

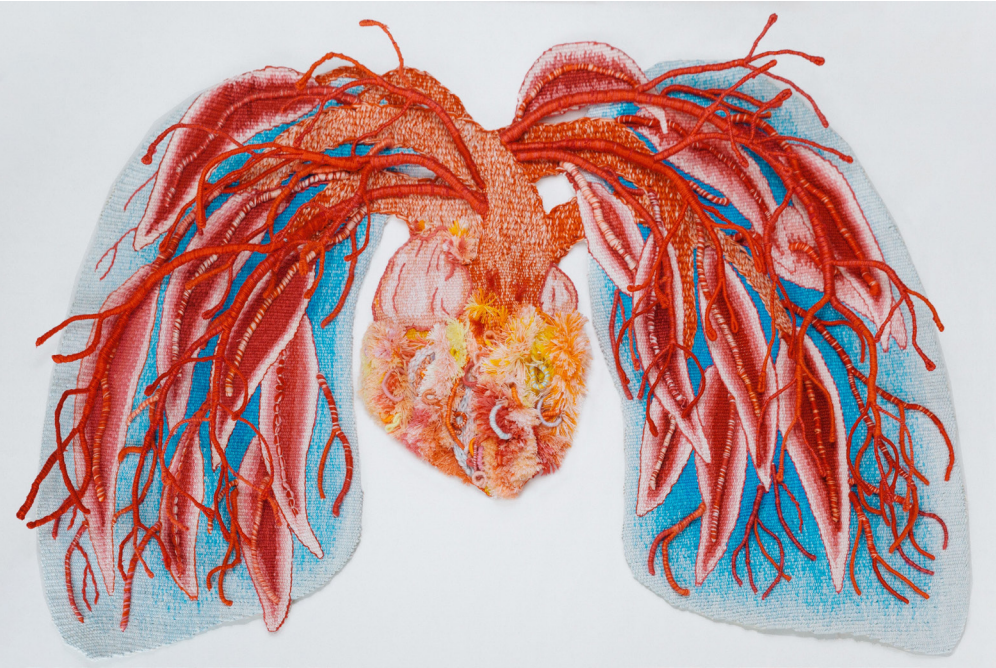
Ema Shin is a Melbourne based artist who was born and grew up in Niigata, Japan. She studied at Tama Art University, Tokyo and completed a Master of Fine Art Degree at Aichi Prefectural Art University, Nagoya. She has held numerous solo and group exhibitions in Japan, Korea, Australia and other countries.

From 2005 to 2007 Ema participated in Artist-in-residency programs and community projects in Japan, Mexico, Spain and Kenya. Ema first came to Australia in 2010 on an Overseas Research Grant from the Pola Art Foundation, Japan after which she based her art practice in Melbourne.

Since the birth of her first child in 2014 she has integrated her artwork with daily life, working in a home studio producing works that celebrate women’s lives and bodies. Her multi disciplinary practice, application of historical techniques and use of tactile materials result in contemporary artworks that express femininity and sexuality.

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Soft Alchemy (Fertile Heart) 2019
woven tapestry, cotton, wool, wire
54 x 80 x 6cm
Photograph: Oleksandr Pogorilyi



Hearts of Absent Women 2020–2021
embroidery, glass, polyester, linen, cotton,
wool, hanji paper, lokta paper
70 x 78 x 60 cm (installation)
Image courtesy of the artist



Ema Shin Hearts of Absent Women



Filling the hearts of absent women

By Sophia Cai

There are many reasons artists make work. It can be an expression of new perspectives, a means of storytelling and sharing, or is born from a compulsion to create. For Ema Shin, it is a combination of all three. Through the process of artmaking, Ema challenges deeply entrenched cultural narratives in order to express her agency, place and voice. Her compulsion to create is informed by the artist's lived experience as a woman, migrant and mother; and the intersecting forces of casual racism and sexism that have informed her place in the world.

This is a narrative that is familiar to me: as Asian women we are often socialised to perform particular expressions of self, and questions of femininity and gender double standards are complicated with additional cultural expectations. When I spoke with Ema over Zoom during one of Melbourne's many lockdowns of 2021, she emphasised the importance of artmaking as a ritual of mental care and routine during turbulent times, but also stressed how anger can act as a great motivator to create. Growing up in a male-dominated family in a patriarchal society, where the names of female relatives are not recorded, Ema's practice acts as a means of affirmation — wielding the power of cultural stories into powerful expressions of femininity.

Though this expression is compelled by anger, to encounter Ema's works is to enter a world guided by warmth and care. Working primarily with bright hues of reds, oranges, and pinks; it is easy to draw comparisons in her palette to that of the fleshy inner body. The softness and tactility of the materials furthers this reading. The colours are also a form of good fortune that honours the colours and motifs of Korean folk art. In the same way that works made by women tend to be historically forgotten, Korean folk art was produced by 'unknown' artists. These artists are not unknown, however; they are just unnamed. In Ema's hands, the care and labour she places on each individual embroidered heart is an act of remembering, a way of expressing and memorialising the hearts of women who came before.



Left

Hearts of Absent Women #7 2020
embroidery, linen, cotton, glass, polyester
20 x 13 x 14cm
Image courtesy of the artist

Right

Hearts of Absent Women #8 2020
embroidery, linen, cotton, glass, polyester
16,5 x 11 x 12cm
Image courtesy of the artist