



*Brenda Clews, "After the Bath," Birth Painting Series,  
watercolour on paper, 21" x 28", 1987.*

"When I was pregnant, my body changed in fundamental and drastic ways. It was a crisis: the freedom of an old self was dying to make way for the mother I would become.

The "Birth Series" paintings became a visual journey of my changing body, a way to comprehend what I was undergoing in the tumble of hormones as my belly grew. The paintings focus on the woman who conceives and carries a baby into life, who nourishes and awaits the child who will hopefully emerge from the nine-month gestation of her body like a dream become real.

In reaction to an increasing invisibility in the world—the averted gaze, perhaps arising out of cultural discomfort with the swollen belly, I wished to present the pregnant body as sensual and sacred. At the beginning of the series, the body is portrayed clearly; as the the forces of labour, birth and then breastfeeding unfold, the clarity shifts into flowing colours suggesting the transformative experience that carrying and delivering and breastfeeding a baby is. These paintings are about a rite of passage, about the strangest body on earth, about the mind-blowing transformation of skin, belly, heart and perception of the self, as a woman ripens and delivers her fragile and beautiful fruit, the newborn, a miracle of the world."

—Brenda Clews (artist statement)