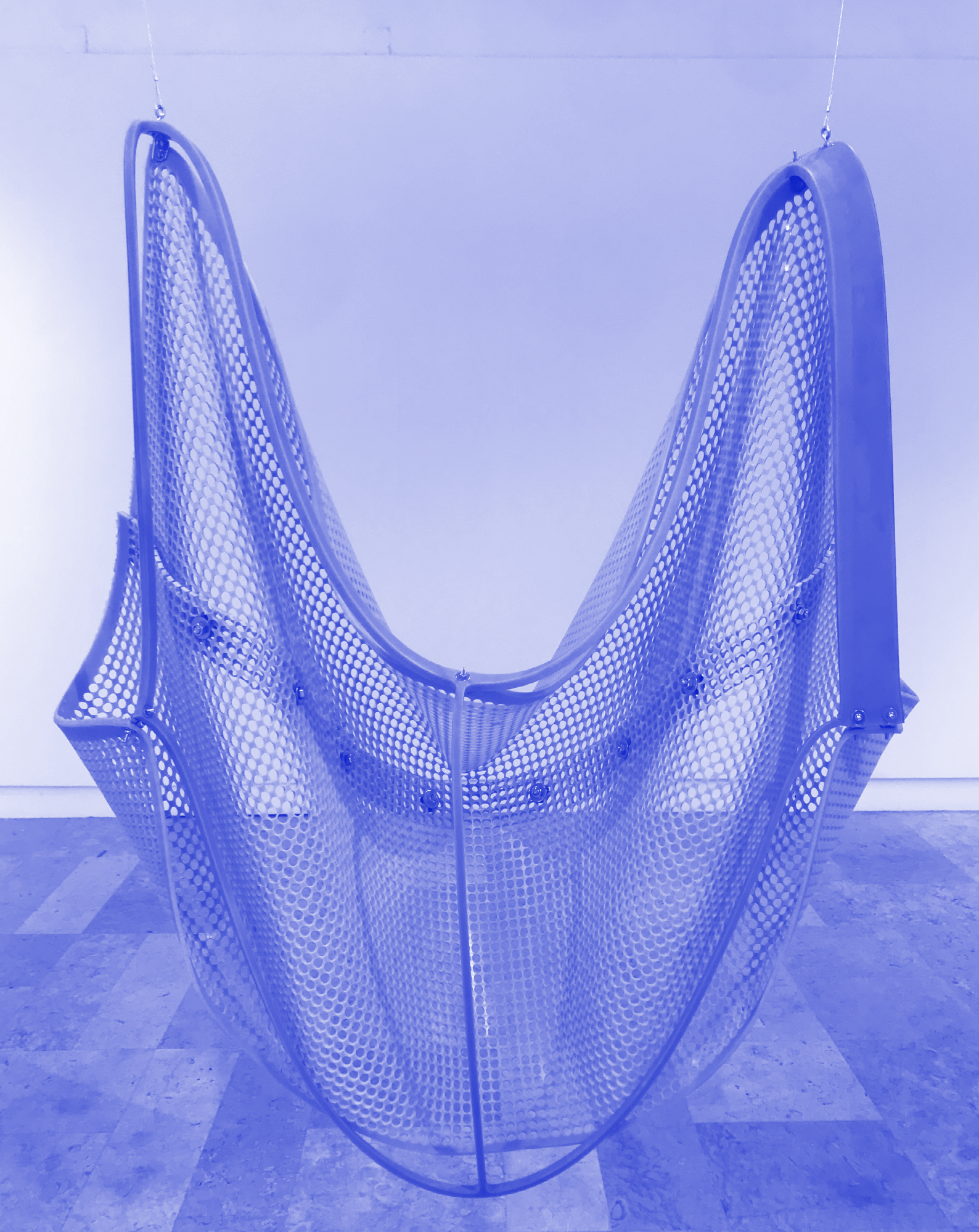


Photo from Mané Pacheco's exhibition *Brama* at Galeria Quadrum,
photo credit: Mía Degner

