Jennifer Ling Datchuk

Truth Before Flowers

Women & Their Work

June 15 - July 25, 2019
Austin, Texas
Above: Babe Cave, 2019, porcelain beads, fake hair, hair clips, wood, paracord rope, cheerleader pom poms, 96” x 96” x 120”
and How I came to my table, 2019, porcelain table and stools created in Jingdezhen, China, blue and white pattern transfers, cobalt decoration. 34” x 34” x 26”

Cover Panel: One Tough Bitch, 2019, photograph/ documentation of porcelain shards, china paints, gold leaf. Edition 1 of 8, 30” x 19”
Truth Before Flowers

In *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, cultural critic Lisa Lowe offers a suggestion to those whose work lies in aesthetic and political inquiry: an intimacy with the past. For Lowe, intimacy serves as a heuristic, a guide to respond to political demands for justice as well as a form of acknowledging the abstract promises of freedom embedded within such pursuits of better worlds. It is by disrupting the incomplete dealings of the past where intimate sensibilities come to life. Jennifer Ling Datchuk alludes to this life-sustaining praxis in her provocative work with porcelain. Trained and educated in the art of ceramics, Datchuk works with common household items to reflect on the complex relationships that arise when embodiment, domesticity, and the past coalesce. Extending and expanding the potentials of intimate form, Datchuk unravels hidden elements of femininity. In *Truth Before Flowers*, the historically feminine trades and products of pottery, craft, and textile take center stage, forwarding an alternative reading of aesthetic choice and the social fractions it engenders. It is in the legacy of feminist maker culture that *Truth Before Flowers* pushes contemporary discourse on femininity towards the intimate relations that exist between women, girls, and their things.

Upon entering the gallery doors the viewer may unintentionally miss the greeting piece. Suspended from above and displayed just inside the front windows are two large macramé plant hangers which together make *Loving Care*. Datchuk braids and knots red synthetic nylon hair with porcelain beads to support an exotic fern resting in a porcelain pot. Made in collaboration with textile artist Marta Francine, this window piece teases those on the outside as it jolts viewers with an unapologetic red, the color of luck and reproductive justice which has shown no mercy on women’s flesh and bodily autonomy. *Don’t Play Nice* carries this message further as it recasts a willow-patterned teacup into a megaphone, emboldening girls to voice their fury.

The center of the gallery hosts what is arguably the installation’s most magnificent piece: *Babe Cave*. Paracord rope topped with white cheerleader pom poms support a large wooden rim. Strands of blue hair drape down the rim leaving only a few inches between the ground and the cave. The hair, adorned with porcelain beads, begs to be touched. On the beads are words of affirmation; some beads were painted by women and men who attended Datchuk’s workshops, others were painted and gathered by Datchuk with words shared by her Instagram followers. The piece is a collaborative affair. Hair clips help create an entryway into the *Babe Cave* where the viewer encounters *How I Came to My Table*, a Jingdezhen porcelain table with four porcelain stools. As much as porcelain is Datchuk’s material of choice, hair is another signature motif. Where porcelain exists in the liminal spaces between fragility and resilience, hair grows before birth and after death. Each material offers an intimacy with time and materiality.


*Truth Before Flowers* is divided into two collections. The first, *Objects of Girlhood*, begins on the gallery’s north wall. Porcelain pieces are joined with *Truth Flag*, an alphabet sampler with the words “Paint not crimes in enchanting colours” first embroidered by a young girl named Emily Beal in 1889. Cross-stitched samplers taught young girls the skills required to one-day become part of the household. Labors of girlhood, while steeped in innocence, are employed as governing apparatuses bounding and controlling girls’ futures. It is through porcelain that Datchuk rewrites this history. Renowned as white gold, porcelain originated in China and played an integral role in imperial trade when it was introduced into Europe through Asian imports in the 14th century. An artist whose experience includes a residency in Jingdezhen, China—the world’s center of white gold—Datchuk uses porcelain as both an ode to her Chinese heritage, and as a tool to mine historical erasures. In *Golden Girls*, five girls adorned with gold luster lay atop a porcelain casted buddha. As a rendition of the Chinese proverb, uttered similarly by Mao Zedong—“girls hold up half the sky”—*Golden Girls* alters the traditional depiction of boys climbing the buddha, replacing them with girls. *One Tough Bitch* similarly thematizes modification as porcelain shards embellished with gold leaf cover a woman’s abdominal scars. The Japanese art of kintsugi, repairing the broken with gold, inspired this piece and exhibits the beauty in that often discarded. Part-photography, part-documentation, *One Tough Bitch* illuminates the enduring war of reproductive justice which has shown no mercy on women’s flesh and bodily autonomy.

Golden Girls, 2018, porcelain from Jingdezhen, China, gold luster, 12” x 10” x 7”
Mills’ 1848 words “Fidelity and Truth is the Foundation of Justice.” Alongside these words are porcelain crafted pieces including Rise Up, a depiction of the “bamboo ceiling and the barriers Asian women face in their careers, and Exhausted Not Exotic, a response to the objectification of Asian femininity. In what occupies an entire wall, G.O.A.T. Girls assembles just under 50 slip cast porcelain ribbons. In varying shades resembling skin color, the ribbons are cast with Laguna porcelain clay, the brand used for porcelain dolls. The piece tempts viewers to locate their own skin tone, soliciting an individual entry point into the politics of representation. Captivating the viewer with color, Datchuk insists that “we are all winners.” G.O.A.T. Girls refuses the empty promises of celebration, and instead invests in women in difference, rendering an aspirational glimpse of multiracial feminism.

