

WORKING ARTIST

An artist depicts workaday life, the dishes, the laundry, the parenting

Helena Wurzel's guiding philosophy, in paintings and collages, is 'about being a woman in contemporary society'

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated May 5, 2025, 25 minutes ago



Painter Helena Wurzel poses for a portrait inside her studio in Somerville. Wurzel makes paintings about the sometimes chaotic realities of motherhood. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

[Helena Wurzel's](#) paintings and collages depict her two children, her husband, her parents, and their ordinary lives. In "[Home Workout](#)," her son Max and daughter Maya (9 and 7) climb Wurzel like a jungle gym as she exercises.

Her art is "about being a woman in contemporary society and navigating all the *stuff*," she said, "the mental load, the parenting, working."

Wurzel paints during school hours. "I'm always on the clock," she said. And she's pulling it off: The artist is a finalist for the [2025 Bennett Prize](#), awarded May 15 to a realist figurative painter who's a woman.

She sees herself as a world-builder. "I'm trying to build a real world with connections between all the images," she said. "And then, you know, the dishes. The laundry."



Helena Wurzel's collage "In the Middle" hangs inside her studio. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Where to find her: www.helenawurzel.com/

Age: 44

Originally from: Newton

Lives in: Cambridge

Making a living: Wurzel taught high school and college art for years but gave that up in 2022 to devote herself to painting. “At a certain point I was like, I can’t work full time, be a mom, and be an artist,” she said. “So far, I’ve been able to sustain it. but if I have to go back and get a real job, I will.”

In March, collaborating with [Life Drawing Boston](#), she started a semi-regular [life painting drop-in evening](#). She provides the snacks and painting supplies. “It’s not a class,” she said. “It’s to create accessibility and to have some community bonding and get everyone talking to each other.”



Some of the gouache paint Helena Wurzel uses in her studio. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Studio: Paintings and collages make a treasure map of Wurzel’s life on the walls of her sunny workspace at [Joy Street](#) studios in Somerville. She stores materials in old diaper boxes and uses a rolling palette table she built 20 years ago.

How she started: Wurzel has always been an artist. In college, she’d rush to finish whatever she was doing to have more time in the studio. She got her master’s degree at Boston University in 2007. “It’s a school for people who love painting,” she said. “And it gave me a lot of grit.”

Grit matters. “Being an artist is not an easy thing to do outside of school,” she said. “My first few years out, I felt really alone.”

What she makes: Her narrative figure paintings packed with patterns and buzzy colors reflect how family life is organized — and disorganized.



Helena Wurzel demonstrates the process she uses to paint by overlaying colors. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

How she works: Wurzel's compositional intricacy reflects that entropy and connective tissue. "I do underpainting. I'll start with a really bright color," she said. "I make a loose, washy drawing. I'll usually spend a couple days drawing to find my composition."

Advice for artists: "Stay true to yourself. Keep making stuff no matter what. And find your people. Because no one does this alone," Wurzel said. "I have a wonderful group of girlfriends who are artists. We all cheer each other on. There are so few people you can just call and be like, 'Oh, I'm having a problem with my orange today.'"



Helena Wurzel's collage "Mental Load" is one of many works on the walls of her Somerville studio. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

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