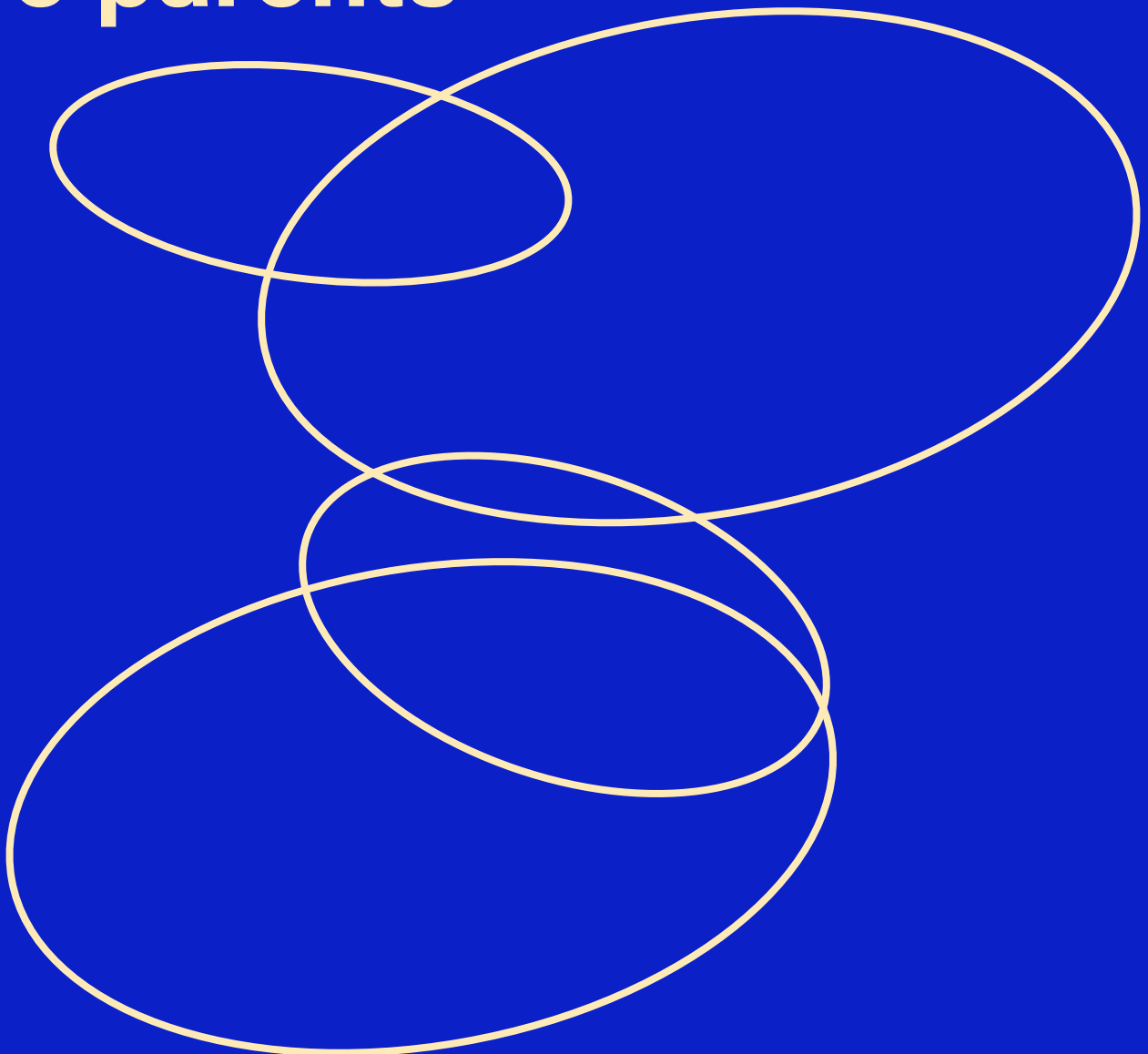
How to use the recommendations

With these policy recommendations I have strived to elaborate – in a guideline form – on Hettie Judah’s pioneering work (no humble task, I admit!), and it is my hope that the recommendations will be informative, usable, and practical for art institutions, galleries, residencies, and art professionals alike.

