

Service in the Nuclear Family



Tasse Geldart, "Service in the Nuclear Family" (1990). Exhibited in Healing Images, Toronto.

Rather than do a sociological feminist analysis of the painting "Service in the Nuclear Family" (oil on canvas), I wanted to let the young girl seated at the table speak to you in her own words.

What day is today? ...aha, no matter. All the days run together anyway. The ones I count are those days that he leaves me alone. The other days I call amnesia... What is love?

Tonight I wait again for some food to nourish me. I need some safety served up with compassion; I'll settle for a side dish of love. Do I sound bitter and clever? I am. He taught me the power of language but forbade me to speak. Secret sadness reverberates in the knowledge that I am in the food — his food. I am at his service... I service him. My father who art in heaven...

Am I supposed to learn to wear my mother's empty smile... to give service with a smile? Can't someone show me an alternative... a hope... an escape from self-annihilation? And can someone explain why my clothes are always invisible when he looks at my body? My mother makes my clothes for me... they do not cover me. What is dignity?

Rage butts the edges of consciousness. Go back! Be quiet! Rage = danger = rage = danger. When I let you fight, scratch, bite, kick, spit and name yourself, I get hurt. His friends stake me to the chosen surface with more hands than I can count. It is you, rage, that brings the pillow down on my face. I send you out to defend me and he deflects you back to me. Who owns me?

Do you know the weary weight of sadness and desolation? I will tell you that it is very heavy... so heavy that the burden enters into me and forces itself out through my eyes. No one seems to see the sadness running ceaselessly down my face. Are the tears invisible? If they can't be seen are they real?

Do you see and understand what is happening to me? If you never see me you can never help me. I need you, neighbour, family friend, teacher, to have my knowledge. I am only a baby, a two year old, a ten year old, a teenager, a young woman and perhaps a friend of yours.

Who are the advocates of children?

— By Tasse Geldart, visual artist