

[ ∞ | EVERLASTING ]

*I'm afraid a lot of the pain is still with me...*

*good home.*

*I have always been overprotective of my children because*

*We're not criminals.*

*never your baby*

*I have always felt my daughter was taken from me.*

*Everyone said, "You have to go on with your life, you have to forget about that now."*

*use I am afraid they will disappear too.*

*We're mothers.*

*y*

[ ∞ | EVERLASTING ]

A MULTIMEDIA SOUND + VIDEO INSTALLATION BY  
ANN FESSLER

Decker Gallery  
Maryland Institute College of Art  
January 31 – March 16, 2003

<http://www.mica.edu/everlasting>

**THE ARTIST** — Inviting Ann Fessler to Baltimore to create *Everlasting* was an occasion for celebration. I learned of Ann in 1985 through her artist books and reputation as a teacher at MICA. I first included her work in an exhibition I curated for the controversial *Outcry: Artists Answer AIDS*, for Baltimore's Artscape festival. She was one of six artists I invited to serve on the founding Board of The Contemporary. In MICA's 1990 Sabbatical Exhibition, audiences witnessed Fessler's first installation about adoption. Then in 1993 Baltimore lost a much-loved member of its arts community to the Rhode Island School of Design. She returned two years later to participate in *Going for Baroque*, a pioneering collaboration between The Walters Art Gallery and The Contemporary. Now, Ann Fessler has come home again.

Of course, home for Ann originally meant a small Midwestern river town, where she was raised by loving adoptive parents, and where traditional gender stereotypes were reinforced in *Life Magazine*, weekly episodes of *Father Knows Best*, sex education films screened in junior high health class, and March of Time newsreels – but a few of the sources of imagery Fessler has appropriated in her photographs, collages, prints, films, and installations. Our culture continues to provide the material from which she constructs stories. As a narrative artist,

## CURATORIAL STATEMENT

she has always questioned the myths of our collective public history. Returning to Baltimore brings her full circle to the place where she first began to demystify her own personal history. The voices of others have long been incorporated into this artist's work through outreach projects; they now take center stage as the heart of the piece we premiere in this exhibition.

**THE EXHIBITION** — The companion installations on exhibit in MICA's Decker Gallery, *Close to Home* and *Everlasting*, question the complex network of relationships within the adoption triad: the adoptee, the woman who gave birth to this child, and the adoptive family. *Close to Home* tells Fessler's story and places us in its terrain through the sounds, smells, and sights from her youth. The secrets that adoption hides begin to reveal themselves within the corncrib's enclosure. The search for a yearbook picture of the woman who gave birth to her brings Fessler back to the river she realizes is the "source" that has symbolically connected mother and daughter for so many decades.

*Everlasting* presents the invisible voices of a generation of women who, as young girls in a post-war era (1945-1973), relinquished newborns for adoption. Their stories are finally being told and, more important, heard, revealing that many made their choice under coercion. Raising her own child was not a choice for one labeled unfit and unstable because she was unwed. These women suffered both the loss of a child and of their identity as mothers. Labels such as "birth mother" or "first mother," often used now to describe these women but not in use at the time of their pregnancies, became problematic for the team working on this exhibition. Fessler attempts to reclaim the status of mother for the seven she interviewed. In texts related to this exhibition, we have taken an editorial stance to refer to them simply as "mothers."

**THE PROCESS** — The most important things we bring into the art arena are our experiences. As a curator, I am continually exploring ways visitors can relate their own lives to the art on exhibit. It is essential that artists participate in this exchange. In an active process of questioning assumptions about how art is presented, an environment is cultivated where exhibition and educational goals work together to stimulate critical thinking.

For me, the educational component is integral to the exhibition experience. All materials, programs, and community partnerships, as well as the visitor's history, become relevant to the content or context of the exhibition. I also hope to facilitate such learning opportunities for my students, many whom will build careers as artists who exhibit, teach, or curate.

These curatorial and educational challenges provided the genesis for the focus on *Everlasting* of my seminar, *Exhibition Development: The Curatorial Experience*. Fessler's work inspired MICA faculty, staff, and students to invest enormous time and energy into this collaborative, community-based project.

During the past year, more than 30 undergraduate and continuing studies students worked together on the complex process of designing and interpreting an exhibition. Our classroom was the laboratory for their experimentations, which were conducted during Fessler's year-long residency at MICA, and with the assistance of 10 professional mentors.

Seven work teams developed proposals that were reviewed and critiqued during monthly presentations to the artist and mentors. All of the exhibition's design and educational components were subject to rigorous evaluation – did they contribute to the artist's vision and her goals for connecting with community?

Both participating in and examining the curatorial process, students formed relationships with the artist, art, and audience. They first established the aesthetic and conceptual basis for everything that would be produced by the teams by conceiving a graphic identity, then they planned the installation, layout, and lighting to reinforce Fessler's goal of audience interaction.

Our team collaborated with private and public schools to identify appropriate interdisciplinary learning activities for high school visitors, produced projects for senior citizens related the exhibit's themes, engaged MICA's Community Arts Partnerships (CAP) program, and organized extensive multidisciplinary public programs and residencies.

Since I began to teach the *Exhibition Development Seminar* at Maryland Institute College of Art in 1997, teams of MICA students have developed and implemented six exhibitions in museums, galleries, and non-traditional exhibition spaces across Baltimore. Each project presents a fresh set of challenges as our team addresses the limitations of exhibition spaces, the emotionally or intellectually challenging content of the art, the vision of the artist and the curator. The students who participate in these projects gain professional experience in the technical aspects of developing an exhibition. But more important for me, they also develop a new way of thinking about the way an exhibition can connect a larger community to art and artists. ∞

George Ciscle has mounted groundbreaking exhibitions, created community arts programs, and taught courses in the fine arts and humanities for more than 30 years. He is currently Curator-in-Residence at MICA, where he consults on the development of community-based and public programming. He leads the seminar *Exhibition Development: The Curatorial Experience*, a course he conceived to provide artists with the opportunity to learn all aspects of the process of producing an exhibition.

...questioning assumptions about how art is presented...

1 For more information on these student's experience, see p. 26, "Seminar Statement."

At present, I find that women...are taking the lead in voicing an art that responds to the question which now preoccupies many people: how to give voice to difference in a way that recasts our discussion of relationship and the telling of truth.

— Carol Gilligan, from *In a Different Voice*<sup>1</sup>

How do we get at the truth? A fundamental responsibility of the art making process is the act of telling a story and telling it well. Visual artists have been engaged by this process for millennia. When an artist sets out to record her own history – personal as well as cultural – the very act provides insight to the underpinnings of the society in which the artist's vision arose, and offers insights into that society's own view of itself. Ann Fessler's *Everlasting*, which has its premiere at Maryland Institute College of Art's Decker Gallery, is a re-examination of the impact of 20<sup>th</sup> century American cultural norms on the changing family structure. While it focuses on adoption and the life experiences of women who surrendered children to adoption, this installation nevertheless serves as a vehicle for not only personal, but also universal, understanding. The experience of belonging to family is universal. The family serves as a cultural crossing for all of us and in some manner is a barometer for determining our personal life experience.

