

In a State of IF

August 17 – November 21, 2026
Frederick Layton Gallery



Cha Gutiérrez, Two Futures: A Portrait of Infertility,
Acrylic on Canvas, 2020

One in six individuals experiences infertility and one in four experiences miscarriage, according to the World Health Organization. Yet infertility is often associated with stigma and isolation. Ongoing legislative debates in the United States around IVF and reproductive healthcare underscore the financial, legal and structural barriers many patients also face.

Exhibition works across media address the full spectrum of reproductive experience: trying to conceive; navigating diagnosis and treatment, pregnancy or childlessness after infertility, miscarriage and infant loss, and celebrating the diverse families made possible through assisted reproductive technologies. Some works incorporate biological imagery, medical materials and procedural documentation to reference the physical, financial and logistical demands of fertility treatments. Others subvert traditional modes of portraiture or repurpose common fertility symbols to express feelings of absence, inadequacy or lack of bodily autonomy. Some interrogate what it means to mourn futures imagined but never fully realized, while others consider the many pathways to family building that often remain unseen.

The exhibition also tackles social issues around family-building and access to care, including experiences affecting BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities. Several artists connect infertility awareness to broader reproductive justice movements, situating personal experience within collective struggle and advocacy. The inclusion of local Wisconsin artists reflects the challenges of living in a state without mandated fertility insurance coverage.

Curated by Katherine Gressel and Maria Novotny.

EVENTS

OPENING RECEPTION: **Friday, October 16**, 5 to 8 PM

GALLERY TALK: Informal Exhibition Walkthrough with Curators Katherine Gressel and Maria Novotny along with Artists Elizabeth Horn, Cha Gutiérrez, Ashley January and Brittany Runaas, **Friday, October 16**, 4 PM

COMMUNITY PANEL: Creative Action for Reproductive Health, **Thursday, November 5**, 6 PM to 8 PM, Auditorium 160

RESOURCES



Community Resources for Infertility Support & Advocacy

1 in 6 persons live with infertility and over 172,000 Wisconsinites must navigate how to build a family after receiving an infertility diagnosis. Learn more how to connect with local and national resources.

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In a State of IF | *Curatorial Essay*

On View: Aug. 17 – Nov. 21, 2026

Curator & Artist Talk: Oct. 16, 4 - 5 p.m.

Gallery Night & Reception: Oct. 16, 5 – 8 p.m.

Curators: Katherine Gressel and Maria Novotny

Overview

One in six individuals experiences infertility and one in four experiences miscarriage, according to the World Health Organization. Yet infertility is often associated with stigma and isolation. Ongoing legislative debates in the United States around IVF and reproductive healthcare underscore the financial, legal and structural barriers many patients also face.

In a State of IF explores art's role in storytelling, healing, community building and advocacy around infertility and access to reproductive care. While pregnancy and motherhood have long histories in visual culture—from fertility figures of the ancient world to works such as [Gustav Klimt's Hope II](#)—experiences of infertility, miscarriage, and assisted reproduction have often existed at the margins of representation. Referencing works such as [Frida Kahlo's Henry Ford Hospital \(1932\)](#), one of the most widely recognized artistic depictions of reproductive loss, *In a State of IF* considers what becomes possible when artists insist on making visible experiences that are frequently silenced, privatized, or culturally disavowed.

Participating artists challenge dominant cultural, medical and legal narratives by reframing fertility, personhood, kinship and parenthood through complex lived experience rather than overly authoritative institutional definitions. Together, these works convey not only the embodied grief and uncertainty (state of IF/infertility) that infertility patients experience but also the resilience, creativity and community that emerge in response to it.

Artworks across media address the full spectrum of reproductive experience: from trying to conceive; to navigating diagnosis and treatment, pregnancy or childlessness after infertility, or miscarriage and infant loss; to celebrating the diverse families made possible through assisted reproductive technologies. Some works incorporate biological imagery, medical materials and procedural documentation to reference the physical, financial and logistical demands of fertility treatments. Others subvert traditional modes of portraiture or repurpose common fertility symbols to express feelings of absence, inadequacy or isolation, or to consider the many pathways to family building that often remain unseen.

The exhibition also tackles social issues around family-building and access to care, including inequities affecting BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities as well as issues facing Wisconsinites. Several artists connect infertility awareness to broader reproductive justice movements, situating personal experience within collective struggle and advocacy.

