

EXHIBITIONS

BEMIS × CENTER

**PRESENCE IN
THE PAUSE:**

**Interiority and its
Radical Immanence**

+

**JENNIFER LING
DATCHUK:**

Eat Bitterness

SUMMER EXHIBITIONS

May 20–September 17, 2023

Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts

Founded in 1981, by artists for artists, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts supports today's artists through an international residency program, temporary exhibitions and commissions, and innovative public programs.

Residency Program

For more than four decades, Bemis has provided artists from around the world dedicated time, space, and resources to conduct research and create new work. Bemis offers artists private live/work studios, financial support, technical/administrative assistance, and opportunities for intellectual discourse about contemporary art. Nearly 900 artists have participated in the residency program.

Bemis's Curator-in-Residence Program provides a curator the opportunity to participate in the Bemis Residency Program, serve as a professional resource to Bemis artists-in-residence and the Greater Omaha arts community, and organize exhibitions and public programs at Bemis Center.

Bemis's Sound Art + Experimental Music Program, launched in 2019, is a special track within the Residency Program for artists working in sound, composition, voice, and music of all genres. Participating artists receive financial, technical, and administrative support, along with dedicated facilities for rehearsing, recording, and performing. The program includes LOW END, a performance venue offering free live shows for the public to experience the

latest innovations by local, national, and international sound artists and experimental musicians.

Exhibition Program

Bemis Center's exhibition program features solo and group exhibitions of artwork in all media by local, national, and international artists. Exhibitions are always free, open to the public, and frequently introduce the community of Omaha to the most experimental and provocative art forms today.