## REVEALING UNTOLD STORIES: "VOICE" IN THE WORK OF ANN FESSLER

My own family experience is part of the construct to which Fessler speaks in her art. My mother was a child of adoption, born of Native American ancestry but raised in the 1930s and '40s by an African American family. Now, in her 73rd year, after a life shaped by assumptions based on her experience in her adoptive family, my mother has been discovering what it is to be Indian. All at once, my family is exploring our collective truth and giving voice to it. My mother is becoming a tribal elder. What she had once denied as a result of her adoption, and its negative manifestations which were dependent on false cultural constructs, is now re-defining our family, thus giving rise to a voice which did not exist before.

Fessler's work is the culmination of many years of research, self-discovery, and cultural re-transformation of the family construct. She has been accomplishing this largely through an interdisciplinary approach to the art making process, always cognizant of whose voice is being represented in her work.

Our modern age has been witness to many "isms" in art, often associated with technological advancements appropriated by artists for their use. The examination of these "isms" has been at the core of a number of recent exhibitions. For example, *Moving Pictures* at the Guggenheim Museum challenged the precepts of what is "image," and many of the artists in that exhibition used iconography that presented less popular views of accepted cultural constructs. New aesthetic and technological movements, which often arise in tandem with major contemporaneous political and social events, serve to question the real nature of the art making process – for the maker, for the viewer, and for the institutions that support art. The impetus and direction for the installation *Everlasting* was the historical significance of the period between the end of the

<sup>1</sup> Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice* (Harvard University Press 1993), xviii.

second world war and the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*. In *Everlasting*, Fessler pursues a poignant, sensitive compositional aesthetic while simultaneously pursuing a sanguine social/cultural discourse about family.

Fessler's focus on engaging audiences directly, a primary objective in this as in earlier works, has presented challenges for the artist, for the audience, and for the institutions that have exhibited her work. Fessler seeks a connection with the audience in order to inform her pursuit of conveying the experience of the family in all of its aspects. But how do we as viewer come to see this in her work? Like all artists of substance, Fessler has placed herself squarely within the work. Not at its center, but respectfully left of center. She is ambiguous in her approach, which leaves ample room for the viewer's interpretation. In Fessler's work, an allegorical perspective has evolved into an idiom that addresses and embraces personal experience while integrating the larger contextual issues of feminism and feminist ideology. Fessler is an adopted child who was raised by a mother who was also adopted. It is no doubt that her artistic angst has come to have its sources here. The juxtaposition of art and life is closely allied in Fessler's personal expressive verb. We sense the thread of connection between earlier and newer work, an ongoing and constant dialogue that the artist has maintained with herself and with the audience. Thus, what we come to is examining the breadth of Fessler's artistic vision to date as an unwavering commitment to creating work that embodies the best of critical theory while at the same time seeking to give voice to the viewer/participant, to the audience, and thereby to the self. Fessler's work is about giving voice. The voice of the participant, particularly in the recent work, has come to take on a truly collaborative role. The act of giving voice is a postmodern construct that serves to transmit consideration of diverse cultural perspectives and to acknowledge the cultural deconstruction of sources and information. Fessler's installations have focused on just these concerns. For example, in *Ex/Changing Families: Two Stories of Adoption* (1997), Fessler considers her parents, Cliff and Hazel (the subjects of a documentary film that is a component of the installation), and her childhood in an adoptive household (Fessler's brother was adopted into the family as well). Within the installation, the family forms a sense of place, or home, for the viewer while inviting the viewer to question the roles we play in family. The work is both aesthetic and thematic in its overture, and it is focused on seeking to demystify the art making process and the institutions that form the artist's milieu.

Fessler's art should be seen in the context of an educational dialogue, stretching our perceived belief structures regarding human interactions. The central element of Fessler's work relative to giving voice has its source in the feminist ideology of the early 1970s. The seminal work of feminist author Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, can offer insights into the family genre concerns of Fessler's work. Gilligan asserts that a new paradigm must be achieved in order for

James Montford

James Montford is Coordinator of Community Programs at the RISD Museum of Art. He has participated in and curated numerous exhibitions and community projects throughout the U.S., most recently at the Queens Museum of Art, the Seattle Art Museum, the Mattress Factory, and the Wadsworth Athanaeum. His work is included in the permanent collections of The Chrysler Museum and the Museum of the National Center of African American Artists, among others. For the past 25 years, as an educator and visual artist, Montford has conducted visual research within the African Diaspora.



LIVING TO PLEASE HUSBAND AND CHILDREN, American Dream Series, 1979, photomontage

women to have voice in our society, affirming that a convergence of ideological thought and experience must exist before new voices can be heard:

...by voice I mean something like what people mean when they speak of the core of the self. Voice is natural and also cultural. It is composed of breath and sound, words, rhythm, and language. And voice is a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds. Speaking and listening are a form of psychic breathing. This ongoing relational exchange among people is mediated through language, culture and plurality. For these reasons, voice is a new key for understanding the psychological, social and cultural order—a litmus test of relationships and measure of psychological health.<sup>7</sup>

The concern for voice and its representation, as the conceptual framework for Fessler's art, has moved the artist to explore the family genre as the psychological vehicle for the expression of the work. The early work in the form of photomontage, including the *American Dream* series (1979-80) provided the artist with an approach that has been her mainstay over the years: a deconstruction of the image in the traditional sense. She appears at times to be intuitively aware of the modernist constructs, which were aptly employed in the early works.

These early pieces demonstrate an interest in women and women's work while thoughtfully evoking the formal constructs of social documentary photography. Coming of age in the 1950s and '60s, Fessler experienced the transitions taking shape in a post-World-War-II-era culture beginning to reconfigure itself during the period of Johnson's new Great Society and the civil rights movement. Her compositions during this early period reflected on her childhood and reveal that the artist was engaged in a reconsideration of the work her mother did in the home in the post WWII era as a "Donna Reed" mother. The titles of the photo-montages suggest their imagery: *Living to Please Husband and Children*, *Growing up to be like Mommy*, *Home Improvement*, and *Men and Motors*. This work makes evident Fessler's concern for personal iconography in the execution and juxtaposition of subject and source. The work has its sources in the burgeoning mass media culture of Fessler's youth, best illustrated by the images presented by publications such as *Life Magazine*, which the artist appropriated in her art. Fessler is re-contextualizing historical events, making the concept of "history" the content of the work. Through the appropriation of images from mass culture and the re-contextualization of historical events, Fessler asserts unambiguously her own voice. She exposes the institutionalized stereotypes placed upon women in a patriarchal culture.

