
Asian American Art Oral History Project

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Mie Kongo Interview

Mimonna Aljaber

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Interviewer: Mimonna Aljaber
Artist: Mie Kongo
Over the phone interview, Chicago
Date: February 4, 2017

Note: the following interview was conducted by a DePaul University undergraduate student enrolled in ART 200: Asian American Arts and Culture during the 2017 Winter Quarter as a part of the Asian American Art Oral History Research Project conducted by Laura Kina, Professor Art, Media & Design.



Image courtesy of the artist

Bio: Mie Kongo grew up in the outskirts of Tokyo, Japan and now lives and works in Evanston IL, where she makes multidisciplinary work: ceramic sculptures & installations, 2D work and porcelain designed objects. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, including recent exhibitions, "Unknown game series" at Dan Devening Projects + editions, Chicago, IL "Beyond Function" Arts and Literature Laboratory, Madison, WI, "Reformat: Digital Fabrication in Clay" Lillstreet Art Gallery, Chicago, IL, "Circle in a Square" Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, IL. She has been showing her porcelain products at Paul Kotula Projects, Ferndale MI and Room 406, Chicago IL. Residency: Shigaraki Ceramics Center, Shiga, Japan, European Ceramic Work

Center, 's-Hertogenbosch, Netherland, "Intonation 2013" Deidesheim, Germany. She received BFA from School of the Art Institute of Chicago and MFA in Ceramics from Cranbrook Academy of Art. Currently she is Adjunct Assistant Professor in Ceramics department at School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Interview Transcript:

Mimonna Aljaber: Tell me a little bit about yourself? Where were you born and when did you move to Chicago? Did you live anywhere else other than Chicago?

Mie Kongo: I first moved to Chicago in 1992. To give you details, I moved back to Japan in 1998 and I came back here 2001 and I have been living in Evanston since 2001. I was living in Michigan for two years, from 2006 to 2008. I graduated from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 2008. [39221 Woodward Ave, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48303]

MJ: How would you define or categorize your art?

MK: So, categorization as for the material, I consider myself probably like ceramic sculptor, or ceramic artist. But, I not only make sculpture, I also make collages and 2D work. Also, I make designed objects, porcelain products. You know artists don't like categorization, so you know I can be anything, but if I have to be categorized, I don't mind being called a ceramic artist.

MJ: When did you become an artist and what or who inspired you to be?

MK: It depends on how you define artist. But I would say, probably... That's a really hard question. I started making art when I was 23, but I was an art student, so I don't know if you consider that as an artist. And how did I get into it? I was studying art history. My major when I was undergrad, was art history. And then I had to take some studio courses and I took ceramics and I fell in love with clay.

MJ: When and how did you first get involved with Arts + Literature Laboratory (ALL)?

MK: That was last year, I was looking at College Art Association website page, they have a page for call for entry and they listed the exhibition, and I applied to that show and I got accepted.

MJ: Can you talk about the relationship between your ceramic sculptures and works on paper? I was especially drawn to your recent series of "Collage" work from 2016 (Origami paper, gouache).

MK: It is 2D work, but it is a collage and I use origami papers. I use origami papers as like a building block in 2D space. So, I think that relates to my sculpture as I am using geometric components to build the sculpture and that's probably good explanation for the relationship between my ceramic sculptures and works on paper.

MJ: Can you tell me about your solo exhibition "I saw the light was on"?