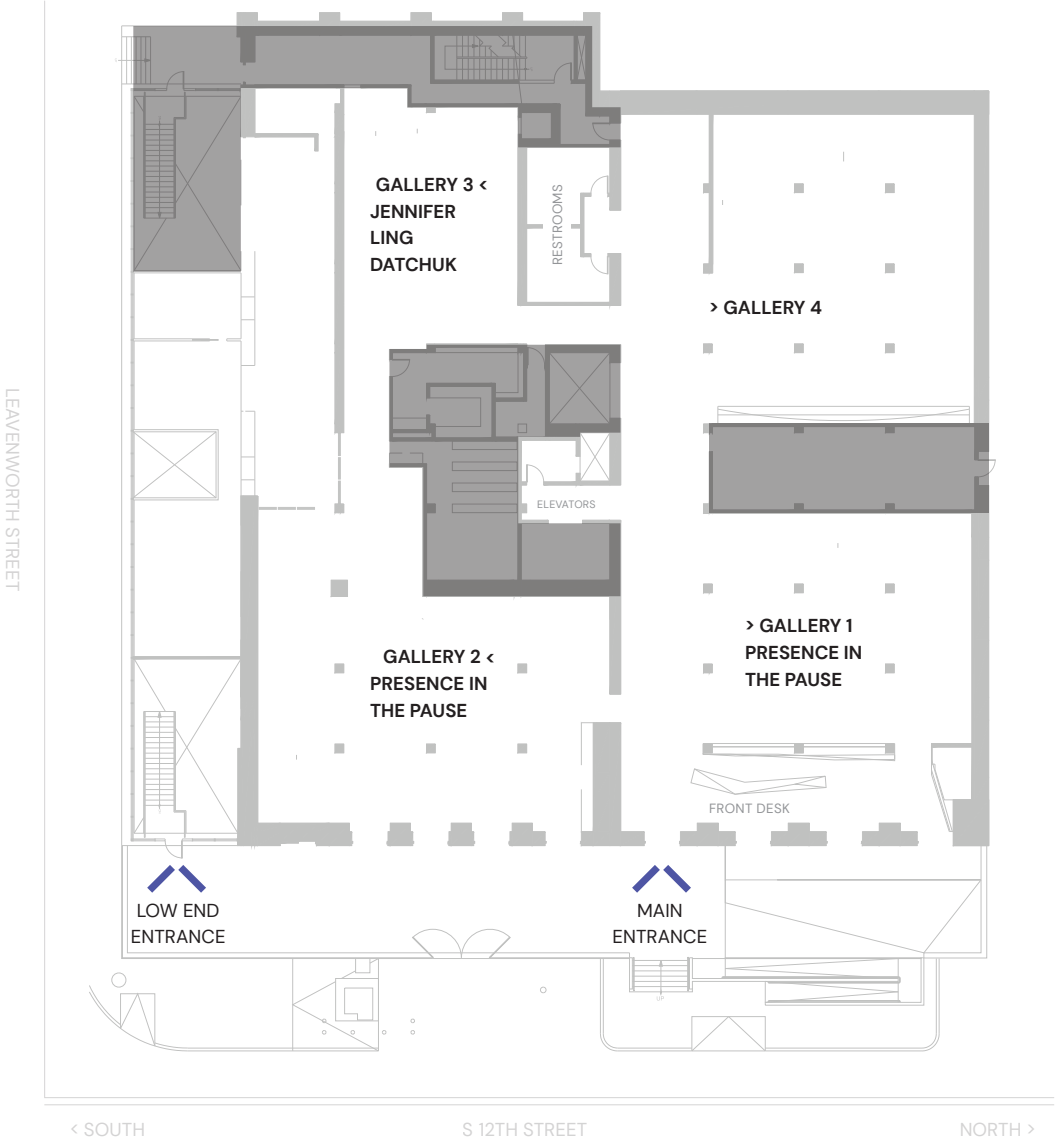
Public Programs

Throughout the organization's history, Bemis Center has offered artist-driven, community-responsive programs that bolster civic engagement in the creation and understanding of art. Public programs provide regular opportunities for the public to learn about and be inspired by the visual arts. Through artist-led classes and workshops, ARTalks, open studio events, panel discussions, film screenings, and performances, the community has direct access to artists and to their diverse approaches to artmaking and interpreting the world around us.

Map

Gallery 1 + 2: *Presence in the Pause: Interiority and its Radical Immanence*

Gallery 3: *Jennifer Ling Datchuk: Eat Bitterness*



PRESENCE IN THE PAUSE: Interiority and its Radical Immanence

CURATED BY RACHEL ADAMS, CHIEF CURATOR AND DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS

*and I ask myself and you, which of our visions will claim us
which will we claim
how will we go on living
how will we touch, what will we know
what will we say to each other.*

-Adrienne Rich

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 simultaneous speeding up and slowing down of contemporary life. Harmonizing these aspects together primarily through the medium of paint, 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; and the visual expression of emotion. The work explores the tension between our inner lives and the external world; between stillness and movement; and between individuality and interconnectedness.

This exhibition grew from my personal feelings of isolation and attempts to connect amidst a cross-country move, negotiating marriage and motherhood, and the overall realization that time was feeling even more compressed and precious than

in my younger days. We moved our family to Omaha in January 2019—our second city as a family of three, our fourth city as a couple, the seventh city since my birth. Out of necessity, we immediately fell into the stride of work and daycare and figuring out the basics. When I think back to this time, I realize we were sorely missing being in close proximity to friends and family. We had moved before but never with a child and for that reason, I think we felt even more isolated. And suddenly, 14 months in, we were locked down in a global pandemic. No daycare, no playgrounds, no in-person socialization for any of us. Looking back on 2020 and 2021, I am thankful for the time I spent with my family. But I was often lonely, anxious, and feeling cut off. Those days were a ping-pong of emotions, simultaneously light and dark, which were feelings that I know were echoed by many others.

During this tumultuous time, I started to focus on this exhibition. The feelings I was carrying around were being reflected back to me on my social media feeds. Artists I had long



Kathy Liao, *Korean Drama Lullaby*, 2019. Photo courtesy of the artist.

loved and new ones I had become familiar with started to collide together, evolving into a family album of sorts. I noticed I was connecting to many artists around my age—those born between 1975–1985. As part of a micro-generation that exists between Generation Z and “true” Millennials, we were transitioning closer to middle age, trying to keep our heads above water and grow as human beings—even while we continued to battle the chaos of each day.

Presence in the Pause is an open invitation from each artist. Slow down and take a moment to enter their

worlds. Whether through translations of their memories and personal histories like Andrea Joyce Heimer, Mequitta Ahuja, Becky Suss, and Kathy Liao, depicting emotional and physical anxieties like Kyoko Idetsu, Lilli Carré and Celeste Rapone, or reinterpreting the past and present like Maia Cruz Palileo, Danielle McKinney, and Preetika Rajgaria, each artist creates spaces that allow us to delve deeper into interiority. Connecting to the work on the walls, phrases from Molly Prentiss’s *FEED* dot the gallery, acting as captions or thought bubbles—adding another voice that connects the images they float amongst.