© Clifford Fessler

Two decades later, Fessler utilized allegory to revisit the underlying tenets of art history in the installation and artist's book entitled *Art History Lesson*. The installation was included in *Going for Baroque* (1995), an exhibition at Walters Art Gallery with *The Contemporary*, and the artist's book first appeared as an insert in *American Art Magazine*. *Art History Lesson* offers visceral visual metaphors, most notably the psychological juxtaposition of H. W. Janson's *History of Art* with a Fessler de-text book entitled *A. H. Fessler's Art History Lesson*. In this work, Fessler brings the viewer to question the cultural mythology around the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of women. She strategically challenges the western canon by re-contextualizing a familiar work of art, taking on Janson's description of Nicolas Poussin's *Rape of the Sabine Women*, which depicts the women who were victims of this attack as filled with sexual rapture. In experiencing this work, we must pause and consider our culpability in the support of cultural and institutional stereotypes which encourage the subjugation of women. This is appropriation in art taken to the highest level of discourse.

Fessler's earlier artists' books, including the *True Stories* series of the 1980s, provided another opportunity to explore new territory as an artist interested in connecting with audience and breaking with gallery traditions. Fessler does not reject the white cube in her process but rather seeks to present her work in ways and in venues that are more inclusive. She has been known to place her books anonymously in such nontraditional venues as beauty salons as a way of bringing the work to people who might not encounter art in the "formal" context of the museum or gallery.

This desire to integrate and to be inclusive of other voices in her work has become a hallmark of Fessler's creative endeavors and resonates with postmodernist constructs. Her artistic strategies signify a new vision and a voice reflecting community.

Fessler has produced artist books, traditional photography, prints, videos, and multimedia installations. It is as an installation artist that we see Fessler in *Everlasting*, which is crafted and presented in a theater-like setting, employing Fessler's keen installation techniques and engaging multiple disciplines. The exhibition's focus on adoption and, in particular, adoption's impact on the mothers who surrendered their children takes center stage. The story of the biological mother's experience in adoption is an almost taboo subject, a story that in Fessler's view hadn't yet been accurately told. *Everlasting* is a seminal work

HAZEL IRONING, c. 1920s, Kodachrome, Clifford Fessler



offering narratives by mothers about their experience of surrendering a child. Both the “style” of the exhibition and its content are emblematic of Fessler’s artistic verb, which seeks to bring community to the work.

*Integrity is based not on artists’ allegiances to their own visions but on an integration of their ideas with those of the community. The presence of a diversified audience in these works leads us back to issues of power, privilege, and the authority to claim the territory of representation. Inevitably then, we must reconsider the possible ‘uses’ of artwork in the social context and the roles of the artist as an actor in the public sector.<sup>1</sup>*

The desire to be relevant to the “community” has Fessler working with an iconography in *Everlasting* that centers on the genre of installation art as a collaborative effort. The multimedia installation is, for Fessler, a wonderfully contrived yet expressive vehicle permitting multiple points of view. In recent years significant discourse concerning installation art has been at the forefront of the prevailing concerns in the art world. Under the direction of Robert Storr, then the curator of the Project Space at MoMA, installation art came into its own. The exhibition *Dislocations* (at MoMA in 1991) clearly places installation art at the center of the dialogue. And it was evident to everyone that the Whitney Biennials of the 1990s were rooted in installation.

Storr writes, in his catalogue essay for that exhibition: “Dislocations therefore implies calculated shifts of location and point of view and the indirect collaboration of artist and audience in mapping previously unimagined spaces, or remapping those taken for granted as self-evident.”<sup>4</sup> This is the direction Fessler took in such work as *Genetics Lesson* (1990), her first work focused on adoption, and *Ex/Changing Families*, where we see the artist giving voice to the viewer by creating interactive components to the installation. Through this process, she begins to create concepts for collaborations with audience. An early example of this can be found in an earlier installation at the Washington Project for the Arts (WPA).

Curator Helen Brunner invited artists who referenced history, or whose work used history, to develop new work in a present-day dialogue or context for the groundbreaking exhibition *History as Content*, presented at WPA in 1984. Fessler researched both statistics and myths about the incidence of rape in the Baltimore/Washington region, developing content for a video which played repeatedly on the television screen in the living room of her two-room installation. This video was juxtaposed with an appropriated Janson image of

*The Rape of Sabine Women*, which was carefully placed on the wall as if a decoration. In the bedroom, Fessler places the viewer in the space of the violation, where a bed and a serendipitously open window were juxtaposed with a maze of sheer fabric panels inscribed with text expressing thoughts of both rapist and victim: “He said it was her fault for not locking the door.” “She was more afraid for her children in the next room.”

Oftentimes, installations can be so site specific that they become ephemeral in nature and have limited impact beyond the exhibition. This has been a concern for Fessler, and she has sought to generate strategies that give elements of her installations life beyond the gallery. *Close to Home*, which premiered at Brown University’s Bell Gallery in 2001 and is re-installed at MICA alongside *Everlasting*, is a multimedia video installation, presenting the story of her own search for her biological mother. As of this writing Fessler has located her mother, but not yet made contact. The artist’s search is documented in part by a video, *Along the Pale Blue River*, which is traveling the country in a number of venues, thus connecting the work to a broader audience. Jo-Ann Conklin, the Director of the Bell Gallery, asserts that in *Close to Home* “Fessler strikes a delicate balance, creating a powerful, experimental work that is personal and touching, but never maudlin, sentimental, or clichéd.” Conklin believes that in this regard Fessler maintains a critical distance, thus creating work that has at its center a universal experience for the audience.

In *Everlasting*, audience is key to the installation. The work is presented in a theater-like setting, a darkened room with chairs that invite the audience to sit. The darkened space is filled with emotive dialogue edited from the artist’s own field interviews with unmarried women who became pregnant and subsequently surrendered the child of that pregnancy for adoption. These voices are projected through a multiple-channel sound installation that makes public the private experiences of these women.

In one form or another, Fessler’s installations have attempted to elaborate her concern for meaningful collaboration with audience, thus providing the voice she sees as a necessary complement to the work. As in her previous installations, Fessler’s multimedia installation *Everlasting* has at its center voices—in this case the voices of mothers providing their individual narratives. Fessler, as the producer and director, constructs an environment, a stage, that encourages the audience’s emotional involvement in these narratives. The goal is to create a transformative experience for the viewer. As an introduction to the new piece, she offers her own personal story in *Close to Home*, which serves as a transition, a means of entry, to the new work, but moreover is a connecting element to Fessler’s greater iconographic vision of education and redefining history as necessary to the process of art making.

*Listening to women, I have heard a difference and discovered that bringing in women’s lives changes both psychology and history. It literally changes the voice: how the human story is told.<sup>3</sup>*

Fessler tells human stories in an analogous yet original fashion by producing poignant collaborations that address a universal voice for and about all of us. ∞



ART HISTORY LESSON, mixed media installation, 1993  
(documentation from GOING FOR BAROQUE, 1995,  
Walters Art Gallery with The Contemporary, Baltimore)

3 Lory, Suzanne. *Mapping the Terrain*. New Genre Public Art (Bay Press 1993), 39.  
4 Storr, Robert. *Dislocations*. (The Museum of Modern Art 1991), 20.  
5 Cilligien, xi.