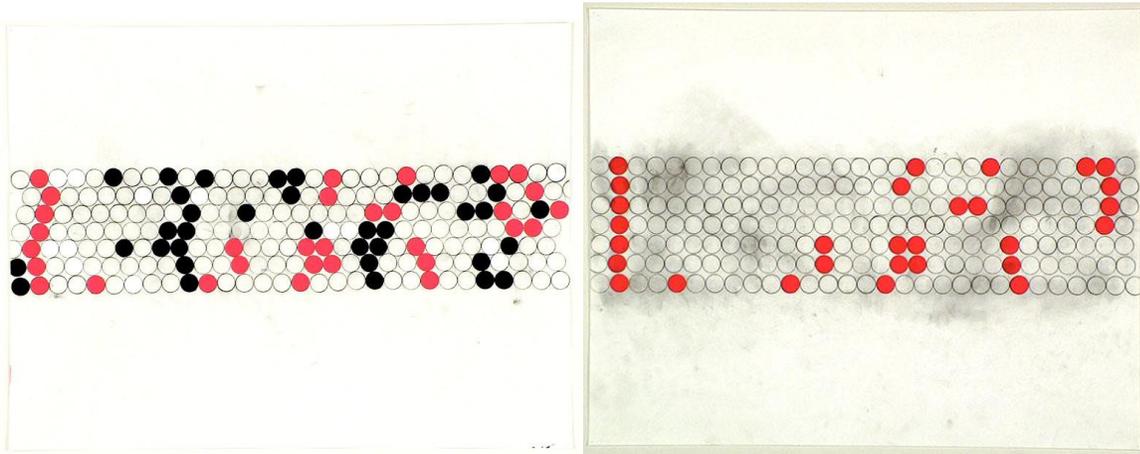
MK: That show took place at Heuser art gallery at Bradley University in Peoria, IL. That was in 2012. I did residency at European ceramic work center in Holland, for three months in the summer of 2011 and I made a lot of work there. I was looking for a place to exhibit the work and Fortuitously I got an email from the director of Heuser art gallery. I sent in my portfolio long time ago and they kept it in record. It was a great timing that she offered me a solo show at Heuser art gallery.

MJ: Do you ever address Asian or Asian American identity, themes or histories in your artwork?

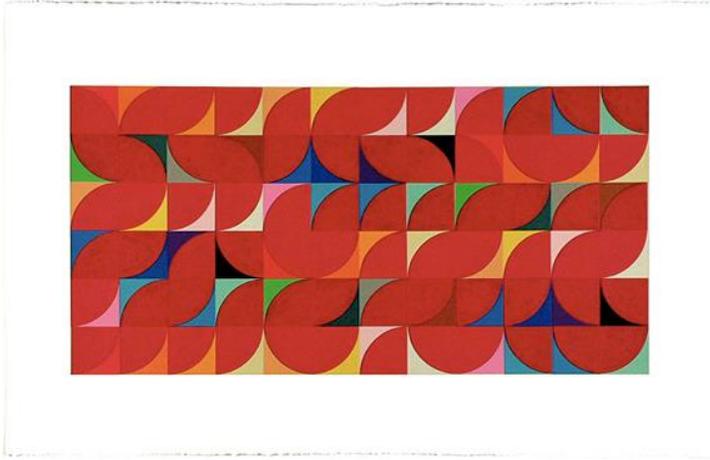
MK: I think it's there without having to mention it. I think the aesthetics and sensitivity; Asian or Japanese is there. I mean that's inevitable.

MJ: In your projects: 2006 – “Parking lot project” and 2006 – “quarter red circles – Homage to Sol Lewitt” – 2009 – I see red circles, they reminded me of the red circle in the Japanese Flag.

MK: yes!



Charcoal pencil, gouache 22"x30"
Photo credit: Mie Kongo



Origami paper, gouache, graphite 22"x30"
Photo credit: Mie Kongo

MJ: Have you ever been included in an exhibition that was contextualized as Asian or Asian American or have you ever been labeled as an “Asian” or “Asian American artist”?

MK: No.

MJ: What are you currently working on?

MK: I am currently working on...I have two solo shows coming up in the fall, so I am working towards those two shows. Sculpture, mostly sculptures. I will be having a show at 4th ward project space in Hyde Park, Chicago, and also at Art and Literature laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin.

End.



Porcelain, underglaze, glaze, wood, wool felt
5"x8"x2"

Photo credit: Don Yoshida



Porcelain, Glaze, Underglaze, Silk, Wool felt, 3d printed plastic, Foam, acrylic paint
8"x15"x2"

Photo credit: Don Yoshida



Porcelain, glaze, underglaze, foam, wood, acrylic paint
12"x48"x6"
Photo credit: Mie Kongo