



88 Corner Pound, VA March 2009





VISIONS



AMERICAN  
VISIONARY  
ART MUSEUM

PARENTING / 24







# PARENTING

*an art without a manual*

**"Life is tough enough without having someone  
kick you from the inside."**

COMEDIAN, RITA RUDNER ON PREGNANCY

WELCOME ALL, Each A Recipient of The Priceless Gift of Life!

**P**arents—we've all had them. Even if they were mere transient biological influences on our lives, predatory horrors, or the embodied essence of good and loving kindness, parents and parental surrogates act like most of humankind's great powers—religion, sex, food, money, government—within themselves neither intrinsically good nor bad, but rather potent magnifiers of intention. Unlike adoption of an ASPCA pet, no license or proof of fitness is required to birth and assume the responsibility for a human child.

The Big Bang Theory actor and neuroscientist, Mayim Bialik, said of her own parenthood, "I came to parenting the way most of us do knowing nothing and trying to learn everything." With that in mind, for one year, our American Visionary Art Museum (AVAM) will focus public attention on humanity's most basic performance art—the intuitive, complex, and transformative art of parenting. Our exhibition showcases works by 36 passionate artists, created out of every conceivable medium to express the artists' own personal life experiences relating to parenting and/or being parented. Alongside the art, we have added globally sourced wisdoms, revelations from all the latest scientific research, and fun!

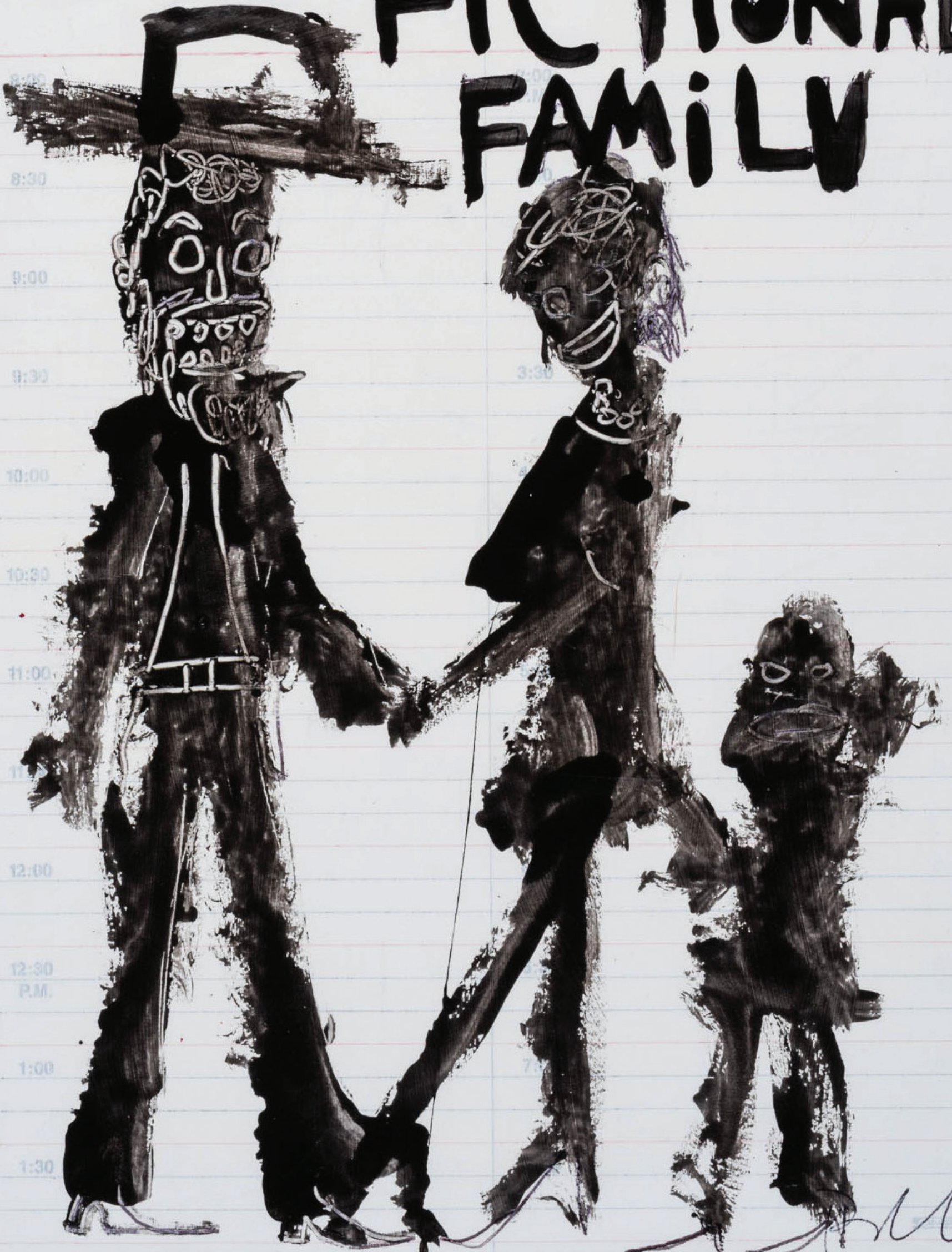
Most of us are children of some version of Marge and Homer Simpson—products of fellow flawed human beings who nonetheless managed to provide us some real glimpses of beautiful, unconditional love. Hafiz's poem speaks of an ideal that may best be applied to parenting at its noblest: "Even after all this time the Sun never says to the Earth, 'You owe Me.' Look what happens with a love like that. It lights the whole sky."