It is a chilly evening after work. Two women face each other in an office on a college campus. Ann Fessler, microphone in hand, bends with concern toward her gray-haired guest.

*If you could take me back a few months before you got pregnant and tell me about your life then...*

Far from traditional therapy, this meeting is about recording history, and, ultimately, creating art. Ann Fessler's eyes encourage, wince, fill with tears as she absorbs the painful story of her guest, a woman who gave up her baby in the days when unwed mothers were told they had no choice. In those days, says the woman who remains anonymous, being pregnant outside of marriage was proof enough that a young woman was not fit to be a mother.

It's hard to imagine that this friendly grandmother with her leather sandals and smile-creased face was once considered a slut. A tramp. A Bad Girl. Hopelessly irresponsible. While she talks about the maternity home where she was hidden away, you can almost hear the voices denouncing her: *We didn't raise you this way...Do you have any idea of our humiliation?...Thank God there are still places to send girls like you...Keep the baby? What would you be able to give it?*

## Re-conceiving the "Bad Girl": Sharing Stories of Mothers

As the mother remembers her past, her own voice remains steady. She has the flat assurance of someone who finally has the upper hand on pain. It all happened many years ago – although it often seems like yesterday. She has dealt with her loss. There has been a marriage, other children, a career. This episode was years and years ago. And yet...She shifts position on the couch and smiles – uncomfortably? Nervously?

*Could I have another glass of water, please?*

Such scenes of bridled pain, cross-cut with moments of raw misery, inform the core of Fessler's latest art project. Her new installation, *Everlasting*, which premieres at Maryland Institute College of Art, examines the untold experiences of women who were ostracized by family and friends simply for becoming pregnant when they shouldn't. These women faced their pregnancies in the 1940s, '50s and '60s, before abortion was legal. In the oral history portion of her project, Fessler has collected details of their aptly termed "confinement" and explored their decision to give up their babies for adoption – a decision, it turns out, almost always forced upon them in those times.

To create *Everlasting*, Fessler has woven strands of personal history into an aural tapestry filled with authentic moments of anger, despair, bewilderment, longing, and although it may be difficult to imagine, hope. This multimedia exhibition explores the shadow nation of birth mothers with the understanding that their testimony may at last bring public understanding.

More than many exhibitions, *Everlasting* is about recognizing – and making such connections. It directly challenges its audience: Everyone knows someone who is adopted. Everyone knows someone who became pregnant outside of marriage. And everyone who encounters this work cannot fail to make the connection between art and life.

Perhaps what is most singular about this work, though, are those connections built into its structure. *Everlasting* has already changed the lives of mothers who surrendered children for adoption in the Baltimore/Washington area in the '50s and '60s, and it has altered the perspective of 30 art students, and their mentors, in curator George Ciscle's Exhibition Development Seminar at MICA.

Organized into teams concerned with exhibition design, graphic design, writing, education and community outreach, and public relations, the students worked closely with Fessler, trading thoughts on materials and points of view in the effort to enhance her message.

Over the fall semester, as they pondered out loud how to present this highly charged subject, the students served as windows into the act of creation. Class became a place where, week after week, participants could learn how art grows from a series of inspired connections. The final vision is the work of many hands and hearts and minds. It has drawn its strength and its shape from innovative partnerships.

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As each woman recounted her difficult story, she knew that Ann Fessler was taping her experiences for an oral history archive. She also knew that the tall slender blonde was capturing emotions for art.

Perhaps as important, though, she knew that the interviewer was herself an adopted child. Each mother was telling her story to someone else's long lost daughter, explaining her decisions to someone who might have the same questions as her own child.

In the taping sessions, then, it was perhaps inevitable that the artist would become a vessel to hold what was spilling out of the mothers she interviewed. As Fessler remembers it, the effort of giving and receiving would often leave both women exhausted.

Many stories unfolded the same way:

The teenager was bewildered, then unbelieving when she missed her period: Why, she couldn't be pregnant! As her waist grew, her excuses shrank and she came closer to the Day of Reckoning: Telling her Parents. That thought was much more terrifying than the idea of giving birth – she knew what to expect from her parents.

Even 30 and 40 years later, their reactions are chilling. The rage and disdain seem so fresh that they soak through the neatly typed transcripts. Feeling the anger makes you marvel at the fortitude of these Bad Girls and their valiant attempts to heal themselves over the years.

Award-winning feature writer Linell Smith has worked for the Baltimore Sun covering general assignment topics since 1991. Smith was a writer and columnist for the Baltimore Evening Sun 1974-1991. She has also taught feature writing at Goucher College for many years.



How would you forgive the parents who sent you away when you needed them most – just so you wouldn't embarrass them? How would you forgive the girlfriends who walked on the other side of the street when they saw you? Or the nuns who sent you alone in a cab to the hospital when you went into labor? Or all the others – a whole country of others – who insisted that the only way to prove you loved your baby was to give it a proper home with a decent family?

*How do you ever forgive being taught to despise yourself?*

Some of the women who were interviewed had more children later. But they remained preoccupied by thoughts of their first infants growing up without them. Could they ever find them? Should they try? Would their children understand the way things were?

Long after the interviews, some stories continued to haunt Fessler. She could not forget the fear and bewilderment of the naked teenager, sitting in the family bathtub, while her mother douched her with a Lysol solution intended to kill her fetus. And there was the surprising gratitude of the woman who still felt blessed because a social worker had let her spend one whole hour alone with her baby before taking it away forever. The world needed to hear these stories and reconsider a few assumptions.

*Who were the Bad Girls?*

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There were moments when MICA senior Emily Blumenthal had to walk away from the tape she had agreed to transcribe. The encounter she was recording was so intimate that she felt as if she were in the room with the mother and the artist. She, too, felt the force of the long-gathered storm. She, too, felt drenched, then drained.



Karen Wilson Buserbaugh and her baby Michelle Renee, age 10 days, on their last day together, August 1, 1966. This photograph was taken in secret by another mother at Florence Crittenton maternity facility, Washington, D.C. Karen, along with the mother whose story is cited in this essay and five others, shared her experiences and her voice for *Everlasting*.

Sometimes the artist sounded more upset than the woman she was interviewing. Then, the artist's upsetness would make the mother more distraught. One of nearly a dozen MICA students working on the oral history tapes, Emily transcribed the majority of hers in one day, a hot August day, in her apartment in the Mt. Vernon section of Baltimore. She had hooked the tape up to her stereo and often stopped and rewound it to make sure she had it just right.

It wasn't too long before she wondered what she would have done in such a situation: Pregnant, unwed, abortion not an option. The art student is good at imagining herself in other lives. In her art, she sometimes portrays herself as Joan Crawford or Bette Davis – or more accurately, the iconic roles they have played in American culture.