It is important to recognize that “the art world” is not a single, unified entity, but rather a dynamic and ever-evolving archipelago of many distinct and sometimes overlapping and interconnected worlds. Conditions vary across countries, institutions, and networks, and it is impossible to develop a set of policy recommendations that is universally applicable or capable of addressing every issue. It is equally important to acknowledge that I undoubtedly have blind spots – there will be issues that I have overlooked, and others that I may have given either too much or too little priority compared to what they might deserve when viewed from another corner of the art world ecosystem.

Therefore, I hope that these policy recommendations will keep evolving, expanding, and being adjusted to the realities that they meet. The recommendations are a wishlist, a utopian ideal. They are not intended as a rigid rulebook, but rather as a framework that each institution can adapt and reconstruct to its own context, culture, scale, and resources.

**Policy recommendations
for art institutions,
galleries, and residencies
to ensure equal access
for artists and cultural
producers who
are parents**



How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)

Hettie Judah

Hot Topics in the Art World

Fiona Rogers

Chapter 6

...and grafted her way to art college, A. She tells the doctor she wants an abortion. She is a great mum and procrastinates, but she knows that something is wrong - that her - but they brush her off ('what do you expect? Do you expect to be a mother?'). She is taken to the hospital, she has a haemorrhage and the abortion is performed. *How It Feels* is an account of access to abortion, and of doctors who do not consider a woman's own body and its pain.

...ing *How It Feels* provides a... to abortion. Emin was twenty... a struggling artist with no... one child. 'When you are... up that you want to have... that you can't have a child... e explains. In the balance... ture - the artist we have... work. The abortion was... the film she identifies the... patronized and coerced... ance of motherhood - as... was going to make art... tant. 'If I couldn't fill the... ever and ever and ever,'... be filling the world up... y the space of the child

120.
Paula Rego,
Untitled No. 4, 1998,
from the *Abortion*
Series, 1998-99



120

clinics waiting for, or recovering from, a termination. Wearing an elegant red dress, a woman with eyes as sharp as a bird perches on a plastic-covered table, legs splayed over folding chairs, waiting for intrusion. A schoolgirl curls agonized on a leather sofa, her knuckles gripped tense and white. Another squats over a plastic bucket, pleated skirt hitched above her hips. These great pastel works and the etchings that followed are claustrophobic, adrenal, heavy-bodied, charged, almost erotic. The story they tell is not of laws, votes and paperwork, but of the physical and psychological experience of abortion. There is pain here, but also relief, weariness, resignation, urgency. The works were shown in Portugal and prints widely circulated. Rego described how they provided a gathering point for women to recall and share their own experiences. She spoke of the grim normalization of women dying after home abortions in Portugal, but also of her own abortion, without which she would have had to quit art school and return home. A second referendum in 2007 legalized abortion in Portugal. Rego's

- Organising accessible restaurants and hotels

- More flexible re-
forth, staying

- concentrating instal-
rather than re-
an artist
Schedule openings to be at times when parents can attend with children?

- so that children can en-
parents can attend

- museum into a quiet space (for neurodivergent)

adapted schedules

teams that programme for children,
parents during installations, openings, or
extension of what some institutions are

additional trips
er children for fifteen

Designate

- Pay for the whole fam-
artists?)

artist-

Actively work to change the gender balance in exhibitions and

1. Create an institutional protocol for working with artist parents and other cultural producers who are parents

Creating a specific protocol for working with artists and cultural producers who are parents ensures that the measures taken are consistent over time and not dependent on the sensitivity or goodwill of individual staff members. As several of the interviewed institutional leaders acknowledged, current accommodations for parents are fragile precisely because they rely on individuals rather than structures.