May your experience of our **PARENTING** exhibition leave you with a love generous like the Sun's, a deeper understanding, and a greater forgiveness of self and all others.

Truly,  
Rebecca Alban Hoffberger  
and Anna Gulyavskaya, Co-Curators



# Fictional FAMILY





# OUTSIDER ARTISTS

## WHEN PARENTS ARE GONE

PAPA, CAN YOU HEAR ME? MAMA, CAN YOU HEAR ME? HISTORY, CAN YOU HEAR ME?

**T**he awakening consciousness of children of themselves and the world around them is largely anchored in their recognition of their places in and their relationships with their families, especially with their parents. However, in the broad sweep of canonical Western art history, parent-child relationships are not among the central themes of its most iconic imagery, with the notable exception, of course, of Renaissance art's depictions of Christianity's Virgin Mary and her infant son, Jesus. More recent American art offers Norman Rockwell's touching portrayals of boys and girls, and their parents, together marking milestone moments in unfolding young lives.

Among outsider artists, evocations of child-parent relationships per se are rare—and not always joyous. Living in poverty, the Swiss art brut creator Adolf Wölfli (1864–1930) was abandoned as a young boy by his alcoholic father; in a 45-volume, illustrated narrative, Wölfli mythologized his childhood and recalled his mother, who died when he was young. The American outsider artist Henry Darger (1892–1973) grew up in orphanages; some historians theorize that his art's peculiar depictions of naked girls with male genitals, fighting destructive armies and monsters, reflect the Roman Catholic-reared Darger's confusion about gender identity, which could have been rooted in hardscrabble childhood experiences. Would guidance from the parents he lost as a young boy have given him a better understanding of sex and sexuality? The North Carolina-based outsider artist Renaldo Kuhler (1931–2013), who, through his drawings and writings created an imaginary country ("Rocaterrania"), detested his mother, who showed him little love or encouragement.

What are we to make of such stories of loss or estrangement in the parent-child relationships of such talented art-makers? Today, researchers are still trying to learn more about their backgrounds, the better, they hope, to understand their unusual creations. Still, wise viewers know that, even though familiarity with artists' biographies can help deepen appreciation of their work, trying to psychoanalyze artists through their creations can turn out to be a fool's errand.

"The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness," Vladimir Nabokov wrote in *Invitation of a Memory* (1951), one of modern literature's most self-aware memoirs, full of evocations of the writer's parents and childhood-era family life. Regrettably, among the most emblematic art brut and outsider artists, such vivid testimonies are almost nonexistent. Thus, in examining what they have left us, we, the living, and posterity can only search for fleeting hints of how their relationships with their parents might have helped nurture their talents — and intriguing visions. —Edward M. Gómez

EDWARD M. GÓMEZ is an art critic, art historian and graphic designer. The senior editor of the outsider art magazine *Raw Vision*, he is a member of the advisory council of the Collection de l'Art Brut, the museum founded by Jean Dubuffet in Lausanne, Switzerland. A contributor to many publications in the U.S. and abroad, he is the author or co-author of, among other books, *Yes: Yoko Ono* (Abrams), *The Art of Adolf Wölfli: St. Adolf—Giant—Creation* (American Folk Art Museum/Princeton University Press), and *Hans Krüsi* (Iconofolio/Outsiders). With Chris Shields, he produced the film *Valton Tyler: Flesh Is Fiction* (2017).



