

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 handlings 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 a representation of the artist's screams. Feminist rage is a global phenomenon and by situating *Loving Care* as the introductory piece, Datchuk uses anger as an instrument to uncover afterlives of exclusion and violence.

Loving Care, thus, functions in the spirit of Audre Lorde's keynote at the 1981 National Women's Studies Association, "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," where she details anger as a source "loaded with information and energy." Through rage, a potential for empowerment becomes possible.

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-photograph, part-documentation, *One Tough Bitch* illuminates the enduring war of 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.



Golden Girls, 2018, porcelain from Jingdezhen, China, gold luster, 12" x 10" x 7"



Don't Play Nice, 2019, slip cast porcelain, cobalt pencil decoration, 4" x 5.5" x 5.5"

Once inside the *Babe Cave*, one may hesitate at first, but the artist invites viewers to sit and interact with one another. To gather in such intimacy within a gallery setting is to offer a sense of connective interaction in a space both private and public. The blue evokes serenity; to be surrounded by the coolest of primary colors is to confront intimacy as truth's condition of possibility. The tabletop is decorated with images of the uterine reproductive system and a number of fruits and flowers evoking the feminine, which enhance the words Datchuk casted on the outer rim: "Truth Before Flowers / Girl You Can / Let Go of Preciousness / There Will Be Pain." There is a special intimacy that opens up when sitting across a table from others. One might be reminded of Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith's "Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue," a piece in the feminist anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* illustrating the labor of justice enacted in the simple act of sitting across a table with others.

Reaching the south wall, the viewer arrives at *Objects of Womanhood*. The shift from adolescence to adulthood yields an additional *Truth Flag*, one embroidered with Fanny

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.



G.O.A.T. Girls, 2019, (detail), slip cast Laguna porcelain for dolls, dimensions variable.

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 Moonmist, 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

Cit.i.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

Lighton International Artists Exchange Program Award

2016 Black Cube Nomadic Museum Artist Fellowship



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"

Women & Their Work

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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.



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