A protocol for working with artist parents and other cultural producers who are parents could include:

*** Institutional obligation to ask artists and other cultural producers prior to project start about their caregiving responsibilities and the specific needs related to these responsibilities.**

By asking the artist/cultural producer directly about their needs in connection to exhibitions, installations, openings, timeframes, residencies, etc., the institution welcomes the artist/cultural producer parent and assumes responsibility for their equal access and collaboration. It should not be the artist/cultural producer's responsibility to bring up these issues.

*** Institutional obligation to designate a specific staff member as a contact person for care-related needs.**

This person would be responsible for initiating the conversation with the artist/cultural producer, sharing the protocol, and coordinating any necessary adjustments across departments. In smaller institutions where a dedicated role is not feasible, this responsibility could be added to an existing position – an HR coordinator, a producer, the lead curator, or another person managing the artist's relationship with the institution. The key is to have a designated staff member taking on this responsibility and ensuring that the conversation happens consistently rather than being left to chance.

*** Institutional obligation to adjust timetables, installation schedules, openings, talks, residency periods, public programmes, etc. to the needs of the artist/cultural producer parent.**

Several interviewees described difficulties participating in public programmes scheduled for hours incompatible with their caregiving responsibilities and also talked about installation and delivery schedules demanding full availability as possible obstacles for them as parents. The length of residencies and how participating in residencies is often almost impossible for artist parents was also a recurring theme. An institutional obligation to adjust timetables, schedules, public programming, and residency periods could include allowing artists to have more flexible installation periods and putting more staff on rather than requiring the artist to stay longer; scheduling openings and talks at hours that are compatible with caregiving responsibilities; allowing the artists/cultural producers more time to complete their work; agreeing on a set timeframe and work plan for the project from the beginning; allowing the artist to attend residencies on flexible schedules (e.g. dividing the residency into smaller parts; not always staying overnight, etc.), and timing residencies to fit the artist's caregiving responsibilities (e.g. conducting the residency during school holidays).

*** Institutional obligation to offer remote participation.**

Offering the possibility of remote participation for talks, panels, jury service, residencies (when suitable; perhaps for a part of the residency period), and other events where physical presence is not strictly necessary would significantly improve access to the art world for artists and cultural producers who are parents. Several interviewees described missing professional opportunities, including jury invitations and events specifically about women in culture, because the scheduling was incompatible with their caregiving responsibilities and no remote option was offered.

*** Institutional obligation to adjust budgets to account for inclusion.**

If artist/cultural producer parents are to have equal access to the institutional art world, budgets for inclusion must follow. This may include budgeting to pay for the travel and accommodation of both the artist/cultural producer, their child(ren) of any age and a partner/assistant; budgets for additional trips for the artist/cultural producer parents who do not bring their children with them but travel back-and-forth; organizing child-accessible hotels/residency spaces and restaurants; organizing and paying for on-location childcare/educational programmes for children of any age, or helping the artist/cultural producer organize affordable local childcare, and possibly offering caregiving stipends to cover childcare costs.

*** Institutional obligation to create a child friendly environment.**

Institutions should welcome the children of artists/cultural producers working with the institution into the institutional activities. This could include: Creating a supervised space at the institution where children of collaborating artists/cultural producers could engage in creative workshops or school curricular learning activities (language classes, art workshops, nature programmes, or collaborations with local schools.) This reframes the child's presence from a logistical challenge into a meaningful experience for the whole family, and can also provide a practical justification for taking children out of school during the project period; transforming a room at the institution into a quiet space for artists/cultural producers to spend time with their children during installations, etc. (some artists/cultural producers may need a space for breastfeeding or for their child to nap).



Small text label on the wall.

Small text label on the wall.



Photo from the exhibition *May I Help You* at MAC/CCB,
photo credit: Mia Degner

2. Keep in touch with artists and cultural producers when they become parents

Keeping in touch with artists and cultural producers when they become parents provides a secure base for continued collaboration and ensures the artists/cultural producers that they are not forgotten or “out of the loop” at this critical stage of their careers.