Visitors are invited to engage with interactive works to reflect, connect, heal and take action.

About the Artworks

Sally Butcher, Cole Askevold, Molina Dayal, Emma Royer, Michelle Levy, El Morgan and others incorporate biological imagery, medical materials, and procedural documentation to examine the labor, repetition, and uncertainty that characterize fertility treatment. Their works challenge simplified narratives around reproductive technology by emphasizing the often-lengthy processes, physical and financial demands, and emotional complexities involved in pursuing parenthood through IVF and related interventions, and the importance of uninterrupted access to health care.

Many of these works reveal the number of embryos, eggs, sperm, or treatment cycles it can take to produce a single child (or sometimes zero, as fewer than 60% of embryo transfers result in live births, success rates decreasing with age), as well as the threat of pregnancy loss. These artworks engage with complicated questions around how to define and ascribe value to embryos as potential lives, especially in light of recent debates around whether embryos should have the same legal status as children.

Throughout the exhibit, artists like Crystal Tursich, Angelina Salgado, Elizabeth Horn, and Brittany Runaas repurpose traditional fertility symbols (such as fruit, flowers, baby items, and animals) to instead engage with personal experiences of miscarriage, pregnancy complications, and premature birth, visualizing forms of grief that exist in the space between presence and absence. Their works interrogate what it means to mourn futures imagined but never fully realized.

Cha Gutiérrez, Alexis Neider, Gina Heatley, Jen Scuro and heather michel riddle reimagine traditional modes of family portraiture and storytelling in favor of compositions that instead convey absence, concealment, liminality, or unpredictability. Ashley January's work examines the trauma and eventual joy of Black families navigating premature birth and other maternal health risks experienced at disproportionately high rates, alongside infertility. Deric Carner, Jackie Dobranski, Eva Nye, Ryan Ferrante, Maya Grobel and Noah Moskin, Raina Cowan, and others highlight the diverse family structures made possible through assisted reproduction—including LGBTQ+ parenthood, donor conception, surrogacy, and single parenthood by choice—as well as adoption. Questions of kinship, identity, bodily autonomy, belonging, and the ethics of different types of family building emerge throughout these works and others in the exhibition.

The exhibit also features artists whose practices intersect with broader movements for reproductive justice, care, and embodied knowledge. Coralina Rodriguez Meyer draws upon ecological and Indigenous belief systems to imagine and organize alternatives to restrictive medical frameworks, while Tamar Ettun's participatory performance video transforms IVF experiences into rituals of care and connection. Jamie Blicher's abstract paintings and designs created with sterile IVF needles channel pain into creativity, outreach and advocacy. Molly Sherman and Emily Fitzgerald invite viewers to situate their own reproductive experiences within a larger historical and reproductive healthcare timeline, expanding the exhibition's scope from individual narrative to collective archive. The exhibition also contains art and writing by infertility patients created through past workshops by the ART of Infertility (an arts-based infertility storytelling project), and in other therapeutic settings.

Although rooted in intimate experiences, *In a State of IF* also engages broader questions concerning healthcare access, reproductive autonomy, and the politics of family formation. The exhibition includes works by artists whose experiences reflect the uneven realities of navigating fertility and family building in contexts where insurance coverage and access to care remain inconsistent and often insufficient, including several artists local to Wisconsin. The League of Women Voters of Milwaukee County's participatory *Garlands of Choice* installation invites visitors' direct advocacy for legislation that expands fertility coverage in WI, a state that still does not have a fertility insurance mandate. Works like Sherman and Fitzgerald's emphasize that infertility should not be discussed in a vacuum—when any type of reproductive care is restricted, this can also limit the options of fertility patients. Infertility is also not always represented in discussions of reproductive health and family planning, and this exhibition asks viewers to consider the impact of this erasure. (For more information on these topics, please refer to the “Reproductive Politics of Infertility” statement).

Through such interactive installations, visitor responses, and community resources, *In a State of IF* extends beyond representation to foster dialogue and participation. It invites viewers to reflect on how contemporary art can illuminate reproductive experiences that have too often remained unseen while opening space for new forms of recognition, solidarity, and cultural change.

The Reproductive Politics of Infertility

In a State of IF situates infertility within a reproductive justice framework that asserts the right to bodily autonomy, the right to decide whether to have children, the right to compassionate, evidence-based care for both infertility and reproductive loss, and the right to parent in safe and sustainable communities.

