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Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts Presents Two New Exhibitions

Presence in the Pause: Interiority and its Radical Immanence

and

Jennifer Ling Datchuk: Eat Bitterness

May 20–September 17, 2023



(L) Mequitta Ahuja, *Ancestor*, 2021. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist and Aicon Gallery. (R) Jennifer Ling Datchuk, *like freckles, like eggshells, like stone*, 2022. Ceramic; Courtesy of the artist and John Michael Kohler Arts Center.

Omaha, Neb. — Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts presents two new exhibitions: *Presence in the Pause: Interiority and its Radical Immanence* and *Jennifer Ling Datchuk: Eat Bitterness*, on view from May 20, 2023, through September 17, 2023. *Presence in the Pause* brings together eleven female and non-binary artists who interpret the complex nature of daily life. *Jennifer Ling Datchuk: Eat Bitterness* is a solo exhibition of new and recent work by Datchuk focusing on her multidisciplinary exploration of her personal identity as a woman, a Chinese woman, as an “American,” and as a third culture kid. Both exhibitions are curated by Rachel Adams, Chief Curator and Director of Programs at Bemis Center.

Presence in the Pause: Interiority and its Radical Immanence focuses on the complexity of our everyday relationships through portraits and domestic scenes that examine personhood, memories, and the speeding up and slowing down of contemporary life. Often known to be solitary creatures, artists regularly spend long periods alone in their studios populated by materials, research, and the plethora of ideas, reveries, and worries swirling in their minds. Harmonizing these physical and

cerebral conditions together through painting, this exhibition highlights a group of artists who examine and celebrate ideas around interiority: domestic spaces filled with memories, inner monologues that flit between representations of past, present, and future, or the visual expression of emotion.

The artists in this exhibition, all from the same micro-generation situated between GenX and Millennial, explore the expansiveness of interiority in their work. Exhibited together, their contrasting styles highlight the breadth of quotidian subject matter. Through disparate scale shifts, color palette, paint type, and canvas choice, each artist uniquely uncovers and chronicles the intimate and immanent aspects of daily life, revealing how the nature of interiority is not simply personal, but potentially political as well. In revealing the presence of daily challenges, memories, and the wants and needs of our bodies, the works touch upon what we continue to yearn for: personal growth, fulfillment, and space to be ourselves and to be with ourselves. The artists highlight how, in the sometimes mundaneness of everyday life, domesticity, identity, and memory collide together to create an all-encompassing radical immanence.

“Presence in the Pause brings together a diverse group of artists who are highlighting their lived experiences through painting,” says Rachel Adams, Chief Curator and Director of Programs. “While each explores unique territories related to their own personal histories and future, this exhibition suggests that despite our sense of separateness as individuals, we are all deeply interconnected and intertwined.”

Artists include: Mequitta Ahuja, Lilli Carré, Andrea Joyce Heimer, Kyoko Idetsu, Kathy Liao, Danielle McKinney, Maia Cruz Palileo, Molly Prentiss, Preetika Rajgariah, Celeste Rapone, and Becky Suss. In addition to visual works, the exhibition includes newly commissioned text by writer Molly Prentiss. “Feed” is a compilation of short-form writings that emerged during the pandemic as a way for Prentiss to share and connect with the outside world. These writings are available at Bemis Center as a takeaway booklet and are also quoted throughout the galleries.

Jennifer Ling Datchuk: Eat Bitterness brings together a variety of works from 2019 to 2023, with several premiering at Bemis Center. Trained as a ceramicist, Datchuk primarily works with porcelain—a material that, for the artist, speaks to a dualistic nature of great fragility and resilience. This metaphor carries through her investigations of beauty, femininity, intersectionality, identity, girlhood, protest, and the global inequalities of labor. Through material culture, the history of craft, and by championing the handmade, she challenges the social, political, and cultural systems that continue to hold women back.

The exhibition’s title, *Eat Bitterness*, originates from a Chinese idiom about enduring hardships, even suffering, without complaint. To this point, much of Datchuk’s work in the exhibition focuses on the unrecognized and invisible Asian labor. *my neck, my back* (2022), for example, is a slip cast of an antique Chinese export ceramic baby in a pillow form, originally used by women for propped

rest, protecting the shape and style of their while sleeping. Paired with the original Chinese antique, Datchuk stacks fruit on the back of the baby figurine to suggest the unsurmountable weight of Asian women's labor that provide comfort, care, and convenience for so many others.