"HAVING CHILDREN MAKES YOU NO MORE A PARENT  
THAN HAVING A PIANO MAKES YOU A PIANIST."

—MICHAEL LEVINE

# Curators,







REBECCA ALBAN HOFFBERGER and ANNA GULYAVSKAYA  
CO-CURATORS

# notebook



# GOOD PARENTING

## A VERY DEMOCRATIC ART

**"I don't think it matters how many parents you've got  
as long as those who are around make their presence a good one."**

ELIZABETH WURTZEL

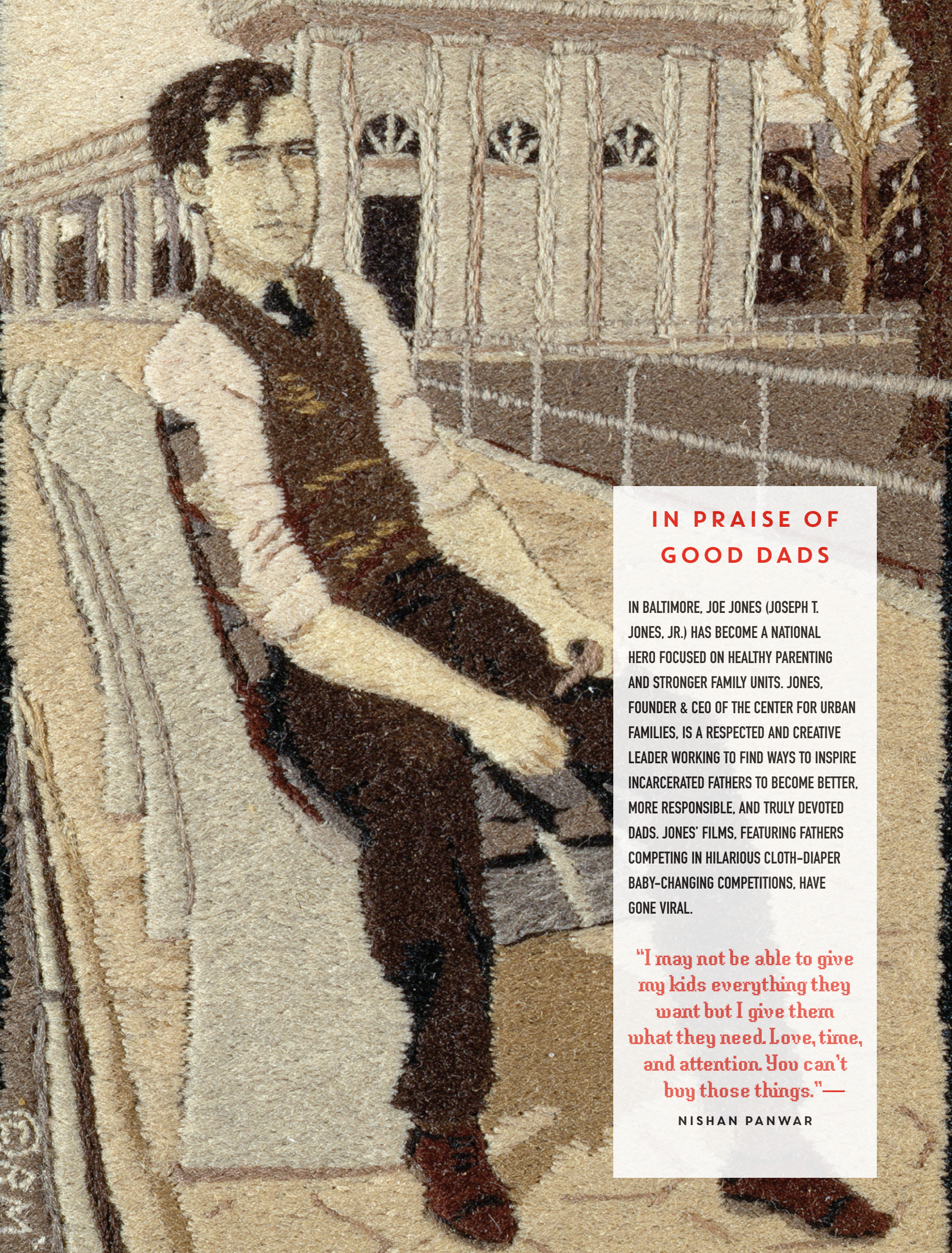
Parenting is truly a democratic art. The poorest and least formally educated parents among us might excel at the wise care and loving nurture of their children in ways that might elude some of our wealthiest and best formally educated.