Keeping in touch could include:

- * For galleries to keep representing artist parents, even if for a period of time their production is slower.
- * For museums to hold on to planned exhibitions and collaborations and to continue inviting the artist/cultural producer to participate in future projects, although timetables may have to be adjusted according to the artist/cultural producer's needs.
- * For all institutions to seek out artist and cultural producer parents actively and invite them for collaborations.
- * For all institutions to support artist parents by buying, exhibiting or promoting their work.
- * For all institutions to engage actively in helping the artist/cultural producer return to work after a parental break. This could include offering studio space, commissioning small projects, including them in group exhibitions, or maintaining regular contact and inviting them to institutional events, even during their break.



Photo from CAM (surroundings), photo credit: Mia Degner

3. Adjust requirements and accessibility for grants, residencies, prizes, and open calls to be inclusive of artist parents

To ensure equal access to grants, residencies, prizes, open calls, etc., institutions must consider their application requirements and their programmes' accessibility, and adjust them to be inclusive of artist parents.

Inclusive applications and programmes could:

- * Redefine or eliminate the term “emerging artist” as a category tied to age.**

An artist who began their career after a decade of caregiving is as “emerging” as a younger artist just out of art school. Tying emergence to age systematically excludes artists who took time away from their careers for parenthood or other reasons.

- * Reconsider age limits in general.**

- * Consider if the timeframe of the project is realistic for artists with caregiving responsibilities.**

If the timeframe is only realistic for artists without caregiving responsibilities (e.g. a three-month-long residency abroad without possibilities of bringing children or dividing the residency into sub-parts), then the project is actively only inviting artists without caregiving responsibilities. Allow artists to suggest adjustments to the timeframe to fit their caregiving responsibilities.

- * Include information in the call stating that you welcome applications from all artists regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, illness, neurodivergence, or caregiving responsibilities, etc.**

- * Ask artists specifically about their needs at application level.**

Having a designated space in the application to include information about special needs, needs to bring one or more children, or needs to adjust timeframes, etc., makes it clear that the institution is explicitly welcoming of artists with caregiving responsibilities and willing to make adjustments to meet their needs.

- * Provide designated funding for artist-parents (e.g. to cover childcare costs).**



Photo from the exhibition *May I Help You* at MAC/CCB,
photo credit: Mia Degner

4. Be aware of the male/female representation ratio and work actively to make it more equal

Being aware of and actively engaging in balancing the male/female artist representation ratio in both museums and galleries is crucial to ensuring equal access for artist mothers in particular.

According to “The Art Basel and UBS Global Art Market Report 2025”, the share of female artists represented by commercial galleries is 41%. Although this number has risen significantly since 2018 (when it was only 35%), women are still underrepresented in commercial galleries.⁷

None of the museum representatives in the Lisbon fieldwork were able to provide exact data on the male/female representation ratio in their museums’ collections during our interviews, but they all stated that female artists were, for historical reasons, largely underrepresented.

“The Art Basel and UBS Global Art Market Report 2025” suggests that “some of the lack of parity in the [commercial art] market may be [...] related to aspects of their [the women artists’] career trajectories ...”.⁸

Assuming that women artists’ career trajectories are impacted significantly by having children (and even more so than their male peers’), working actively to improve their representation in both commercial galleries and museums becomes all the more crucial to ensuring their equal access to the art world.

An active approach to include more female artists could include:

- * Rethinking and reshaping museum collection presentations to include more works by women.**
- * Consciously prioritizing women artists in acquisitions, especially when budgets are limited.**
- * Conducting and publishing audits of the gender ratio in collections, exhibitions, and public programmes.**
- * Commissioning new work by women artists, particularly those returning from career breaks.**

7 “The Art Basel and UBS Global Art Market Report 2025”, p. 83. Available at: <https://www.artbasel.com/news/the-art-basel-and-ubs-global-art-market-report-2025> (last checked 18 June 2026)

8 ibidem.



Photo from Maria José Oliveira exhibition *Eu que já fui eu*, MNAC,
photo credit: Mia Degner

5. Be willing to make cultural changes

As mentioned in the introduction of these policy recommendations, the everyday structures of the art world at large remain built around assumptions of uninterrupted availability, geographic mobility, flexibility, and continuous productivity.