Through introspective and expressionistic compositions as well as a stream of consciousness-like style, each artist approaches their work through a feminist lens—focusing on power dynamics, representation, and cultural norms that question how gender is constructed and portrayed in visual culture. Highlighting a multitude of perspectives, their work conflates the personal with the political, expanding the dialogue around issues that continue to intersect and impact us

all. While caretaking and domestic responsibilities have become more equally shared, there has been a gendered expectation that “women are socialized to be attuned to others’ needs in a way that men aren’t.”¹ Yet, these are dominant narratives that shape one’s understanding of the world. In presenting works related to memory, storytelling, and personal histories, this exhibition engages critically with the current realities of our time.



Becky Suss, *8 Greenwood Place (1997-99)*, 2022. Photo courtesy of the artist and the Beth Rudin DeWoody Collection.

¹ **Prentiss, Molly.** “On Keeping the Creative Dream Alive, The Endless Search for Writing Time, Capitalist Expectations and Motherhood, and Her Second Novel ‘Old Flame,’” Interview by Shelby Hinte, *Write or Die*, May 9, 2023. <https://www.chillsubs.com/writeordie/interviews/molly-prentiss>.



Mequitta Ahuja, *Ancestor*, 2021. Photo courtesy of the artist and Aicon Gallery.

Presence in the Pause suggests that we can find value and meaning in these quotidian moments. By taking the time to pause and reflect, we can better understand ourselves and our relationships with others. In a world that often values speed and productivity over reflection and connection, this exhibition encourages us to embrace the richness of our interior lives and to find the beauty in the moments of pause that we encounter every day. While each artist explores unique territories related to their own personal histories and potential futures, this exhibition suggests that despite our sense of separateness as individuals, ultimately, we are all deeply interconnected and intertwined.

Rachel Adams
Chief Curator and Director of Programs

***Presence in the Pause* is on view May 20–September 17, 2023.**

JENNIFER LING DATCHUK: Eat Bitterness

CURATED BY RACHEL ADAMS, CHIEF CURATOR AND DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS

An Interview with Jennifer Ling Datchuk

RA: You recently told me that after you give an artist talk, the first question often asked is, “What does your family think about your work?” I’d like you to respond as you normally do, but also, I would love for you to expand on how your work relates to different members of your family, starting with your grandmothers, who were both factory workers.

JLD: I share a lot of my personal story in my artist talk. It’s hard not to when your work is centered around identity and the third culture experience I had growing up—which is directly informed by both my immigrant Chinese and Polish American sides of my family. This third culture experience is defined by my parent’s interracial marriage and them not understanding my experiences of growing up biracial in America. I understand people’s curiosity about what



Jennifer Ling Datchuk, *like freckles, like eggshells, like stone*, 2022. Photo courtesy of the artist and John Michael Kohler Arts Center.



Jennifer Ling Datchuk, *Tame*, 2022. Photo courtesy of the artist and Houston Center for Contemporary Craft.

my family thinks of my work just as how I ask these questions when I read a really vulnerable memoir of someone's life. Our experiences always have two sides—for me sometimes three—so how can someone speak to us singularly? I often think people center my work within a patriarchal framework when they ask this question, as if a woman cannot center her feelings first in these familial narratives.

I feel both the pressure and duty to share my family's story. Three out of the four of my grandparents are immigrants to the United States and three out of the four were adopted—all of this during a time when paperwork and documentation were not often kept. I rely a lot upon oral

histories on both sides of my family. From one of my oral histories from a second uncle, I learned that the ancestral home in Guangzhou, China contains a plaque that traces my Chinese family back 28 generations but only in the name of sons. So, even my story, my mother's, and my grandmothers' stories don't count in the records of my family.

