**From Madonna to Mother: A Journey of Body and Soul**

My art began as a raw exploration of the Madonna-Whore dichotomy. Why did men only desire me when I seemed unattainable, childless? Why the sudden longing for maternal nurturing once commitment beckoned? I channeled this frustration into immersive installations, blurring the lines between seductress and mother. A mirrored stage reflected images from a projected video of strippers, while fish swam tantalizingly uncatchable with the paper nets provided. (*Sheep and Wolves)* An adjacent room offered a jarring contrast: eroticized breasts and a video of tender breastfeeding. (*Mother’s Milk)*

My work soon took a deeply personal turn. Living in Japan, I discovered Mizuko Kuyo, shrines for miscarried or aborted children. These quiet spaces validated the private grief of women, regardless of the circumstances. It was a revelation – and a reckoning. I realized I had let partners manipulate my own reproductive choices, threatening to withhold love if I didn't comply.

This newfound awareness ignited a series of installations honoring the loss of potential life. A video installation with a home shrine featured a woman sharing her abortion regret, not as a political statement, but as a testament to the universal ache of 'what if?' A painstakingly crafted nursery stood empty, a haunting symbol of absence. Most powerfully, I recorded women sharing their abortion stories, not to rehash debate, but to capture the complexity of relief tinged with melancholy, of choice accompanied by wonder at the path not taken*. (Loss/ Private Shrine/ Nursery/ Rest Our Souls)*

Collaborating with a colleague, we built a permanent Shrine for Water Children at the Tyson Research Center. The design echoed Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial – a quiet reckoning with loss. A triangular window invited kneelers to pray, the bronze impression of small knees and elbows on the kneeler a poignant reminder.

After miscarrying twins at 7 months gestation, my art became a desperate act of protection and remembrance. I stitched quilts with symbols of safeguarding, drew portraits of the children I yearned to know. I penned an illustrated book, *The Book of Lost Children*, chronicling a mother's futile quest to retrieve her babies from the afterlife.

When my daughters finally arrived, healthy but hard-won, my art overflowed with joyous portraits and protective quilts. Yet the fear of loss never fully dissipated. It fueled my research into ancient mourning rituals and my hopes of building a public Mizuko Kuyo shrine in North Carolina/

My latest pieces are a tender counterpoint: dreamy portraits of blissful infants. I’ve also completed a series canopic jars featuring delicate baby doll parts. They challenge us to acknowledge the unrealized potential of every pregnancy. Because in the end, the only way to end the rancor and polarization is to center the experiences of those whose bodies carry the weight of creation and loss.

A mother's womb is not a battleground, but a sanctuary. It's a space where the most intimate of decisions are made, decisions that define lives. Let us strive for compassion, for understanding that choice – in all its forms – is rarely easy, always nuanced. Let us build more shrines, not to judgement, but to the profound complexity of motherhood.