

Carmen Watts

01:082:253:H1 Contemporary Photography

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Birth



Carmen Winant, My Birth (3,059), 2018. Found papers and photographic prints with tape

This course has shifted my perspective. Previously, I underestimated the depth of photography, but now I recognize its rich history, complexity, and impact.

The contemporary photograph I chose is Carmen Winant's *My Birth*, 2018. 3,059 found papers and photographic prints with tape. This is a photograph with multiple photographic prints with tapes on them to stick to a canvas. This is a Dimensions variable photograph, and the photos vary in size. Carmen Winant's *My Birth* is composed of a multitude of *black & white* and colored photographs that represent the powerful narrative of the nature of a mother's intimacy and vulnerability of giving birth. "How do we look at this photograph?" is a question that varies by perspective. Each photograph has its unique emotion and story but cohesively reflects the birth experience of a woman.

The subject of the photograph is a collage of smaller photos arranged together to create a story. Given that the photos in this photograph are arranged in a collage, it is clear that manipulation has occurred, as individual images were selected and organized. The image was also fabricated by combining various photographs. The construction was purposely composed by bringing together different elements to form a unified whole. The angle of vision varies for each original photo captured, some from high angles and some from low angles. However, the photograph of the collage itself is viewed straight-on. The images in the collage vary in detail, with most not appearing as sharp. Judging from the colors, it seems likely that these photos were taken with old cameras. This adds a captivating interest to each photo in the collage. However, the straightforward shot of the collage is presented clearly, conducting a crisp contrast to the hazy photos. Although this photograph lacks a clear focus, the lighting in each photo captures people's attention. Each photo features dramatic lighting that creates contrast and expresses raw emotion. The use of light and shadow adds depth and intensity to the overall composition, drawing the viewer into the scene and creating a powerful visual impact.

The sand on the beach is what I compare to the photograph. Just like the sand, the photograph consists of different elements combined to make one substance. Each grain of sand has its own unique story of where it originated. Some grains of sand come from different rocks; some grains are big, and some are small. With millions of different grains, each grain of sand has had its unique journey, much like the multiple photos in the photograph. The grains of sand unite to form a beach where you can relax and unwind, while these photos come together to illustrate the visuals of the beginning of life. There are different ways to experience having a child, as shown in the photos. Some people in the photo looked drained, while others looked thrilled. The context varies in each photo because there are different situations and different mothers; Birth is personal. "Photographs carry more credibility than other kinds of images and especially require interpretation" (Terry Barret 149). This photo captures authentic moments strategically placed together, conveying raw emotions and expressions that can be interpreted.

How these photos are casually placed together with tape and that there are multiple photos sends a clear message from Carmen that birth is normal. I believe as a society, people that have not experienced a birth firsthand do not understand the intensity and intimacy it entails. The collage shows graphic images of what happens that most people typically do not want to see. Most people don't believe birth is easy, but they don't realize how strong you have to be in this experience. Not just physically but emotionally. That's why this photograph is important so viewers can be more aware. Birth is not a common feeling everyone feels; it is a unique process. Most births are not depicted or shown, which creates a lack of awareness about what giving birth is really like. Using tape is a convenient method for quickly sticking things together. I think this also symbolizes how frequently these experiences occur. The unfiltered photo of childbirth

casually displayed on a canvas with blue tape creates a strong contrast at first glance. Displaying these photos sends a message that these experiences are indeed raw but regular and should be normalized. “My Birth is a profound testimony to the cultural silence and pictorial absence of (and lack of familiarity with) the overwhelmingly bodily process for women of giving birth.” (Charlotte Cotton 108). Charlotte Cotton points out how the process of childbirth for women has been culturally silenced. In our society, it's not common to see genuine images of women giving birth, even though the process itself is remarkable and frequent. I believe that by not normalizing the experience of childbirth creates a distorted narrative and undervalues its significance. Those who have not witnessed childbirth firsthand may have differing opinions compared to those who have. “My Birth calls forth not only a timely contemplation of the politics of women’s bodies and fertility, but also specifically speaks to the ideological bias that hides women artists’ maternity from public discourse and, in so doing, underplays and ignores the nature of women’s creative labor.” (Charlotte Cotton 109). She discusses the politics of a woman's body and how it is ignored. There are people in politics who ignore the women's birth process/body and make decisions based on something most can't even physically experience.

When I look at this photograph, I am deeply moved by the emotions evoked by it. The powerful display of human strength depicted in this image captures a range of emotions, stories, and experiences, highlighting the uniqueness of each moment that has been frozen in time. I see a photo that shows that there is no one way of birth, but all cohesiveness is motherhood. Motherhood shouldn't be censored or silenced; it should be shown and applauded.

Works Cited

Charlotte Cotton, "Revived and Remade," *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2020), 109.

Terry Barrett, "Principles for Interpreting Photographs" *The Weight of Photography: Photography History Theory and Criticism*, Johan Swinnen and Luc Deneulin, Editors. Brussels: ASP, 2010, pages 149