The person on the tape would prove more difficult to describe. Later, as the semester unfolded, Emily Blumenthal would realize this generation of mothers who surrendered children for adoption embodies a cultural secret: These are women who were officially anonymous, their existence merely implied by the lives of children considered "lucky" enough never to have known them.

But on this day, as she typed, she was thinking about the rest of the mother's story. She learned that the woman never had another child. Now it was too late. Much too late. Back then, they had told her she had no choice but to give that baby up. Now there was nothing she could do.

On a hot day in August 2002, Emily Blumenthal was already in the guts of *Everlasting*. She knew more about the artist's experience and the raw material of her art than she had ever imagined.

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If you were to ask Ann Fessler about *Everlasting*, she would say that it exists because curator George Ciscle, for whom she has the deepest respect, invited her to mount this show at MICA, providing a site and a workforce for the complex project.

George Ciscle would probably refer the credit to Ann. He would mention her history of highly original projects, many of them tied to themes of personal and gender identity. He would enthuse about her films, her awards, her distinguished career as artist and educator, her roots at Maryland Institute College of Art.

From there, Ann might talk about her experience as an adopted child. She would discuss her frustration at how society has treated – and continues to treat women. And she might disclose that this newest work emerged from an unexpected encounter some years ago.

Perhaps it was curiosity about her own biological mother that caused the artist to dream of an older woman she did not know, the woman she would meet the next day. The stranger from her dream approached Fessler at an art exhibition. She wanted to know how old the younger woman was. Eventually, they explored the notion that this woman might indeed be Fessler's mother.

It turned out that the artist was not the daughter that stranger had surrendered. But the meeting set Fessler on an artistic path of inquiry which continues. As she learns more about the rewards and punishments for women in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, she is beginning to understand the world of her own biological mother, another way of feeling close to her.

In return, the artist has offered those generations of women a way to express their untold stories beyond the exhibition of *Everlasting*. Because of Fessler's continuing oral history project – destined for the scholarly archives at Harvard University's Schlesinger Library – these women are preserving their version of the truth: Finally – and forever. ∞







Previous Page: *Close to Home* installation showing video projection on scrim, video projection on floor, three corn cribs, and 2.5 tons of feed corn.

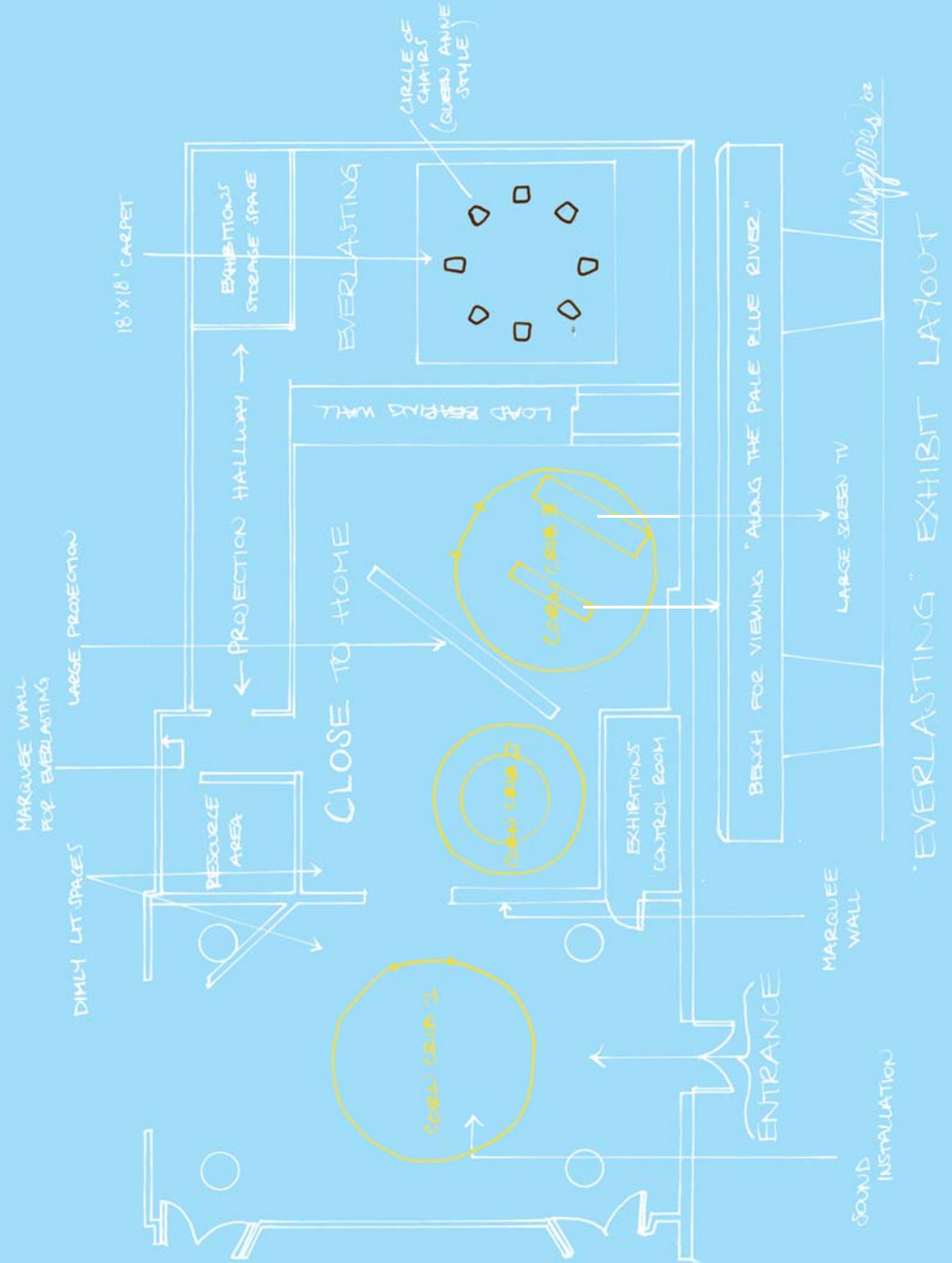
Above: Interior of the third corn crib, which serves as the viewing room within *Close to Home* for Fessler's 9-minute video *Along the Pale Blue River*.



Above: Still from *Nurses Wheeling Babies*, one of the two video projections shown in the "projection hallway" leading into the *Everlasting* audio installation.

At Right: Exhibition layout design by the Exhibition Development Seminar, MICA, for Decker Gallery installation, January 31–March 16, 2003.

Next Spread: *Everlasting* maquette overlaid with transcription excerpts from the *Everlasting* audio installation and oral history project (additional excerpts appear in the endpapers of this catalog)



We're not criminals. We're mothers. I mean we could be your teacher, your next-door neighbor, your aunt. We could be anybody out there that you have enormous respect for. The only difference is we have to live with the trauma of losing a child and then live with the trauma of knowing we didn't stop it. How do you do that?