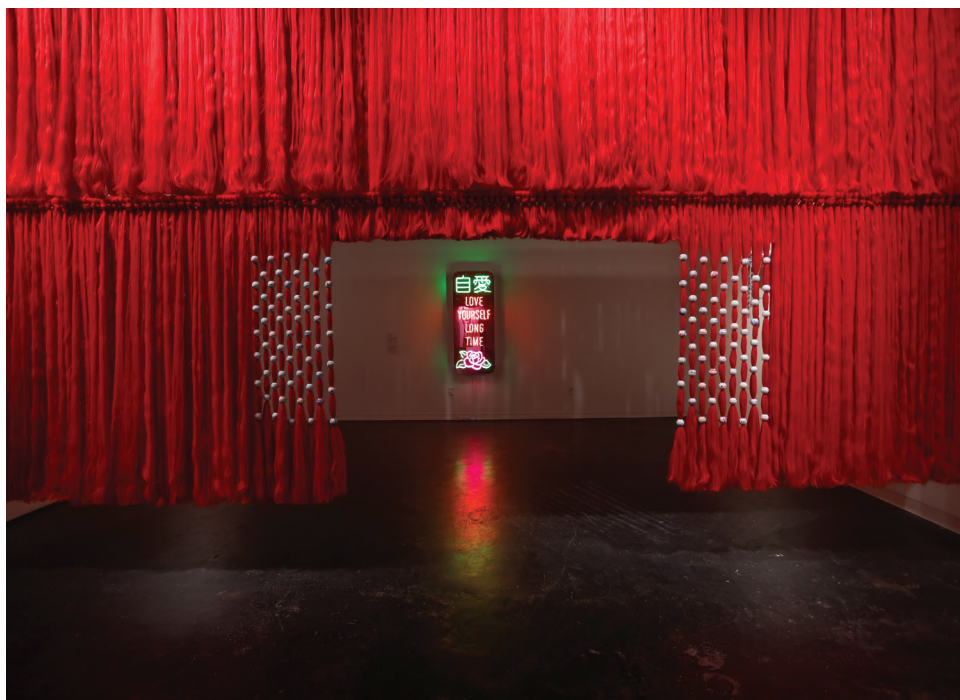
It is an honor to share the stories of my grandmothers as it's something I didn't know or appreciate while they were still living. My Chinese grandmother, Paw Paw, sewed clothes for an American retailer, her hands in the constant rumble and path of an industrial sewing machine. My Irish American grandmother Ruth was one of the first women to work

on the assembly line for a major car manufacturer. My grandmothers faced poverty, political and social oppression, and personal trauma. Eventually, though, they both worked with relative security and retired with pensions. They were both tough, independent women during a time when women weren't supposed to be either. Their lives were confronted with questions and statements that diminished them: "Come back when you get your husband's permission" or "We speak English in America." Much of my work focuses on the conflict between my two radically different cultural identities, Chinese and American. I deal with the constant question "What are you?" But my past comes together in the

muscle memory of the assembly line. I feel that struggle deep in my body, in my DNA, but I also feel my grandmothers' hope.

RA: *A big reason I am drawn to your work is the essence of truth-telling that spills from it—your work is not shy and there is such strength to it, even if many of the materials you utilize are known for being more fragile. Can you speak to the tension between strength and fragility and how you navigate it? How does this lead to the variety of materials you implement?*

JLD: I'd like to think that in strength and fragility there is power in vulnerability. I make from the place



Jennifer Ling Datchuk, *Love Yourself Long Time*, 2022. Photo courtesy of the artist and Houston Center for Contemporary Craft.



Jennifer Ling Datchuk, *my neck, my back*, 2022. Photo courtesy of the artist and John Michael Kohler Arts Center.

of being half, or both, which is deeply rooted in a third culture experience. I use materials that speak to dualities that capture the range of expressions in this. The foundation of my practice has always been porcelain as it serves as a cultural connector to my Chinese heritage and it is often perceived as fragile, delicate, and pure white. But it is quite a resilient material, it's dense and strong even while thin. And porcelain's cultural value and class associations are really fascinating to me. Porcelain can be teacups, teeth, and toilets— all objects with a direct relationship to the body.

My discipline of ceramics allows me to approach other materials in a similar way. I spend a lot of time in hair and nail salons because they are sites of sisterhood and camaraderie but also sites where appropriation of

beauty and culture happens. I think about the closely shared experiences that happen sitting across from a stranger as they gently trim your cuticles or the whole conversations you can have with a stylist or beautician where eye contact only happens in a mirror. These moments of intimacy inform my use of reflective materials like tiny gold mirrors and colored mirror acrylics.

Hair is power, beauty, and seduction, a reflection of ethnicity and religion, and even a canvas for self-expression. It is contradictory: desirable or disgusting; pure or processed; innocent or sinful; an afterthought or the crowning glory. These delicate strands have the power to identify us to the world, and, in turn, the world might make assumptions about identity based on that hair's shape, color, and



Jennifer Ling Datchuk, (Detail) *like freckles, like eggshells, like stone*, 2022. Photo courtesy of the artist and John Michael Kohler Arts Center.

condition. They are the tiny threads that link us to our past and present stories.