Here, we speak of parenting not as mere biological fact, but as an active verb; one that takes on the day in and day out responsibility for the care and nurture of the child. Dr. Anthony P. Witham, President of The American Family Institute, wrote, "Children spell love. . . T-I-M-E."

We sing praises to all the adoptive, foster, and surrogate parents, same-sex couples, grandmas and grandpas, loving extended family, mentors and teachers, and concerned neighbors who lovingly step in when biological parents cannot or will not—to responsibly invest their time and love into the serious role of parenting a child in need.







## IN PRAISE OF GOOD DADS

IN BALTIMORE, JOE JONES (JOSEPH T. JONES, JR.) HAS BECOME A NATIONAL HERO FOCUSED ON HEALTHY PARENTING AND STRONGER FAMILY UNITS. JONES, FOUNDER & CEO OF THE CENTER FOR URBAN FAMILIES, IS A RESPECTED AND CREATIVE LEADER WORKING TO FIND WAYS TO INSPIRE INCARCERATED FATHERS TO BECOME BETTER, MORE RESPONSIBLE, AND TRULY DEVOTED DADS. JONES' FILMS, FEATURING FATHERS COMPETING IN HILARIOUS CLOTH-DIAPER BABY-CHANGING COMPETITIONS, HAVE GONE VIRAL.

**"I may not be able to give my kids everything they want but I give them what they need. Love, time, and attention. You can't buy those things."**—

NISHAN PANWAR







IN PRAISE OF  
GRANDPARENTS

*"My Grandmother is Big Data."*

SETH STEPHENS-DAVIDOWITZ

A recent Pew Research Center study found that there are 2.7+ million grandparents raising their grandchildren, acting as the children's primary or sole custodians in the U.S. alone. A fifth of these elder caretakers have incomes below the poverty line.

The impact of the current opioid crisis has generated new, even greater numbers of parent-addicts, incapable of reliably consistent care of their children. Other reasons parents fail to be able to care for their own children include catastrophic illnesses like cancer, mental illness, accidental injuries, and death. Brave and caring grandparents have stepped in time after time. Another fact that has greatly contributed to the increased number of grandparent-caretakers is the alarming explosion of the rate at which American women have been incarcerated—more than an eightfold increase since 1980. Over 60% of inmate women are mothers of children under the age of 18.

The USA, with less than 5% of the world's population, has a shocking 25% of the world's total prison population. This is a fact destructive to both our most cherished American ideals, as well as to the stability and wellbeing of America's families.









# THE FUTURE OF PARENTING

Think: designer babies with inherited genetic diseases edited out, desirable parental and third-party genetic markers added in, and the possibility of birthing a clone—be it your own or that of your favorite movie star—all part of an accepted, everyday reality. Imagine great-grandparents living healthily to 180, and even far beyond that, and our future children benefiting from those centuries of experience, wisdom, and history lived first-hand by parents whose mental capacities have not at all diminished.

With the shared cost of public medical burden viewed as an ethical and societal responsibility, will your baby's embryo in the future need to pass desirability standards before being approved to proceed to term and live birth? The babies of tomorrow may very well routinely expect to live multiple centuries, and among the company of many of their well elders.

With robots replacing much of the workforce in the future, will multigenerational families pool their resources to live with and communally parent their children and even their great-great-great-grandchildren? Will robots help us to parent, monitor wellbeing of, and act as teachers and companions to our children of the future? Will transhumanism supplant biological birth? Will we download our individuated consciousness into machines capable of preserving our memories and personalities forever? Will our families of the future be telepathically linked—an upgrade that has already been successfully induced in animal tests? The breakthrough discoveries in bioengineering, and a more precise understanding of the mechanisms of consciousness and intelligence are all proceeding at an exponential rate.

