

# The art of motherhood

*Kareena Zerefos is Tate's mother; she's also an artist, illustrator and clothing designer. Her trick to the creative-motherhood juggle? Go with the artistic chaos.*

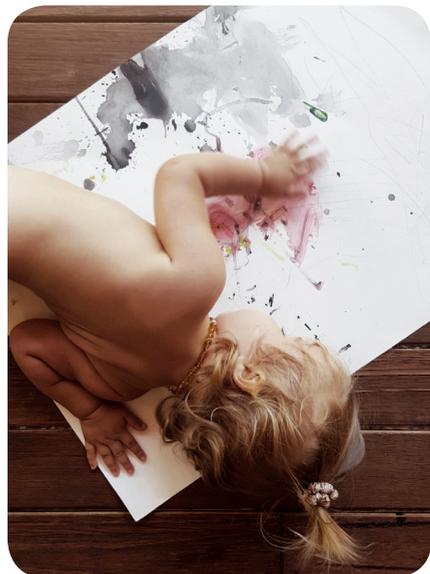


**A**s a self-employed freelancer, this is something Kareena understands well. Based in Sydney's very relaxed ocean-side suburb of Newport, Kareena and daughter Tate, who is almost two, have time and space to draw all day. For Kareena, this is freeing. I ask, do you still have time to make art? "It's not that I get time, it's more a matter of making time... I have everything out on the kitchen bench, and literally, take whatever moment I get." But, as she adds, "I'm fluid with time, part of being an artist is surrendering to the madness. With motherhood, it's just a different kind of madness."

"Parenthood makes you realise that you're not actually in control of your whole life. Whether it's the birth or the postpartum period, it's the transformation, and surrendering to whatever will be. You think you have all the control, but you really don't. You can't understand what will happen to you, how much everything will change, and how different you will feel. It's a total cliché, but nothing prepares you for it, it's better to have no expectations."

Motherhood and careers are often a balancing act, but Kareena shares that working as a freelancer meant she was already used to time at home, an unreliable income, and working at crazy hours of the day.







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She says, “It’s an unexpected perk!” But it also leads to her most important piece of advice for expectant parents that came from her own process of accepting that things were going to change, pretty quickly. She shares, “appreciate how short a time frame it is when they are young, and surrender to that time.” Adding, “don’t put pressure on yourself to expect productive energy, allow yourself to step back if you are in a position to do that, and just enjoy it basically.”

Being at home with Tate has actually helped develop Kareena’s process, through experimentation on the floor of her home. Watching the way Tate will hold a pencil, or use her whole body to create, simply because that’s what feels right. It’s a refreshing method of art making, focusing solely on the act of art. Kareena adds, “It’s interesting to see that from a really base level of not having any expectations. She’s so free with it.” Kareena also shares that the ‘mum stuff’ is infiltrating her practice. Where she used to work with collages and research, now she is working on a series of works that let the art go on its own journey on the paper; focusing on her new-found mother intuition.



The mother and child figures have always appeared in Kareena’s work, exploring the intuition and child-like instinct. The concept of oneness is a theme, and motherhood became a platform to represent ‘mentoring’ and ‘love’ collectively. I asked whether Kareena feels like anything has changed for her artworks now she is a mother, “I’ve been thinking about that a lot lately. I feel like I manifested becoming a parent through my artwork.” However, now she wonders how to represent the symbols of rebirth and regeneration that come with motherhood, especially now she is in the toddler stage, and it’s going into a different kind of chaos.

“Becoming a mother made me very connected to my intuition – even in the presence of pregnancy and birth. It’s a different flow of energy, and whether you have a chance to express that is another thing; I just feel like there’s a lot more coming through.”



And motherhood is directly affecting Kareena's practice – for the better! Sharing she has so much more confidence in her work because she doesn't have time to muse and deliberate or question her skill. Her artworks are made up of moments of clarity. The ideas and thoughts are journaled and considered, practically, because being a full-time mum means she doesn't have the time to act on her creative energies straight away. But Kareena adds, "I used to come up with the ideas and execute them so quickly that I didn't have that time of reflection...I'm much more confident in my ideas because they've been given consideration."

One of the things that changed for Kareena was her working space. The expectation of having a studio, and time alone to do work, made sense for the first three months; when Tate was still small enough to fit in the carrier. But Kareena adds, "once she started crawling, I realised I couldn't have her in a warehouse with all the dangerous stuff around."

The balance of childcare, and paying for a studio, meant it was easier to be at home. But, it also made her appreciate that spending time with her child was valuable. Now when taking on jobs, Kareena considers not only whether the income is worth it against childcare, but whether it's worth it for her own professional development. Kareena discloses, "I'm in this for the long haul, so having a few years with my child doesn't actually make a difference, because in the bigger picture I'm still going to be an artist."



It's critical for creative people to give themselves time to build inspiration that can make your work stronger, accepting that today, you're going to be inspired rather than create. We mused on our must-do-it-right-now generation, Kareena adding, "I think there is so much pressure, especially with social media, to be expected to do it all so quickly." The key – not letting the pressures of social media affect your own personal practice, whether it's artmaking, writing, or motherhood.

At the end of the year, Kareena, Tate, and father Nick will all be undertaking a new adventure. This one even bigger than the venture into parenthood: moving to Portugal. For the freelancing duo, it seemed like the perfect time to take Tate and experience something completely different, giving Tate exposure to an entirely new culture. Enter a new kind of chaos!

To check out more of Kareena's work, you can find her on Instagram at @littlekareena

Words by *Emma-Kate Wilson*

Emma-Kate is a British contemporary art and design writer based in Sydney. Through her writing, Emma-Kate reveals the lives of creative people, and uncovers how they juggle parenthood and art practice.