RA: *I am really interested in your influences...who are the artists or other creative practitioners that you look to?*

JLD: While studying art in undergraduate and graduate school, I didn't learn about or have many artists in ceramics that looked like me or shared my story. While in school, I discovered the work of Mona Hatoum and Lorna Simpson in an art book and the works of these women of color forever changed and influenced my artistic path. Mona Hatoum for her use of domestic

objects to create works about confinement, silence, and desire for a sense of safety and home. Lorna Simpson for her use of images, text, and language to create layered narratives of the female body.

I am also greatly influenced by modes of craft found in the everyday. In summer 2022, I participated in the Arts/Industry Residency at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center and spent 3 months working on the factory floor at Kohler, a US-based factory that produces toilets, sinks, and tubs in porcelain and the foundry. I learned from the pottery foreman that the slip casting process requires one to two hundred pounds of liquid clay going into very large and heavy plaster molds. It takes years of training, and the casters make hundreds of decisions on every piece. He said it was hard to find and keep good casters because it's really hard to teach people how to be strong but gentle. I think about this idea of dualities in process and the body all the time.

RA: *Your work opens a conversation about historical civil rights precedents in both China and the United States and the title of this exhibition, *Eat Bitterness*, speaks directly to how many women and people of color have to endure without complaint. How do you feel your work is helping shift this narrative?*

JLD: Women and people of color are imprisoned in cages that men have created. These patriarchal



Jennifer Ling Datchuk, *Giddy Up*, 2022. Photo courtesy of the artist and Houston Center for Contemporary Craft.

systems turn women's bodies into sites of ideological struggles, where often whiteness is centered and the assumed standard. As a Chinese American woman, I want to reclaim the narratives that we did not create, claim visibility in the black and white racial binary, and show that our stories are not monolithic.

I think about how I am in some ways part of the sandwich generation as an aging millennial otherwise known as an 80's kid. I live with the question "What are you?" and people desire an answer that authenticates me like an object. Most of my family continues to experience the question "Where are you from?" and are perpetually treated as foreigners. As the first generation born in the United States, I live with the constant reminder of

my family's struggle for equality and stability and witnessed every act of xenophobia, racism, and misogyny against them. I saw them retreat into silence and was taught to eat bitterness through their actions. I am actively trying to unlearn this and undo the perceptions of others I was taught while seeing this generation use the power of their voice. I hope my work breaks down boundaries and builds connections as every day there are more and more heinous and dehumanizing political, cultural, and social systems trying to hold us back.

Jennifer Ling Datchuk:
Eat Bitterness is on view
May 20–September 17, 2023.

Summer Lecture Series

Lyz Lenz: *The Right Way to Fight For Your Life* June 7, 7 PM



The power of storytelling is paramount in the struggle for liberation. This talk will look at how our stories and the ways we share them can open up our worlds and make them a better place.

Lyz Lenz's writing has appeared in the *Huffington Post*, *The Washington Post*, the *Columbia*

Journalism Review, *The New York Times*, *Pacific Standard*, and others. Her book *God Land* was published in 2019, through Indiana University Press. Her second book *Belabored*, was published in 2020 by Bold Type Books. Lyz'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*, will be published by Crown. Lyz received her MFA in creative writing from Lesley University. She writes a regular newsletter, "Men Yell At Me," where she explores the intersection of politics and our bodies in red state America.

Anna Storti Ph.D.: *If Porcelain Had a Race: Racial Abstraction and the Asian/White Thing* June 22, 7 PM

Renowned as white gold, Chinese porcelain played an integral role in imperial trade when it was introduced into Europe in the 14th century. Soon after, porcelain had come to reference a white woman's fair and unblemished skin. Moreover, its features—delicate, glossy, oriental, fragile, still—deliver a stereotypical rendition of Asian femininity. An ornate object like porcelain,



in other words, can be abstracted to represent a racialized and gendered aesthetic, begging the following question: If porcelain had a race, would it be Asian or white? Drawing on recent debates in feminist theory, Asian Americanist critique, and object studies, this lecture offers one answer.

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. She is currently at work on her first book, which asks what the growing population of mixed-race white and Asian Americans elucidates about intimacy, violence, and the permanence of war.