Highest population projections put the expected number of our total human family at a record-setting 9 billion by 2050—that's a giant leap up from the current 7+ billion in just a little more than 30 years. The fundamental ideals of good parenting and loving nurture are unlikely to change, hardwired as they are. We even see fundamental similarities to human parenting behavior among that of many animal species. One thing is certain, the outward form that future parenting and family will take is about to change, bringing about new future realities for parents and children beyond our wildest imagination. May they be for blessing and for greater, evolutionary peace and achievement.









# OUR HUMAN BRAIN

## ITS MATURITY IS 'A LONG TIME COMING'

When the mother's egg becomes fertilized, and a single cell folds to become two, not until three weeks into gestation does the formation of what eventually becomes a brain begin. Once born, having reached a full 9-month term, human brains double in size in the first year of life. By age three, a child's brain has reached 80% of its eventual adult volume.

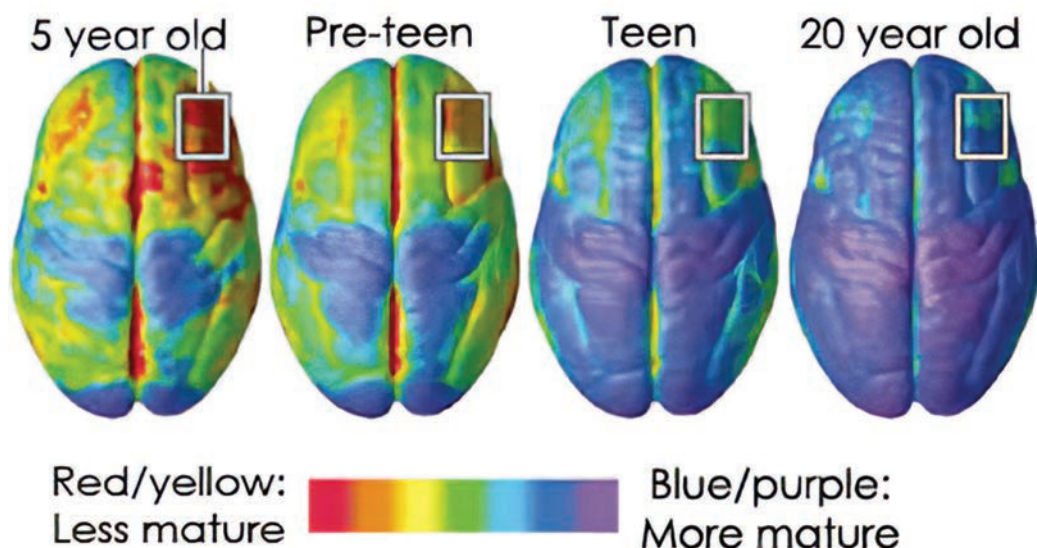
Here's the amazing part: For the first three years post birth, our unset gelatin-like delicate baby brains are busy making 1 million neural connections per second, trying to absorb and make sense of the world and people around us—impressions that will last our lifetime. And yet, our brains are still years away from being fully “cooked” or mature.

The part of our brain located behind our foreheads, the prefrontal cortex (PFC), does NOT fully mature—here's the shocker—until we're about twenty years old (for women) and in boys, not until they reach the age of twenty-five or twenty-six!

Why is this *really* important? The prefrontal cortex portion of our brains contributes to our ability to focus, governs motivation and goal-directed behavior, and moderates social behavior—our executive function. It also helps compute consequence for our actions.

Therefore, it is rightful that “innocence” is long associated with childhood, but so is the need for a child's protection and guidance by a fully mature, caring (not predatory) adult, justly because of this inherently long maturation cycle. Given this fact of delayed brain maturity, the accepted norm that 18-year olds among us—or younger—can have legal access to guns, liquor, drive cars, make babies, and be required to enlist to fight wars, has huge implications on the collective design of our society, our overall youth wellbeing and nurture, and how juvenile offenders are viewed by the courts. It is sobering to know that the part of our brains that governs impulse control and wise, well thought through action, does not really fully mature until our third decade. That is not to say that there are not many caring, thoughtful, well-behaved young people among us, but the fact remains that their adult brain is not yet fully set.

Pictured here is a graph of our human brain maturation cycle that depicts development milestones at ages 5, 15, 20, and for male brains, 25/26.





# AMERICA'S REPORT CARD

HOW WELL DOES AMERICA PARENT HER OWN CHILDREN?

