

Exhibitions

Mother and Child: Parturition from Past to Present. MOTHER-CHILD PROJECT INCORPORATED in cooperation with the MUSEUM of the HISTORY of MEDICINE, ACADEMY of MEDICINE, TORONTO. Mounted at the Ontario Science Centre, Toronto, 11 December 1986 to 30 April 1987. No published catalogue.

The current publicity given to the phenomenon of motherhood in the 1980s has been accompanied by a spate of recent publications and a sometimes bewildering variety of philosophies. It can come as a relief to turn from the almost competitive aspects of the present maternal experience to look at some of its historical aspects. *Mother and Child* is a bilingual travelling exhibition organized by Mother-Child Project Incorporated in cooperation with the Museum of the History of Medicine, Academy of Medicine, Toronto. On display at the Ontario Science Centre in Toronto from 11 December 1986 to 30 April 1987, the exhibition is billed as an exploration of "the history of mothering from swaddling to Pablum to the electronic nanny." It focuses on maternal history in the Western World from 1600 to the present, and leads the viewer through changing perspectives on child-birth practices, feeding techniques, and hygienic advancements.

The first part of the exhibition concentrates on the period 1600-1850. Panels and cases of artifacts illustrate a range of themes: male and female midwifery, maternal and infant mortality, domestic medicine, anatomy and infant care. The blue-tinted reproductions which accompany the text on many of the panels bear testimony to the resources of the Academy of Medicine. An illustration of a sixteenth century birth scene, for example, is reproduced from Jacob Rueff's *De conceptu et generatione hominis* in the Rare Book Collection of the Academy. Illustrations of an overdeveloped fetus performing gymnastic exercises are drawn from a 1604 volume, *The byrth of mankynd*, in the Academy's Drake Collection. The artifacts providing a transition between display panels also rely on the same source. A few are on loan from the Royal Ontario Museum but the rest belong to the Museum of the History of Medicine. There are cases of rattles and amulets, mortars and pestles, but perhaps the most macabre artifacts are the mid-nineteenth century obstetrical instruments: the craniotomy forceps, hook and crochet, and perforator. Artifacts, illustrations and text all underline woman's lot at this time: conceiving and bearing children.

The second part of the exhibition, covering 1850 to the present, views maternal history in a Canadian context. The problems created by new industrial cities, the Public Health Movement, scientific obstetrics and twentieth-century childcare are encompassed in this

section. The photographic reproductions illustrating the text here are heavily dependent on two sources: the City of Toronto Archives and the Notman Photographic Archives (McCord Museum, McGill University). These sources have served the exhibition well; photographs such as those of the 1914 slum dwelling at 512 Front Street, Toronto, and the Montreal Maternity Hospital in 1925-26 are both apt and visually arresting. The artifacts in this section are perhaps less well coordinated thematically. The 1934 incubator of one of the Dionne quintuplets is certainly an interesting curiosity; however, the relatively close proximity of a 1980 birthing chair to an early twentieth century maternity dress does indicate a certain thematic muddle.

The ambitious scope of this exhibition, both in terms of chronology and subject matter, has meant that the display consists of a series of vignettes on a multitude of topics rather than an extended survey of any one topic. In the twentieth century section, in particular, this leads to a somewhat confusing succession of panels in an attempt to embrace a host of modern developments. Given the range of the exhibition and the limitations of the traveling display format, this is perhaps inevitable. The exhibition does steer carefully clear of recent controversies although it touches on the current midwifery dilemma. The Science Centre has featured a succession of guest speakers in January and February on strife-ridden topics such as contraception and test tube babies, but the exhibition does not tackle these subjects at all. It wisely avoids any ideological bias and thus is unlikely to provoke dissension among viewers.

More positive praise can be meted out to the considerable visual impact of the exhibition. The lighting is good, the bilingual text is easy to read, and the subject captions are both prominent and, sometimes, provocative. It is hard, for example, to resist a panel which is happily titled "Shift the clouts often for the piss and dung." There is no published commentary or guide to the exhibition, but this is a minor lacuna. Since the exhibition does not rely on a linear survey of a topic, the directional flow of traffic is likewise not of paramount importance; the intended viewing sequence in the second part of the exhibition, however, is rather bewildering. Perhaps this is due to the physical limitations of the display space in the Science Centre's Great Hall and will be improved in the exhibition's later stops. One change that is certain to transpire when the exhibition moves will be a reduction of the noise level. Unfortunately, though not illogically, the exhibition at present shares the Great Hall with a special play area for three- to six-year-olds. The uproar presents a vivid contrast to the hush, not to say somnolence, occasionally provoked by archival displays.

The exhibition moves to the Wellington County Museum in Fergus at the end of April. Thence it proceeds to the David M. Stewart Museum in Montreal in December 1987; and then opens in the Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax in March 1988; the Newfoundland Museum, St. John's in May 1988; the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Ottawa in July 1988; and Science North, Sudbury in November 1988. From there the exhibition continues to the United States.

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For the Curious: The City Archives Collection. PAMELA WACHNA and ALAN MEISNER. Mounted at the Market Gallery of the City of Toronto Archives, Toronto,