Works in the exhibition also chart Datchuk's ongoing interest in how women specifically embody time: the phases of the moon and the menstrual cycle, the exaggerated weight of waiting and quarantining, the slow growth of hair, the thresholds they cross and the unknown spaces they withstand, and the many "luck" objects they create to hold and use while hoping for a better future or circumstances. Braiding pain and perfection, these objects amplify female voices, reconstruct their identities, and celebrate their truths. Her piece *like freckles, like eggshells, like stone* (2022) is a collection of pastel-colored porcelain bull horns with bamboo-cast handles. Created as *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in the summer of 2022, two of the horns are illustrated with the phrases "Roe is Precedent" and "They Lied Under Oath," calling out the voices of protestors and the power of the collective female voice. Through material culture, the history of craft, and by championing the handmade, Datchuk challenges the social, political, and cultural systems that continue to hold women back.

"Jennifer Ling Datchuk's *Eat Bitterness* showcases an artist whose introspective practice delves deep into examining material culture related to her personal history and everyday experience as a woman, as a Chinese woman, and as an 'American,'" says Rachel Adams.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

In conjunction with these exhibitions, Bemis Center will host a series of lectures and facilitated discussions exploring the intersections between gender and our social, political, and cultural systems. Upcoming lecturers include: Lyz Lenz (June 7, 7 pm), Anna Storti, Ph.D. (June 22, 7 pm), and Jenni Sorkin, Ph.D. (July 27, 7 pm).

Lyz Lenz is a writer and author, and whiskey drinker living in Iowa. She writes a regular newsletter, *Men Yell At Me*, where she explores the intersection of politics and our bodies in red-state America. Lyz's writing has appeared in the *Huffington Post*, *The Washington Post*, the *Columbia Journalism Review*, *The New York Times*, *Pacific Standard*, and others. Her books include *God Land* and *Belabored*. Lenz's essay *All the Angry Women* was also included in the anthology *Not That Bad* edited by Roxane Gay. Her third book, *This American Ex-Wife* is forthcoming.

Dr. Anna Storti is Assistant Professor of Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies at Duke University where she also teaches in the Asian American and Diaspora Studies Program and is affiliated with the Asian/Pacific Studies Institute and Critical Asian Humanities. An interdisciplinary scholar trained in feminist theory and queer of color critique, Storti explores the aesthetic and affective relations between race, empire, violence, and pleasure, specializing in art and culture across the Asian diaspora.

Jenni Sorkin is a Professor of History of Art & Architecture at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She writes on the intersections between gender, material culture, and contemporary art, working primarily on women artists and underrepresented media.

PUBLIC ASSEMBLY

Using Bemis Center's exhibitions as an entry point, this series of discussions offers Omaha an opportunity to share ideas and create meaning in the community with one another. Facilitated by local artists Caitlin Cass and Jamie Ho, and exploring questions of womanhood, domesticity, and labor in their own practices, these conversations seek to connect questions in the artwork with issues directly affecting Omaha's social, political, and artistic landscape. Formatted as an informal discussion and blurring the boundary of "expert" and "audience," Public Assembly harnesses the creativity and vision of the community to hold space for collective meaning-making. Public Assembly will occur on July 13, August 10, and August 31 at 7 pm.

SUPPORT

Presence in the Pause: Interiority and its Radical Immanence and *Jennifer Ling Datchuk: Eat Bitterness* is supported by Nebraska Arts Council and Omaha Steaks.

ABOUT BEMIS CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS

Exhibition and Public Program Admission: Free

Bemis Center Gallery Hours: Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday 11:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; Thursday 11:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m.

Gallery materials are available in English and Spanish.

Access details can be found at bemiscenter.org/accessibility.

For more information about Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, visit bemiscenter.org.

Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts facilitates the creation, presentation, and understanding of contemporary art through an international residency program, exhibitions, and educational programs to inspire an open and diverse dialogue on the critical issues that give shape and meaning to the human condition.

PRESS CONTACT

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Jennifer Ling Datchuk, *my neck, my back*, 2022. Ceramic; Courtesy of the artist and John Michael Kohler Arts Center.



Celeste Rapone, *Living Room*. Oil on canvas, 66 x 52 1/8 inches. Courtesy of the artist and the Michael and Leslie Weissman Collection. Photo by Nathan Keay.