Remnants of the artist exist as hidden treasures throughout the installation. Some pieces are enlivened by dichotomy and hybridity, each a gesture towards Datchuk’s lived experience as a biracial Asian American. Most intimately, the installation is magnified by the touch of Datchuk’s grandmothers. Both her maternal Chinese grandmother and paternal American grandmother worked in factories at the height of America’s manufacturing empire. The opportunity to make together across difference and across generations is foreclosed when we cease to listen to our pasts. While the installation’s theme is womanhood, its thread remains to be feminist maker culture.

Truth Before Flowers at once joins feminist art, feminist theory, and feminist politics, modeling a contemporary approach to issues concerning those living intimately with precarity. Datchuk captures an essence of femininity unveiling that it is more than its conventions—soft, excess, subordinate—but an urgent, world-making form holding the capacity to restore past silences and speculate better futures so long as intimacy plays a major role. Truth Before Flowers makes possible intimate sensibilities that bring life to those who gather around the table to listen, respond, and build together.

Anna M. Moncada Storti is a writer and teacher at Dartmouth College.
Jennifer Ling Datchuk

EDUCATION

2008  MFA, Artisanry, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, North Dartmouth, Massachusetts
2004  BFA, Crafts, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio

RESIDENCIES

2019  Artpace San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas
2017  European Ceramic Workcentre, Oisterwijk, Netherlands
2016  Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany
2015  Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, Vermont
2011  The Pottery Workshop, Jingdezhen, China

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2019  thick, Artpace San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas
      The Political Hand, American Craft Council, Minneapolis, Minnesota
      Truth Before Flowers, Women & Their Work, Austin, Texas
2017  Girl You Can, Neidorff Art Gallery, Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas
2016  Blackwork, Art League Houston, Houston, Texas
2014  Dark and Lovely, Blue Star Contemporary, San Antonio, Texas
2010  Sometimes I Wish I Was Invisible, Stella haus, San Antonio, Texas
      Little Graces, SMART Art Space, San Antonio, Texas
2007  Recent Work, Gallery 244, Star Store, New Bedford, Massachusetts

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2019  The Great Race, Clay Art Center, Port Chester, New York
      PROCESS, Handwerker Gallery, Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York
      Ground, As In, Hello Moonmind, Houston, Texas
      In Sight, Holter Museum of Art, Helena, Montana
      Shifting Reverence, Silverwood Park, Saint Anthony, Minnesota
      Domestic Matters: The Uncommon Apron, Peters Valley School of Craft, Layton, New Jersey
      Made in Asia America, Art Salon Chinatown, Los Angeles, California
      Self Portraits, Dorf, Austin, Texas
      OBJECTS: USA Redux, Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston, Texas
      Funkadelic Awakening: A Futuristic Resistance, Clay Studio, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
2018  Melting Point, Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles, California
      74th Scripps Annual, Scripps College, Claremont, California
      Feminum, Landmarks Art Gallery, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas
      Common Currents, Artpace San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas
      Oriented, Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
      Adam Chau and Jennifer Ling Datchuk, Hammond Museum, North Salem, New York
      The Dangerous Professors, Flatland Gallery, Houston, Texas
      US = Emerging Voices in Clay, District Clay Gallery, Washington D.C
      Blue is Not a Color, Ruiz Healy Art, San Antonio, Texas
      Citi.zen.ship: Reflection on Rights, Tisch School of Arts, New York University, New York, New York
      Craft Texas 2018, Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston, Texas
2017  Texas Biennial, Big Medium, Austin, Texas (curated by Leslie Moody Castro)
      Whitewash, ThreeWalls Performance Art Series, Wabash Arts Corridor, Chicago, Illinois
      Fake Art, Forum Gallery, Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
      Mindful: Exploring Mental Health through Art, Fuller Craft Museum, Brockton, Massachusetts
      Critical Mass, Southwest School of Art, San Antonio, Texas
      Fine Print, Mini Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas
      Mixed Feelings: The Irreverent Object, Mt. Hood Community College, Gresham, Oregon
      Mindful: Exploring Mental Health through Art, Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, Virginia Beach, Virginia
2016  Gold Hill Public Art Project, Black Cube Nomadic Museum, Denver, Colorado
      CraftTexas 2016, Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, Houston, Texas (juried, Merit Award)
      Allow Me: Facing Identity, Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas
      VisionMakers 2016, 108 Contemporary, Tulsa, Oklahoma (juried)
      No Empty Vessel, Gildar Gallery, Denver, Colorado
      The Clay Studio National, Clay Studio, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (juried)
      Treachery of Objects, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas

AWARDS/ SCHOLARSHIPS

2018  French and Michigan Publication Program Finalist
2017  Emerging Voices Award, American Craft Council
2016  Lighton International Artists Exchange Program Award

2016  Black Cube Nomadic Museum Artist Fellowship
Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 41st anniversary. Presenting over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, and film, the gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented over 1,900 artists in 322 visual art exhibitions, 154 music, dance and theater events, 16 film festivals, 30 literary readings and spoken word performances, and 693 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, The New York Times, ArtForum, and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches over 850 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.

Objects of Womanhood (left to right): Don’t Tell Me To Smile, 2018, found porcelain plate, china paint, 7.5” x 7.5” x .5”; Exhausted Not Exotic, 2019, porcelain, broken teacups and saucers, 12” x 6” x 6”; Truth Flag (Fanny Hills, 1848, age 9 years old), 2017, digital jacquard textile produced by Textiel Lab in Tilburg, Netherlands, 36” x 60”; Surrender Slowly, 2014, porcelain, pine, 10.5” x 20” x 3.5”; Hanger, 2019, porcelain, 10” x 15” x 1.5”; Rise Up, 2019, porcelain, found figurine, 14” x 6” x 6”