**PARENTING**  
*an art without a manual*

Below you'll find compiled information from three comparative studies that rank the world's richest countries by universal benchmarks of happiness and wellbeing, such as: low infant mortality, access to daycare and education, low rates of crime and violence, citizen perception of personal safety, access to free quality healthcare, gender equality, opportunity, and hope for the future.

RIDDLE:

WHAT SOCIETAL POLICIES ARE IN PLACE—WITHOUT EXCEPTION—IN ALL THE TOP-PERFORMING COUNTRIES RANKED BELOW?

ANSWER:

1. UNIVERSAL WELFARE THAT PROMOTES SOCIAL MOBILITY, AND PROVIDES FREE HEALTHCARE TO ALL ITS PEOPLE
2. AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE, AND NEW-PARENT PAID WORK LEAVE FOR BOTH MOMS AND DADS TO BOND WITH THE BABY
3. FREE HIGH-QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION
4. COMMITMENT TO FREE TRADE, FREE MARKETS, AND PRIVATE OWNERSHIP, WHILE MAINTAINING STRONG LAWS RESTRICTING ENVIRONMENTAL HARM AND ETHICS VIOLATIONS TO PROTECT THEIR CONSUMERS WITH HIGH QUALITY PRODUCT INSURANCE, AND HIGH-QUALITY MANUFACTURING AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS
5. PROMOTERS OF STRONG UNIONS THAT WORK IN CONCERT WITH THE BUSINESS OWNERS WITH THE AID OF FREE GOVERNMENT MEDIATION) TO ENSURE FAIR WAGES AND WORK PRACTICES, AND GUARANTEED PAID VACATION TIME

## STUDY #1

US News and World Report, 2018  
**Top Ten Best Countries to Raise Children**  
(The USA did not even place on this list)

- #1 Denmark
- #2 Sweden
- #3 Norway
- #4 Finland
- #5 Canada
- #6 Netherlands
- #7 Switzerland
- #8 New Zealand
- #9 Australia
- #10 Austria

## STUDY #2

UNICEF's Office of Research, Innocenti Report's,  
**Child Well-being In Rich Countries**  
(The USA ranked #26, near the bottom,  
below Greece at #25, but above Lithuania at #27!)

- #1 The Netherlands
- #2 Norway
- #3 Iceland
- #4 Finland
- #5 Sweden
- #6 Germany
- #7 Luxembourg
- #8 Switzerland
- #9 Ireland
- #10 Denmark
- #11 Slovenia
- #12 France

## STUDY #3

UN Sustainable Development Solutions  
Network Report, 2018  
**World's Happiest 150 Countries in The World**  
(The USA ranked 18th!)

- #1 Denmark
- #2 Sweden
- #3 Norway
- #4 Finland
- #5 Canada
- #6 Netherlands
- #7 Switzerland
- #8 New Zealand
- #9 Australia
- #10 Austria

This study had a fascinating observation: Countries in which new immigrants were happiest, also were ranked highest for their own citizens' happiness.

**"You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." —DEUTERONOMY, 10:19**

**"The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you;  
you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt;  
I am the Lord your God." —LEVITICUS, 19:34**



# ONE HUMAN FAMILY

UNICEF reports that 30 million children worldwide are current refugees, the highest recorded number since WWII. They are on the run with their families, or as orphans, due to conditions totally beyond their control—abject poverty, brutal regimes, gang threats, organized genocide, dire climate change with all its ensuing crop failure, disease, and lack of access to drinkable water.

The presence of a loving adult for these young refugees can help reduce some of this stress, but the supreme stressor—the loss of, or separation from a safe loving parent—can cause the developing brain of a child to release massive levels of cortisol as a natural response to the extreme stress they experience. Cortisol is a disruptor of vital circuit formation in a developing brain, and can inflict life-long damage.

