

SITUATIONS

ELLEN JONG

ANOTHER MOTHER

Exhibition dates: November 3 - December 17, 2023

Opening: Friday, November 3rd 6-8pm

SITUATIONS is pleased to present *Another Mother*, an exhibition of new work by the artist Ellen Jong. Putting traditional calligraphic ink to unexpectedly groundbreaking ends, Jong's sculptures reimagine an ancient communicative tool to explore the body, stereotypes, personal history, and cultural identity. Comprising a series of velvet wall works and a functional fountain sculpture, *Another Mother* marks Jong's solo debut at SITUATIONS. There will be an opening reception on Friday, November 3rd, from 6-8pm.

Born in Queens and currently based in Los Angeles, Jong was taught traditional Chinese calligraphy at an early age with a dry ink stick, water, inkstone and brush. Her reconnection with ink took place during a 2014 trip to a river town in China whose natural rock formations with shafts straight into the river served as "water prisons" during imperial times. The thought of a person facing death by being washed away slowly between water and stone created a powerful connection for Jong between the ink sticks of her childhood and the adult human body. For a site-specific project she later performed in Shanghai, Jong created a "water line" around the room at her height using a dry ink stick. Further desire to transmute her body directly into the pigment took another 7 years to develop and control.

Since the Neolithic period, ink has been used across cultures as a medium for transcription and a tool of expression. Without being introduced to water, the compact powdered ink remains dry and malleable—although its natural origins as a product of animal rendering also make it sensitive to conditions such as heat and humidity, expanding or contracting in response to the air of a room. Reversing the traditional process of preparing ink for calligraphy (from a solid to a liquid), Jong begins with liquid ink, which she dehydrates in order to create a workable material for sculpture. Because the ink is organic, it is mortal, and thus transforms over time.

Jong's sculpture *Another Mother*, 2023, is a functioning ink fountain made in studied reference to historical depictions of the Madonna and Venus. Based on Jong's own body, it represents a vision of self-empowerment that shuns normative cultural pedagogies in favor of personal exploration and self-discovery, as well as the confidence to insert oneself into tradition. Heavily influenced in her early years by the Western canon, Jong describes her return to traditional Chinese ink—and her nontraditional methods of using it—as a reconciled balance between East and West, playfully interrogating the influences that have informed her practice. Standing proudly atop an L-Beam (similar to those by the conceptual minimalist Robert Morris), her figure is also a rejoinder to art history's aggrandizing male narratives and the biases behind them.

Although *Another Mother* appears to be a monochromatic black sculpture, the process of building up pigment for its body involved painting new layers of ink into a mold, allowing Jong to slip other shades into the process. Here, form and composition mirror each other in deception: what appears to be sculpture is actually a product of brushwork, as what seems merely black catches the light with other shades. Jong's velvet tondos, which together depict a full lunar cycle, work similarly; often referred to as paintings, they are really an accretion of impastoed dry ink. The indeterminate nature of Jong's work speaks to the nuances of her material, capturing a view of life that is alchemical in its transformation from solid to liquid, responsive to its environment yet enduring in its mark. Working with the time machine of ink as a medium, Jong rejects

traditional proprieties and constructs, affirming disobedience as a potent form of self-expression.

ELLEN JONG was born in Queens, NY to an Indonesian-Chinese dad and Taiwanese mother, and attended The Bronx High School of Science where she took her first photography class. She studied at the Parsons School of Design and The School of Visual Arts, but owes her perspective to her early life photographing on the streets of New York. She is the author of the photographic monographs *Pees On Earth* (Miss Rosen Edition/powerHouse Books 2006) and *Getting To Know My Husband's Cock 2010* (featured in aperture Books' *Self Publish Be Happy* by Bruno Ceschel), and an included artist in *Radical Intimacy in Contemporary Art: Abjection, Revolt and Objecthood* by Keren Moscovitch (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023.) Her work has been covered by The New Yorker, Photograph, The Guardian and The Wall Street Journal. Jong began her foray into ink sculpture in 2014 after a trip to Guilin, China during which she returned to her earliest memories of painting lessons in her childhood home in Queens where the traditional Chinese ink stick and brush were her first writing tools.

SITUATIONS is open to the public Wednesday through Sunday, noon to 6pm. For more information about the gallery, visit www.situations.us or email info@situations.us.