The social worker gave me a sheet of paper and said to write down what I could give my baby on one side, and then on the other side list what the adoptive parents had to offer...And on my side I only put down love.

I took a whole bottle of aspirin and all it did was make me throw up. My mother came in my room and said, "You are pregnant, you Slut, Whore. Bitch. No wonder he followed you around like a dog in heat all the time."

I said, "Can I have some more time? I'm trying to find a way." And she said, "You can't have any more time. He's costing your parents six dollars a day in the nursery. Haven't you caused enough trouble? If you sign the papers, the bills will be done."

She told me, "If you really love your child, you'll do what's best."  
But I never felt like I gave my baby away. I always felt like my daughter was taken from me.

...my life has been transformed by meeting my sons. I would never have had the energy to go back to school at the age of 58. The lies were gone and the layers were unfolding. I don't worry about how other people look at me. I...felt myself becoming a whole creature, which I never was before. I always felt like I was hiding something.

Every time someone asks you how many children you have, and you lie. That's not right. It affects your self-esteem.

Everybody whispered. If you were in high school, you had to stay home. It was one of the worst things that could ever happen. It just brought terrible shame on anyone who knew you, particularly your family or anybody related to you.

My mom was able to live at home until she died because my brothers and sisters and I all took turns caring for her...that's what families do. Well, we were a family then too, and they should have done it...not because I was good, bad, or whatever, but because I belonged to them.



My mother tells me that on my first three birthdays she lit a special candle on my cake for the young woman who had given birth to me. She never explained why she did this for three years, no more no less. I don't remember this private ceremony, but I do remember that there were times in my childhood when my mother would look at me in a particular way, and I knew she was thinking of this young woman, my mother.

I come from a family that has been brought together by adoption for three generations. Neither my maternal grandmother, nor my mother, nor I, have given birth to a child. I am the first for whom this was a conscious choice.

My mother was never told that she was adopted. For my grandmother, to admit this would have been a public declaration of her own inadequacy, her inability to bear children for her husband. But my mother knew. She had found her birth certificate taped to the back of a painting at her aunt's house.

Her name had been "Baby Helene" before it was Hazel, and when she brought me home, she named me Ann Helene. My mother suffered her own private insecurity over not being able to bring a child to full term, but by the time she and my father turned to adoption, there was no public stigma attached to those who chose to adopt. In post-World War II America, adopting families were carefully

## ARTIST STATEMENT

screened and thus represented a kind of model family, one with a mother and a father who really wanted to raise a child.

Although it is doubtful that families vetted through this process were actually any better than other families, I was lucky enough to have parents who were loving and supportive and mindful of my development as an individual. They knew that they could guide me, but they also understood that I was not the sum of their parts. I was the product of two young people who were, themselves, perhaps too young to understand fully the characteristics they had inherited from their own parents and passed on to me.

My adoptive mother and father were offered little information about my biological parents. I was of English and German descent. She was 19 and from a big farm family. He was athletic, a college football player from a family of means. This was no way to start a family.

My mother cried whenever she told me this story. She knew it could not be so simple. I did not. The story of that young couple sounded like the plot of a movie to me. I liked being a part of this soulful story of ill-fated love, of having a mysterious past, of not being related to my family, of being on my own person.

When I became sexually active, I imagined that if the worst happened, I would either kill myself or do as my mother had done: go off to another town to a home for unwed mothers and return with a story about a kidney infection or an Aunt Betty in Sandusky who needed my care. This is what young women caught in this unfortunate situation did. Almost every graduating class had a girl who disappeared. Everyone knew where she had gone, and that she had most likely been told: "If you love your child you must give it up, move on with your life, and forget."



HAZEL AND ANN, 1950. Clifford Fessler

It never occurred to me that those girls may not have forgotten, that it might not be so easy to just move on with your life, but then I had never gone through pregnancy and childbirth myself. And I had never heard the story of a woman who had surrendered her child.

Then something happened that forever changed my understanding of adoption, marking the beginning of an artistic and personal inquiry that has brought me back, full circle, to Baltimore and the premiere exhibition of *Everlasting*.

In 1989, I had been teaching at Maryland Institute College of Art for seven years, and I was attending the opening of an exhibition in one of the College's galleries. Not long after I arrived, I noticed a woman who looked very familiar. I had a distinct and clear memory of talking to her recently, but I couldn't remember where or when. I asked several people if they knew who she was, but no one knew, so I continued to look at the exhibition.

Later, this woman walked towards me from across the room, and with no introduction she said, "You could be my long lost daughter. You look like the perfect combination of myself and the father of my child." I had a physical reaction to her statement, my focus narrowed and shut out every other sound in the room. I said, "You don't know what you're saying to me. I could be your daughter. I was adopted." There was a long silence, and I saw her start to react as I had. We stared at each other not knowing what to say next. Eventually, we compared dates, but they were one year and one month apart. She kept asking, "Are you sure about your birth date? Sometimes records are changed." But I was sure.

We continued to talk. She asked me if I had looked for my mother, and I responded that I didn't think I wanted to open up that can of worms because, I said, when you gave up a child for adoption back then, you didn't expect her to come knocking on your door 40 years later. And she told me: "You should find her. She probably worries every day about what happened to you and whether you've had a good life." I could see in her eyes that she was speaking from her own experience, and the thought that my mother might feel the same sense of loss was profoundly shocking to me. I felt incredibly guilty, and empathetic, and

Ann Fessler



naïve, all at once. How could I have never considered this possibility? How could I not know? How could everyone not know?

I continued to listen, realizing that this was the first time I had ever heard the story of adoption from the perspective of a mother who had surrendered her child.

It seemed incredible to me that after 40 years of life as an adoptee I was hearing the other side of the story for the first time. And as I listened, I finally remembered why this woman seemed so familiar to me. The image of the two of us talking had been in my dream the night before we met. I went home and wrote down every word.

The next year, I created my first installation about adoption, *Genetics Lesson*, and subsequently, *Ex/Changing Families*, and *Close to Home*. Whenever possible, I offered space in my exhibitions for members of the community to display their stories of adoption along with mine. I was overwhelmed by what I read. The writings left behind by women in New York, California, and Texas, all echoed the story I had heard in the gallery at MICA. What the mothers had been assured when they signed the papers giving up all rights to their children turned out to be a lie. They did not move on and forget. I think my adoptive mother knew this when she lit those candles. I think three years was all that she could bear. She needed to move on and forget.



In June 2002, I began collecting oral histories for the MICA exhibition of *Everlasting*. I interviewed women who either currently live, or lived out their pregnancy, in the Baltimore/Washington area and who had surrendered children for adoption between 1945 (WWII) and 1973 (*Roe v. Wade*).

Years of an unending need I learned it women who looked very familiar I couldn't remember where I have been. But I had a distant memory of holding the baby. I looked several people if they knew who she was, but no one knew. I was sure I had and again to her. I realized I would come to me eventually as I prepared to look at the children.