Dr. Alicia Lieberman is one of the world's foremost authorities on child trauma. She has urged a halt to the practice of separating children from their parents at the border, saying, "The end should not justify the means in a society that is governed by the rule of law. The separation policy hurts children and hurts our own moral fabric as a nation because it perpetuates harm on innocent victims. Many decades of scientific study show that losing a loving and protective parent is the biggest single tragedy that can happen to a child. Children are biologically programmed to grow best in the care of a parent figure. When that bond is broken through long and unexpected separations with no set timeline for reunion, children respond at the deepest physiological and emotional levels. They become terrified, and their fear triggers a flood of stress hormones that disrupt neural circuits in the brain, create high levels of anxiety, make them more susceptible to physical and emotional illness, and damage their capacity to manage their emotions, trust people, and focus their attention on age-appropriate learning. Separating children from their parents at the border is the equivalent of inflicting cruel and unusual punishment on children. This is bad enough for a single child. When routine separation from the parent affects hundreds or thousands of children, it means adopting a policy that systematically hurts children's physical wellbeing and emotional health not only in the moment but for the rest of their lives."

**"Here are God's children on both sides of the wall,  
and no man made barrier can destroy this fact."**

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., SEPTEMBER 1964,  
TO 3,000+ GATHERED AT AN EAST GERMAN CHURCH







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SOCK MONKEY SATURDAY	Saturday, DECEMBER 9, 2017 10AM-2PM
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR DAY	Monday, JANUARY 15, 2018
THE KINETIC SCULPTURE RACE	Saturday, MAY 5, 2018 <a href="http://www.KineticBaltimore.com">www.KineticBaltimore.com</a>
JULY 4 PET PARADE	Wednesday, JULY 4, 2018
FLICKS FROM THE HILL	Thursday evenings JULY 12– AUGUST 30, 2018



## FRONT, BACK & INSIDE COVER: ARTIST J.J. CROMER

J.J. Cromer was born on November 21, 1967 in Princeton, West Virginia to science teacher parents. His mother's love of birds inspired her to name him "John J." after famed bird illustrator John James Audubon. Cromer was raised in rural Tazewell County, Virginia. He remembers, "We always had animals: dogs, cats, turtles, fish, ducks, chickens, and a rooster named Duke." The living room was filled with scientific apparatuses—microscopes, telescopes, and the family rock collection. Collecting and identifying bugs and plants were frequent family activities along with extensive family camping trips in summer. Cromer enjoyed drawing as a child until a dismissive seventh grade art teacher shut down his interest. Turning to books, Cromer loved reading science fiction and fantasy, and began writing his own at an early age. Cromer received a bachelor's degree in history and then earned two additional degrees in English and Library Science. He then worked as a librarian at a college library, where he met his wife Mary. Only after marrying Mary did Cromer begin to draw again. What was at first a renewed hobby quickly gave way to obsession. His drawings developed into detailed paintings, all inspired and expressive of his concern with current issues such as war, racism, science and technology, freedom of expression, class inequities, and environmentalism. Likewise impassioned by the destruction of the environment, Mary works as a lawyer for the nonprofit firm Appalachian Citizens' Law Center in Whitesburg, Kentucky. Cromer states: "I am very interested in the other human beings I share this planet with. I'm motivated by a humanistic hope that my voice can contribute to our cultural conversation. However small and inconsequential my voice is, it's still my voice. This need to 'speak' drives my artwork. In other words, what it means to be a good human being in community with other human beings. This is very important to me."

## PARENTING: *an art without a manual*

**ARTISTS** BOBBY ADAMS, ANONYMOUS, MORTON BARTLETT, CAROL BECKWITH, DANIEL BELARDINELLI, LEON BORENSZTEIN, WENDY BRACKMAN, TANJA BRANDT, ED BROWNLEE, ALLEN DAVID CHRISTIAN, JIM CONDRON, LORING CORNISH, J.J. CROMER, SCOTT CROMWELL, ANGELA FISHER, KAHLIL GIBRAN, PAUL GRAUBARD, ALEX GREY, BETTY GRODNITZKY, LOWER EAST SIDE GIRLS CLUB, FRANCISCO LOZA, JORDAN MACLACHLAN, MARS TOKYO, RAY MATERSON, JOHN O'BRIEN, P NOSA, MARY PROCTOR, CAROLYN REDWINE-GEER, CHRIS ROBERTS-ANTIEAU, ROMAINE SAMWORTH, PHILIPPE SAXER, ANN SOSBE, LINDA ST. JOHN, ROBERT SUNDHOLM, FRANK WARREN, GEORGE WILLIAMS, CHRIS WILSON, JACK ZIEGLER

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Closed: Christmas and Thanksgiving  
\*Open Monday, January 21, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. FREE.

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See WEBSITE: [www.avam.org](http://www.avam.org) for current prices and special discounted group rates.

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