One of the interviewees in the Lisbon fieldwork directly shared her concern that for both artists and cultural producers alike, interrupting their career could be irrecoverable and make it impossible to return. This testifies to a culture that does not by default leave much room for breaks (parental or other).

Institutions play a crucial role in rethinking and reshaping the norms and habits of the art world, and therefore have a unique opportunity to initiate cultural changes.

A lot of ideas for cultural changes have already been proposed in previous parts of these policy recommendations, and will therefore not be addressed at length here, but a few elaborations and additional ideas are appropriate:

Cultural changes to improve access for artist and cultural producer parents (and other artists/cultural producers with limited access) could include:

*** Rethinking the structure and significance of networking activities (dinners, openings, events, etc.) to be more compatible with childcare obligations.**

Rethinking timetables of networking activities has already been addressed elsewhere in these policy recommendations, but it is equally important to reevaluate the entire concept of these activities as such. Networking dinners, openings, and events can all be planned to be family friendly and inclusive.

Finally, we can expand the networking activities to include online platforms and remote participation options, and consider who is included and who is excluded at social events in general and how we might work towards a structure that does not require permanent physical attendance.

*** Normalizing periods of unavailability, career breaks, CV “gaps”, leaves, and periods of less artistic productivity.**

*** Advocating specifically for parental leave provisions for freelance artists and cultural producers,** who currently have no or very limited access to parental leave in many European countries. Institutions are well-positioned to raise this issue because they are among the main beneficiaries of freelance cultural labour and should have a vested interest in ensuring that the artists and cultural producers they work with can sustain their careers through parenthood.

Working politically to improve parental leave provisions for artists and cultural producers could involve building alliances between art institutions, unions, and professional associations, and joining forces to advocate for artists' and cultural producers' parental leave rights at governmental level.

*** Working to ensure equal pay regardless of gender, ethnicity, etc.**

*** Acknowledging that all cultural changes may require advocacy at governance level.** Institutional leaders who are willing to implement parent inclusive policies may face resistance from boards that do not prioritize these issues or are unwilling to allocate funding. Engaging governing boards – through data, case studies, and the voices of the artists and cultural producers themselves – is an essential part of the cultural shift.

Literature

- "The Art Basel and UBS Global Art Market Report 2025", report. (Available at: <https://www.artbasel.com/news/the-art-basel-and-ubs-global-art-market-report-2025>)(last checked 18 June 2026)
- Hettie Judah: *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)*, book (London: Lund Humphries 2022)
- Hettie Judah: "How Not to Exclude Artist Parents", guidelines/policy recommendations. (Available at: <https://www.artist-parents.com>) (last checked 18 June 2026)
- Sayori Radda (2026). "Are Women in the Arts Facing a Career Exit Crisis?", *The Art Journal*. June 2026 edition., article, (Available at: <https://www.theartjournal.com/articles/women-arts-career-exit-crisis-awita-artnet-report>) (last checked 18 June 2026)

