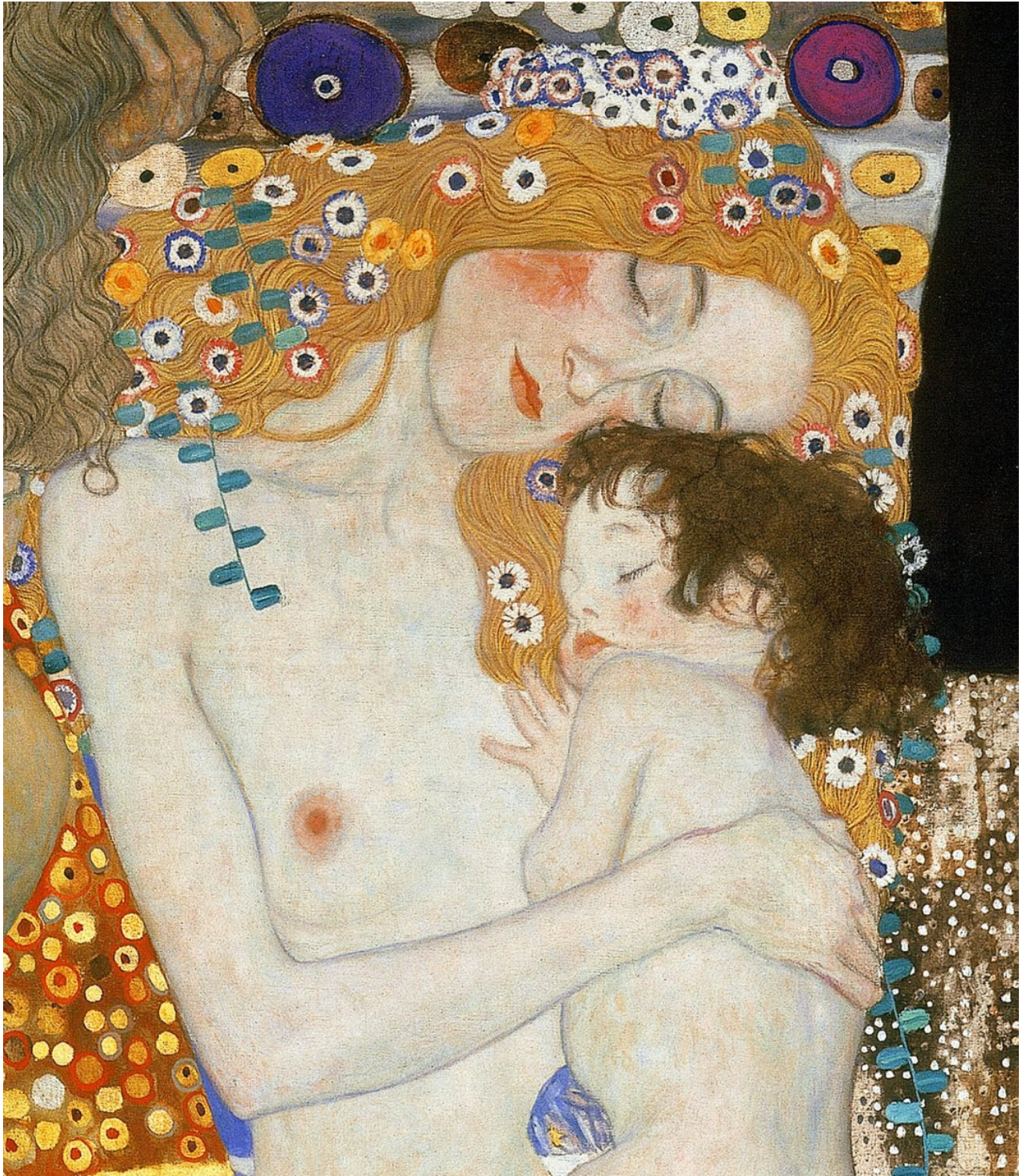


# Two Poems for an Exceptional Child

by [Cristina Nehring](#) (November 2023)



*The Three Ages of Woman (detail), Gustav Klimt, 1905*

## **In Praise of Disability**

*Je t'aime, maman,*  
Says my lovely girl  
As she sticks her head  
Into my mezzanine bed.

Go back and sleep,  
Say I,  
She wonders why;  
It's 4 in the morning already

An hour  
At which she starts to flower  
She begins to sing  
Her false notes ring

Around the room  
As silent as a tomb  
Only moments ago.  
What a show

She stages  
This handicapped child  
How wild she is,  
How full of vigor.

Go figure.  
Children with Down Syndrome  
Are supposed to be tame  
And easily tired;

Whoever conspired  
To give them this reputation?  
I wonder

As I blunder

Barefoot around our Parisian flat  
In search of something to make her fat  
At age fifteen  
She's lean as a foal.

That's not really the goal  
To flourish she should have  
Something to nourish  
Her growing forms.

Who came up with the norms  
For adolescents like her?  
Her energy and love  
Seem to come from above

No fatigue and no frailty  
Disturb her deep gaiety  
There's no child in the world  
I'd rather see  
Than my Eurydice—  
Even at 4 am.

### **Ode to an Extra Chromosome**

My child she cannot read,  
My girl she cannot write,  
My babe she barely speaks,

But what a blur of bliss!  
What a cacophony of kisses,  
What an opera of affection.

She is the sunshine  
Missing from Paris



She is the whirlwind waning worldwide.

She is her mother's impertinent ecstasy.

Betrayed by her papa

She is courted

By comely young men;

The femme fatale of her school,

Attentive to all,

Indebted to none.

Together

We make a perfect pair

Of girlfriends. Sitting

Round a café table

We feed each other

Avocadoes and olives

And scatter the scruples

Of intellectuals adjacent.

Eurydice, my love, my

Light, forge on, fight on, flash on

Until the dying of the day.

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**Cristina Nehring** published *The Child Who Never Spoke: 23 1/2 Lessons in Fragility* on October 24, 2023. She is also the author of *A Vindication of Love* which made the front page of the *New York Times Book Review* as well as of two books in French. She writes for the *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. She lives in Paris with her daughter.

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