Since the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, infertility has been reshaped by significant legal and political developments in the United States. Restricted abortion and miscarriage care in some states has limited treatment options for fertility patients faced with high-risk or unviable pregnancies. In 2024, the Alabama Supreme Court ruled that frozen embryos are “unborn children” under the state’s Wrongful Death Act, a decision grounded in fetal personhood doctrine. This ruling exposed IVF providers to heightened legal risk and led multiple clinics to temporarily pause services. In response, emergency state legislation was passed to restore limited legal protections for fertility care. That same year, the U.S. Senate introduced *The Right to IVF Act*, which sought to establish federal protections and insurance coverage for in vitro fertilization, but the bill did not pass.

At the same time, infertility has entered national political discourse, with public figures including Donald Trump and vice-presidential candidate Tim Walz referencing personal and political connections to fertility. Following his re-election, President Trump signed an Executive Order aimed at reducing IVF drug costs. It did not establish a federal mandate requiring insurance coverage for fertility treatment. Despite increased public discourse, access to care remains uneven and often dependent on geography, insurance status, and shifting state laws. Currently, only 25 U.S. states plus Washington D.C. have insurance mandates for IVF and only 6 explicitly include LGBTQ+ families.

In Wisconsin, repeated efforts to pass the Building Families Act—which would mandate insurance coverage for fertility treatment for all families—have failed to advance through the legislature. This exhibition brings together artists whose work expands how infertility is represented, moving it from private experience into public cultural and political view and building greater empathy and understanding around patients' true experiences and needs.

Curator Bios & Featured Artists

Maria Novotny (she/her) is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Drawing on a reproductive justice framework, she studies reproductive advocacy, infertility, and recurrent reproductive loss. Her co-edited collection *Infertilities, A Curation* (Wayne State University Press, 2023) portrays the ranging experiences of infertility in art and writing. In 2022, she established and continues to serve as a co-PI for the Center for 21st Century Studies Reproductive Justice Collaboratory at UW-Milwaukee. In 2020, co-founded the Building Families Alliance of WI, which is a coalition of Wisconsinites advocating for fertility-friendly state legislation and reducing inequities to family building. Since 2014, she has served as the Co-Director for The ART of Infertility, which is an arts-based infertility storytelling project and in 2018 was recognized by RESOLVE: The National Infertility and Family Building Association for her innovative approach to infertility advocacy via the arts and storytelling.

Katherine Gressel (she/her) is a NYC-based independent curator with over 15 years of experience bringing site-specific, socially-engaged and participatory art to public and educational spaces. As a member of the Mother Creatrix artist collective, a curator with The ART of Infertility, and a volunteer for RESOLVE: The National Infertility and Family Building Association, her interests include exploring the intersection of art and caregiving with a focus on infertility and reproductive health issues. Katherine currently serves as the inaugural Art & Exhibits and Art x Environment Fellowship Coordinator at Brooklyn Botanic Garden, and previously built an original contemporary art program for Brooklyn's Old Stone House & Washington Park historic site, connecting contemporary art to critical issues in U.S. history. Katherine has also curated and produced artist projects for diverse galleries, outdoor settings, and universities throughout NYC. Her work has been recognized by *The New York Times*, *Hyperallergic*, Time Out NY, and CBS News. She has written and presented on art and social impact for Americans for the Arts, Public Art Dialogue, and Dickinson College, among others. She earned her B.A. in art from Yale and M.A. in arts administration from Columbia.

Featured Artists: Cole Askevold, Jamie Blicher, Sally Butcher, Deric Carner, Cha Gutiérrez, Raina Cowan, Molina Dayal, Jackie Dobranski, La-Anna Douglas, Tamar Ettun, Ryan Ferrante, Emily Fitzgerald, Maya Grobel and Noah Moskin, Gina Heatley, Cynthia Herrick, Elizabeth Horn, Ashley January, Kevin Jordan, Michelle Levy, Ashley MacLure, Sarah Matthews, Emily McCully, heather michel riddle, El Morgan, Alexis Neider, Eva Nye, Emma Royer, Coralina Rodriguez Meyer, Hannah Robarge, Brittany Runaas, Angelina Salgado, Molly Sherman, Robin Silbergleid, Jen Scuro, Meghan Szidik, Crystal Tursich, Kristina Varaksina, and The League of Women Voters of Milwaukee County.

Sources Consulted

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