GENETICS LESSON, detail, mixed media installation, 1990

CLIFF & HAZEL INSTALLATION, from EX/CHANGING FAMILIES, 1997



During the time period under examination, thousands of mothers surrendered their babies at the insistence of family members and adoption workers who convinced them that relinquishing their child would save both mother and child from a lifetime of shame. Often it was the family, not the young pregnant woman, who was most concerned about shame. Women in the 1940s and early 1950s were deemed “unfit” or “mentally unstable” simply by the act of “getting themselves pregnant” out of wedlock. In the 1960s, with the popularization of psychoanalytic theory professionals no longer believed that these women were unstable, but rather that by getting pregnant they were punishing their parents.

However the situation was assessed, it was clear to everyone (except perhaps the mother) that the child would be better off with an adoptive family.

The women I have interviewed for this project thus far gave birth to “illegitimate” children at ages ranging from 15 to 32. Their stories are equally diverse. Some felt placing their baby in an adoptive home was the best option, and others were coerced into surrendering their children. One mother was asked to sign her rights away while still in the recovery room, groggy from childbirth. Another was told the next day that adoptive parents had already taken her child home and it was too late to change her mind, despite laws to the contrary. During their lifetime, the women of this era have seen tremendous changes in the acceptance of single parenthood. They have gone from being judged “bad girls” for getting pregnant, to being “heartless” for giving up their own flesh and blood. Many went on to raise other children as a single parent. The irony of this has not escaped them.

My deepest thanks and appreciation go to the incredible women who have participated in this project and taught me so much. Their generosity astounds me. I can only hope that I do justice to their stories. Thank you Judy A. Z., Karen Wilson Buterbaugh, Linda Clausen, Carolyn Haupt, Ann Hughes, Margy McGinnis McMorrow, and Pollie Robinson. ∞

Since the 1970s, Ann Fessler's work has challenged controversial societal issues from a feminist perspective, often confronting myths about women's role in society and revealing the way they have been perpetuated throughout the history of Western art and in contemporary popular media. The keen wit and sense of humor which are hallmarks of Fessler's work make it possible for viewers to connect on a human level with complex and sometimes difficult issues. Whether it takes the form of a multimedia installation, a video, or an artist's book, Fessler's work stretches convention, giving to the unspoken a voice that echoes far beyond gallery walls.

Fessler was a faculty member in Maryland Institute College of Art's photography department from 1982 through 1993. In that capacity, she helped transform the photography curriculum by initiating courses in video, artist's books, offset lithography, and non-traditional camera-based imagery. Her time in the Baltimore/Washington art community significantly influenced Fessler's development as a video installation artist. This exhibition brings Fessler back to her roots and gives her the chance to present her new work in the community that inspired her to explore new avenues for expression. *Everlasting* (2003) and the works on adoption that preceded it had their origins at the College, and

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

the oral histories that comprise the new work were gathered in the Baltimore/Washington region.

Fessler spent her childhood in a small river town outside Toledo, Ohio. She received a B.A. in art from Ohio State University in 1972, an M.A. in Media Studies from Webster University in St. Louis in 1975, and the M.F.A. in Photography from the University of Arizona in 1981. She has received many grants, including an Artist Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and support from the LEF Foundation, Art Matters, NY, and the State Arts Councils of Maryland and Rhode Island. She has published and lectured extensively and has taught in the photography department of the Rhode Island School of Design since 1993.

Fessler draws freely from her own life experiences as a woman and as an adopted child to bring attention to often-overlooked social issues and human experiences. Adoption became a central theme in Fessler's work when, in 1989, a chance encounter with a stranger triggered a creative response. At an exhibition opening at MICA, the artist was approached by a woman who believed Fessler might be the daughter she had given up for adoption 40 years earlier. The woman's story moved Fessler to create her first work about adoption. A MICA sabbatical allowed her to create *Genetics Lesson*, which premiered in the College's 1990 Sabbatical Exhibition and was followed by two other installations confronting the psychological aspects of adoption: *Ex/Changing Families: Two Stories of*

*Adoption* (1997), in collaboration with artist Carol Flax, and *Close to Home* (2001). Videos which are integral to these last two installations also screen as separate works and have received critical acclaim at film festivals internationally.

*Cliff and Hazel*, the documentary about her parents which was first screened as part of *Ex/Changing Families*, was made possible by a 1999 Art and Technology Post-Production Residency at Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University and premiered in Chicago at the 2000 Women in the Director's Chair International Film Festival. It received awards in the documentary film category at the Athens International Film Festival, Athens, Ohio; the New England Film Festival, Boston; and the Big Muddy Film Festival, Carbondale, Illinois.

Along the *Pale Blue River*, a key component of *Close to Home*, which is reinstalled at MICA in this exhibition, received the Spirit of Moondance Award for Short Film at the 2002 Moondance International Film Festival in Boulder, Colorado; Judges' Choice for Independent Film at the New England Film and Video Festival; Gold Prize for Experimental Film at the Big Muddy Film Festival; and First Place, Experimental at the Athens International Film Festival. The film was also screened in 2002 at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, Edinburgh, Scotland; Taos Talking Pictures Festival, Taos, New Mexico; and the Arizona International Film Festival, Tucson.

Fessler's work has been featured in numerous solo exhibitions. *Close to Home* (2001) was exhibited in Bell Gallery, List Art Center, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island; *Ex/Changing Families* (1997) at the California Museum of Photography, Riverside; and *Art History Lesson* (1994) at the Houston Center for Photography. Significant group exhibitions have included *Going for Baroque* (1995), Walters Art Gallery (with The Contemporary), Baltimore; *Parents* (1992), Museum of Contemporary Art, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio; and *Family Stories* (1990), Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, New York. Her photography and artists' books are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and the Baltimore Museum of Art, among others. ∞

In 1989, a chance encounter with a stranger triggered a creative response.

OUR CORN FIELD, 1964, Ann Fessler, page 12





Students in the Exhibition Development Seminar at MICA participated in building the exhibition *Everlasting* from the ground up. Developing a framework for a project about mothers and adoption required that students first understand the complexity of what adoption meant in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. After artist Ann Fessler related the history of her subject and her approach to it, students were able to put aside previous assumptions, exchange ideas, and 30 artists from various disciplines learned to form a cohesive team in order to communicate an integrated vision to audiences. In the end, patience, teamwork, and tolerance for working long hours were integral to every aspect of the implementation of *Everlasting*.

George Cisle, who conceived and since 1997 has taught this class as a way for students to learn the mechanics of how art exhibitions are created, is Curator-in-Residence at Maryland Institute College of Art. He is an invaluable resource for students interested in the curatorial process. Cisle has long worked to create new models for exhibitions and public experiences of art, noting: "The biggest challenge isn't the exhibition, the artwork, or the site. It is adapting all of this for the audience, orchestrating or choreographing the exhibition experience that you would like the audience to have in order to make a connection with the work and with the artist."

