

Jillian Mayer Freaks Out Her Unborn Grandchildren in "Family Matters"

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Video still from Mayer's "I Am Your Grandma"

Two babies cry: one after emerging from a gaping vagina in a hospital, the other a disproportionately large baby mask perched atop a slender 26-year-old woman with chipped pink nails. These are the lasting images after our sneak peak of Jillian Mayer's solo show "Family Matters" at David Castillo gallery. As the name suggests, the artist's first solo show tackles arguably the most formative of influences -- family.

On one screen, we watch Mayer give birth to herself and think: *Is she really showing the full frontal birthing video of herself being born?* Yes. Yes, she is. Although it's not the first piece you encounter in the gallery, it sets the right tone. From the first breath, life is messy: it's striped in blood and flecked with gray tissue. It's pain and it's joy. And even for the passive voyeur, there's a sweet release of tension when baby Mayer lets out her first throaty cry.

It's like the newborn Mayer wails in recognition of the sometimes cruel, mostly awkward world she somehow anticipates. Twenty-six years later, the baby is now a multimedia artist using video, sculpture, and performance to guide us through the battlefield of growing up.

The gallery door is flanked by sculptures draped with key chains - representing the gateway to shelter - but weighed down with heavy resin and metal, representing the leash of burden when you realize the drama that awaits at home.



As part of her cut-out board series, "Getting to Know You," a front lawn (complete with a working chimney) and a dining room (with a crackling fireplace) become battlefields of domestic angst. Participants peak out, contorted and frozen in mid-motion. They appear defeated by the heavy weight of being home.

The headliner from the show is undoubtedly, *I Am Your Grandma*, a video piece where Mayer sends a message to her unborn grandchildren. Sweet-faced Mayer morphs into characters fantastically styled by Sean Wildchild. The artist looks like someone going through an acid flashback while trapped in a theater's costume closet.



Two video stills from "I Am Your Grandma"

Fast cuts show her in sagging-skin masks, giant crying baby heads, exaggerated clown make-up, her head lined with sequin tumors. She mouths *I am your grandma* over and over. *You are the future, you can get love by video.*

The tweaked out ditty, "I Am Your Grandma," written by MJ of local band ANR, will stay in your head long after you leave the gallery -- as will Mayer's neo-futurist generational vision.

Mayer explains the inspiration for the piece came after a long lost cousin got in touch with her family and shared extensive archival research of the family's lineage. Looking at photographs, names, and basic information about ancestors as far back as the 1400s, Mayer realized she was trying to piece

together any semblance of a personality from the sparse information.

She started to wonder what her own grandchildren and ancestors would learn about her. She envisions *I Am Your Grandma* as a time capsule for her humor and her penchant for fantasy. "Basically I wanted to creep my grandchildren out," Mayers says adding, "And maybe if my grandson's a big weirdo, he won't feel so isolated if he knows his grandmother was capable of this."

"Family Matters" opens tonight with a reception from 6 to 9 p.m. at the David Castillo Gallery (2234 NW Second Ave., Miami) and will be up until May 7. Call 305-573-8110 or visit davidcastillogallery.com