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Author Biography

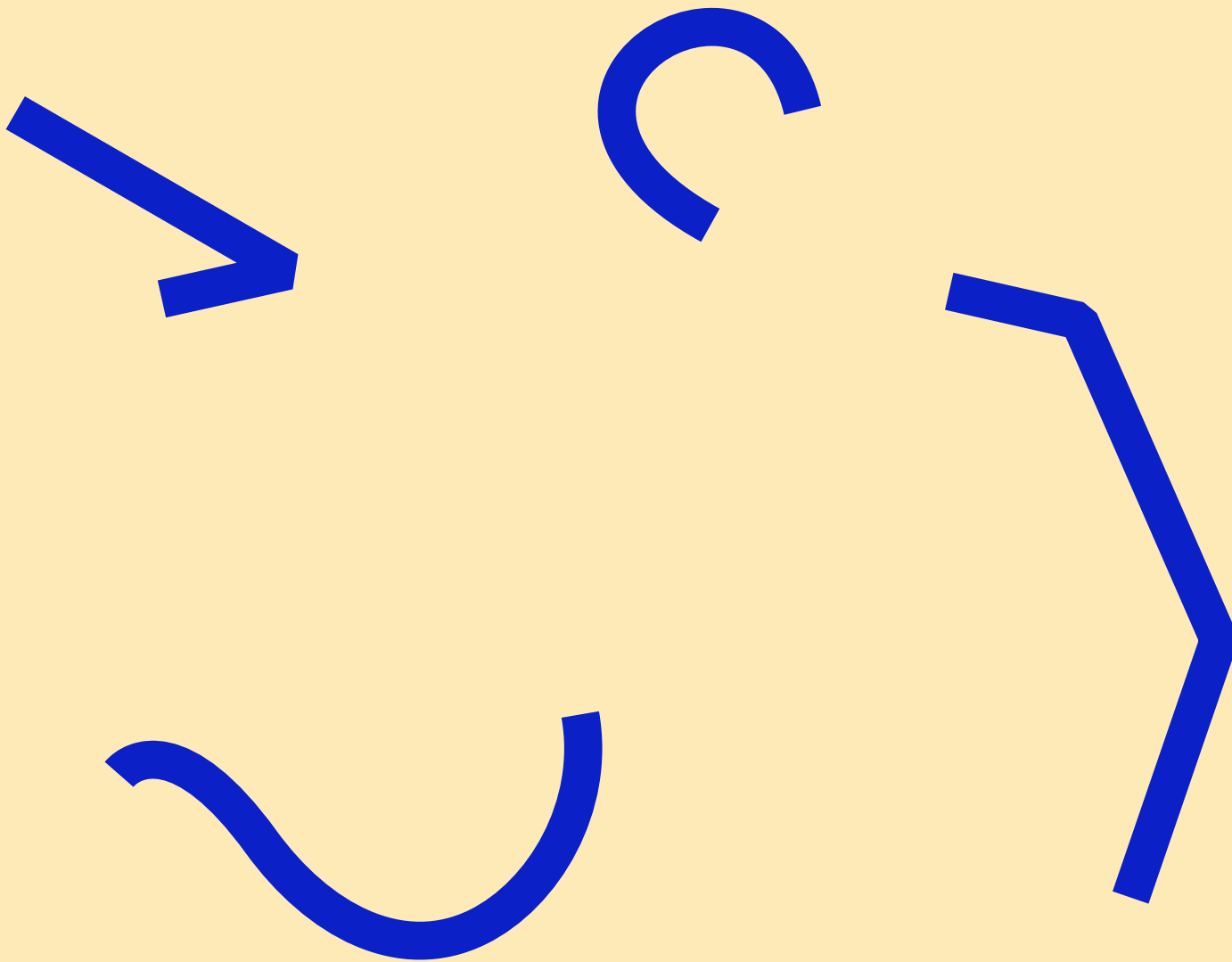
Mia Degner, b. 1984, is a Danish author and visual artist. She studied filmmaking in Lisbon, Portugal, and oral storytelling, dramaturgy, and writing in Copenhagen, Denmark.

She is the author of five books of fiction, poetry and literary non-fiction, and most recently published the essay-booklet *Børneårene* (*The Childrearing Years*, Mikrobe, 2024); a text about the working conditions of artist mothers.

Her text installations and video work have been shown in exhibitions and at festivals across Europe, and she is currently part of an artist duo with fellow author and artist Sine Bang Nielsen, exploring the possibilities of creation and participation from the position of the carer.

For the past fifteen years, Mia Degner has worked as a book editor, conceptualizing several books, among them the anthologies *Afbrydelser* (*Interruptions*, Mikrobe, 2023) about the interrupted working conditions of women authors, and *Moderelementet* (*The Mother Element*, Gutkind, 2024) about mothering and carework as it is presented in Danish literature from 1895 to 2024, which she co-edited with a group of Danish authors.

Mia Degner spent several years between Portugal and Denmark and currently lives outside of Copenhagen with her children.



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