## SEMINAR STATEMENT

Since the Seminar began, different teams of students have created six major exhibitions in museums, galleries, and nontraditional settings. The most recent were *Situated Realities: Where Technology and Imagination Intersect* (MICA 2002) and the well-received exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art: *Joyce J. Scott Kickin' It with the Old Masters* (2000). Each Exhibition Development Seminar attempts to build meaningful bridges among artists, institutions, and audiences. This unique course allows students to participate in a multi-semester seminar that engages them at a professional level in all aspects of a major gallery exhibition.

This year's Seminar drew students from MICA's undergraduate and continuing studies divisions, and from local high schools. The students hail from across the United States and abroad, providing for diverse perspectives. A mélange of majors, educational levels, and professional and artistic backgrounds fuelled the collaborative process. The experience of producing an actual exhibition, as opposed to theoretical exercises common to student seminars, was valuable training for students interested in both museum studies and fine arts.

For the development of Ann Fessler's exhibition *Everlasting*, the course was sequenced in two consecutive semesters (Fall 2002 and Spring 2003). A small team of students also participated in the oral history and graphic design phases of the project in the summer before the Seminar officially began. The fall semester was devoted to conceiving and planning all aspects of the exhibition. Installation, programming, education, and de-installation take place during the second semester.

At the start of the academic year, students were immediately immersed in the exhibition process. The class split broadly into two categories, Education and Design. Subgroups were formed to provide teams responsible for public programs, art education, community outreach, writing, communications, graphic design, and exhibit design.

Students began by studying Fessler's résumé, narrative videos, and slides, and read articles about her work. Then each group focused on their tasks. Along with having Cisle as a resource, each subgroup was advised by a professional mentor. All teams also met regularly with the artist. The class was challenged to craft an exhibition that met the artist's expectations and was consistent with the integrity of the work.

For most students, the course provided a first exposure to Ann Fessler's art. Students soon began to understand and make personal connections with Ann's sometimes challenging work. Fessler's art makes the viewer think about stories that are not commonly heard. The class was engaged by Fessler's work on many levels. She creates her art out of untold stories and reveals gaps in history. She is not only an artist and documentarian, but also a sociologist and anthropologist. Fessler's art creates a personal, yet accessible, realization of the conflicts and various dynamics of gender and adoption. Her work exposes the horrific and dehumanizing experiences of mothers who surrendered children for adoption that many in the class never encountered.

Yet adoption is more prevalent in society than most people realize, as continuing studies student Heidi Herman observed: "Growing up, I had a close friend who was adopted. Most people probably did."

Some students were unexpectedly affected by the art. The students who volunteered to transcribe Fessler's interviews with mothers which form the core of *Everlasting* found that most of the stories were difficult to hear, as Valerie Piraino, a junior general fine arts major at MICA attested, "Listening to this woman's story was very disturbing. She wasn't given a choice in giving up her child. It was really frustrating to listen to her story because so many of her rights were taken away. I really admire her for having the courage to find her daughter after going through all that pain." Most of the class had never worked with an artist on such an emotional piece. Students felt a responsibility to shape the exhibit in such a way that would pass on similar intensity to the audience.

This course has allowed us to collaborate with our peers, encouraged us to think about communities and audiences, and has been a priceless hands-on experience. It is about making lasting connections with other students, faculty, artists, and communities. Members of the class became whole-heartedly invested in the exhibition at a crucial time in our own development as artists. As a class, this curatorial experience has provided vital training in design, education, and the details of exhibition installation. For some of us, it has reaffirmed our commitment to our majors, and for others, it has helped to find our niche in the art world. ∞

We became whole-heartedly invested  
in the exhibition at a crucial time  
in our own development as artists.

**ARTIST'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** — I am indebted to the administration and staff of MICA who have supported me both in the past as a faculty member and now in this residency. Many individuals from the College have generously given their time and expertise to *Everlasting* over the last year, including Kim Carlin and the staff of the Office of Communications who guided this catalog through design, writing, and production, and the Department of Exhibitions, whose staff were invaluable in the installation of *Close to Home* and *Everlasting* in the Decker Gallery.

This exhibition was indeed a collaboration. It would not exist without the seven mothers who shared their stories and the 30 students enrolled in George Ciscle's Exhibition Development Seminar. These students worked on virtually every aspect of this exhibition's development and implementation together with the ten professional mentors who guided their teams through the development of public programs, education, and community outreach; public relations, exhibition design, and the writing and design of the catalog and website. This exhibition simply would not have been possible without the students' expertise, talent, research, ideas, hard work, energy, and devotion.

I am extremely grateful to James Montford and Linell Smith for their insightful catalog essays. Both have brought their considerable intellect and emotions to the reading of my work. I thank James for bringing his impressive knowledge of contemporary art theory and practice as well as his family experience to his essay and to Linell for her compassionate investigation into the human aspects of this work and her ability to feel and reveal the connections among generations of women, lived experience, and art.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would also like to acknowledge Jo-Ann Conklin, Director of The Bell Gallery at Brown University, who made the first exhibition of *Close to Home* possible, and two individuals from Rhode Island School of Design, Michael Schrader, Assistant Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations, and Ann Hudner, Director of External Relations, who have supported this project from the start and whose continued hard work and encouragement will ensure that this first exhibition of *Everlasting* will not be the last.

Because this MICA exhibition of *Everlasting* marks the beginning of a series of site-specific installations and film to be born out of interviews in other states and regions, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge contributions already made to the ongoing *Everlasting* project from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, the LEF Foundation, the archivists from the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University, and my husband Peter A. Andersen, whose encouragement and support are with me each and every day.

And finally, a heartfelt thanks to all of my old colleagues from Maryland Institute College of Art who have once again reminded me that old friends are the best friends and who have proven to me that you can go home again. ∞ Ann Fessler

**CURATOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** — The workforce that produced *Everlasting* was extensive. I want to extend my sincere thanks to an extraordinary group of students who pulled together as one team to assure that an artist's vision became reality. My gratitude also to the designers, writers, and educators at MICA and the professional community who mentored students throughout the process. It is a privilege to include the art historical and personal viewpoints by both essayists whose contributions to the catalogue provide further insights into the artist's work. All of this would not have been possible without the incredible support and resources I receive from MICA's staff and administration. The final, or should I say "everlasting," thanks goes to Ann Fessler, who invited all of us to witness, share, and contribute in her creative process. It was what most only dream of learning. ∞ George Ciscle

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The artist, curator, and students would like to acknowledge MICA's Communications and Exhibition departments for their support to the Exhibition Development Seminar and their role in the process of producing *Everlasting*.

More information on *Everlasting*, including detailed project credits, images, expanded bios of team members, information on the issues raised by this exhibition, and the full text of this catalogue, can be found online at: <http://www.mica.edu/everlasting>

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*...someone asks how many  
children you have...*

*It's as if part of you went away.*

*..you lie.*

*It brought terrible shame on anyone who knew you.*

*I have always been overprotective of my children  
because I am afraid they will disappear too.*

*pretends to be whole.*

