

# Glitch Mommy explores the fairytale of adoption



Glitch Mommy: Forty Days & Forty Nights – A 21st Century Adoption Tale in Mixed Media will be on display at Avila’s Thornhill Art Gallery through October 6. Photo by Kady Cramer

By KADY CRAMER

“Returning to the baby closet of all the things gifted or bought for the children we thought would be ours, I began using those items I had been holding onto. ...as source material for new work.”

Artist Rita Koehler refers to a “baby closet” as all the things collected during her and her partner’s journey of trying to adopt. Using these items along with real life photographs and other artistic mediums, Koehler explores the fragments of “adoption disruption” and brings to life a true exhibition experience in *Glitch Mommy: Forty Days & Forty Nights – A 21st Century Adoption Tale in Mixed Media*.

Avila University is exhibiting the show at the Thornhill Art Gallery, 11901 Wornall Rd., through October 6. Free and open to the public, the gallery will be open Monday – Thursday from 10am-3pm.

## Adoption Disruption

Rita Koehler and her partner Patricia Hackett started their adoption process in 2006.

“We were trying to adopt during a time that was before marriage equality,” says Koehler. At the time, same gender couples achieved adoption by approaching the adoption agency as a single parent. The second person in the relationship would apply to adopt the child later.

Koehler and Hackett were part of several different agencies in Seattle, California, and Chicago for over a decade. Sometimes that included open adoptions.

“In open adoption the birth mother is the one who chooses who will adopt,” says Koehler. “She chooses a family in waiting and then at some point changes her mind.”

The couple was chosen a handful of times with three instances making it all the way up to the baby’s delivery.

“We had a birth mother in Seattle who chose us,” says Koehler. “They called us around 11 at night to tell us ‘You’ve been chosen.’ They called us at noon the next day to say that our baby girl had been born. As we’re putting things together and getting our flight information, we received a third call and were told that she had changed her mind.”

A month later the baby was placed for adoption again and they went with a straight couple.

A pregnant 14-year-old in south Chicago, being

raised by her grandmother, also chose Koehler and Hackett. The couple took the soon-to-be mother to every doctor’s appointment through the last trimester – only for the young mother to decide to raise the baby herself.

“That one was really hard,” says Koehler.

## Happily Ever After

The prologue to Koehler’s show as you enter the exhibit features a reference from the play Mother Goose – “In Gooseland she lived. A queer country close by the sea.”

“I have placed this show in the realm of fairytale,” says Koehler. “I just felt that to create a common universal experience, the fairytale was a good genre. It also wasn’t too far off the mark in telling a story about adoption. You have a real-life event that’s constantly butting up against these fairytale notions about what a family should be...notions of ‘happily ever after.’

Koehler’s mixed-media work includes various transparent papers, watercolor paper and paint, acrylics, inks, pastels, and embroidery thread.

“I use transparent papers when I want to leave everything to chance and the unexpected, and when I want the photographic images to come out glitchy and non-recognizable.”

The process involves printing photography on watercolor paper, then adding a layer of paint, removing paint, painting more, and then sometimes following with embroidery.

“Allowing for glitch and permutations gives me permission and agency over the work and over the telling of the story – a story in which, as a participant, I had no control.”

Koehler explains that the show’s take-away is broad and different for everyone depending on their own experiences.

“It’s an absolution of our experience in coming to understand that whether one has children or not, that for women today, there’s always a place in the realm of motherhood.”

## Choosing Avila

Koehler grew up in south Kansas City in the late 60’s, early 70’s. She attended St. Catherine’s grade school and Notre Dame de Sion High School before attending St. Mary’s College in Notre Dame, Ind.

Koehler completed her MFA in Visual Studies from Lesley University College of Art and Design, Boston; and completed a Certificate Program in Curatorial Studies through the University of Chicago.

But she gives credit to Avila, where her mother graduated from, as a source of influence.

“Sister Margaret Reinhart was the chair of the Art Department at Avila for many years,” says Koehler.

“She taught my mother and made many trips to our home. She was really the first serious artist that I met and someone who recognized that art was a serious discipline and not just something visually pleasing to the eye. She was my first real influence.”

With her current work about motherhood, Koehler wanted to exhibit it at her mother’s alma mater.

“I think it’s relevant for the time and it’s an experience that people may not be familiar with,” says Thornhill Art Gallery director Teresa Johnson. “Her work is so engaging not only visually but there’s definitely an emotional impact too. It pulls you in even without knowing what the works about and what the meaning is...there’s something else there.”

Koehler currently resides just east of Chicago with her partner of 25 years.

For more information, visit [www.ritakoehler.com](http://www.ritakoehler.com).



(l-r) Patricia Hackett and Artist Rita Koehler. Photo by Peter Ringenberg



Fairyland, 2021. Digital Image. Ink-jet ink, watercolor, and acrylic paint on Yupo paper. 11" x 14" Back-lit Frame. Created out of a photo with Rita and her mom in hospice care. Rita was in a bed next to her mother, holding her hand as she slept.

don't deny your beast inside

Directed By Korey Childs  
Musical Direction by Ahafia Jurkiewicz-Miles

Sept 28-Oct 7  
[www.theartsasylum.org](http://www.theartsasylum.org)

**BAT BOY**  
THE MUSICAL