Jenni Sorkin, Ph.D.: Craft-like: The Illusion of Authenticity July 27, 7 PM

Craft-like: The Illusion of Authenticity charts the appropriation of craft into spheres that are not craft, but rather, “craft-like,” a strain of contemporary art practice that incorporates a range of extractive, borrowed, or copied techniques, materials, and ideas.



Jenni Sorkin is Professor of History of Art & Architecture at 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. Her books include *Live Form: Women, Ceramics and Community* (University of Chicago, 2016), *Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women Artists, 1947–2016* (Skira, 2016), and *Art in California* (Thames & Hudson, 2021), as well as numerous essays in journals and exhibition catalogs.

Public Programs

Jun
1
6 PM

RESIDENCY
Meet + Eat

Join our current Artists-in-Residence and Curator-in-Residence for a casual community potluck! Bring a dish to share and we will provide the drinks. Residents will give short talks about their practices and aspirations for their Bemis residency.

Jun
3
2 PM

TOUR
Curator-led Tour

Join Rachel Adams, Chief Curator and Director of Programs for a tour and discussion of both exhibitions on view at Bemis Center.

Jun
7
7 PM

LECTURE
Lyz Lenz
The Right Way to Fight for Your Life

Writer, author, and whisky drinker Lyz Lenz will be discussing the power of storytelling and how we share them to open up our world and make it a better place.

Jun
22
6 PM

TOUR
Gallery Tour with Artist Jennifer Ling Datchuk

Join artist Jennifer Ling Datchuk for a tour of *Eat Bitterness*, directly followed by Anna Storti's lecture. FREE and open to all.

Jun
22
7 PM

LECTURE
Anna Storti, Ph.D.
If Porcelain Had A Race

Renowned as white gold, Chinese porcelain has come to reference a white woman's fair and unblemished skin, while its features—delicate, oriental, fragile, still—deliver a stereotypical rendition of Asian femininity, begging the question: If porcelain had a race, would it be Asian or white?

Jun
22
12–4 PM

RESIDENCY
Open House / Open Studios

Visit with our current artists-in-residence to see their studios, view their works-in-progress, and discuss art, life, and their Bemis residency experience.

Jul
27
7 PM

LECTURE
Jenni Sorkin, Ph.D.
Craft-Like: The Illusion of Authenticity

Professor Jenni Sorkin charts the appropriation of craft into spheres that are not craft, but rather, "craft-like," a strain of contemporary art practice that incorporates a range of extractive, borrowed, or copied techniques, materials, and ideas.

Jul
13

PUBLIC ASSEMBLY
Co-facilitated by artists Caitlin Cass and Jamie Ho,

this three-part discussion series connects questions in Bemis' exhibitions 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.

Aug
10

Aug
31
7 PM

Sep
16
2 PM

TOUR
Curator-led Tour

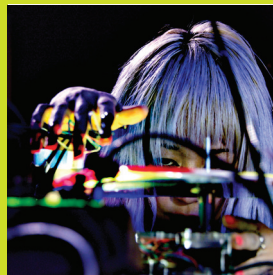
Join Rachel Adams, Chief Curator and Director of Programs for a tour and discussion of both exhibitions on view at Bemis Center.



Princess
May 25, 8 PM



Salami Rose Joe Louis
June 8, 8 PM



Evicshen
June 15, 8 PM



Maria Chávez
July 20, 8 PM



SCRAATCH
August 3, 8 PM



Takuya Nakamura
August 24, 8 PM



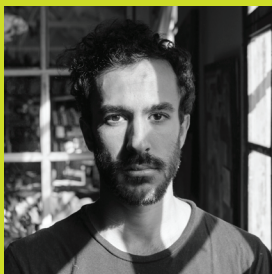
Emily Wells
September 21, 8 PM



Sontag Shogun
September 28, 8 PM



Rafiq Bhatia
October 5, 8 PM



Marc Vilanova
November 9, 8 PM

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*Presence in the Pause:
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+

*Jennifer Ling Datchuk:
Eat Bitterness*

Curated by Rachel Adams, Chief
Curator and Director of Programs

Exhibition Acknowledgements

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Jennifer Ling Datchuk: Eat Bitterness is supported by:



RUIZ-HEALY ART

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Thanks to the generous support of individual donors, local and national foundations, and corporate partners, Bemis Center offers free admission to all of its exhibitions and public programs.

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Friday	11 AM–5 PM CT
Saturday	11 AM–5 PM CT
Sunday	11 AM–5 PM CT

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Please ask staff for assistance.
