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Review Transforming injury into art

By Sharon Mizota

The rainbow-sherbet colors of Yong Soon Min's installation at Commonwealth & Council seem a bit cheery for a work inspired by a brain hemorrhage.

The centerpiece is a round table segmented like a pie, in which slices are different bright colors. Each slice is incised with lines that resemble neural networks and a cutout of a word, written in cursive. Words situated across from one another form vaguely homonymic but odd pairs: diaspora/diarrhea, womb/tomb, happiness/penis, thank/spank. As the result of a cerebral hemorrhage several years ago, Min often confuses one word for another. The piece is a cheeky acknowledgment of these cognitive difficulties, putting a brave, even humorous face on a reckoning with disability.



Yong Soon Min, "AVM: After Venus (Mal)formation," 2016. (Ruben Diaz / Yong Soon Min and Commonwealth and Council)



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The hemorrhage must have been an especially dismaying challenge for Min, who has been creating provocative installations and photo-based works with significant textual components for more than 30 years. The table is surrounded by curved benches, which are also inscribed with snippets of handwriting, including quotations from earlier works.

The floor is covered with oversized photographic reproductions of the artist's bookcases, featuring tomes about art, post-colonial theory and social and political struggles. They form the backdrop, a network of ideas against which the table's new normal is forged.

Indeed, Min's hemorrhage-induced slippages are eerily physical echoes of linguistic theories that uncouple words from their conventional meanings, opening them up to radical new interpretations. In Min's brain, this unmooring is no longer theoretical.



Yong Soon Min, "Last Notes and Sketches, Min Tae Yong (1918-2001)," 2016. (Ruben Diaz / Yong Soon Min and Commonwealth and Council)

The exhibition continues in a personal vein in another room. Inset into the panels of a folding screen are notes made by Min's father, Min Tae Yong, late in his life. Written in a neat hand, they are meditations on the nature of the universe, as well as discussions of other beings: "cosmoans, galaxians, starmen." Some of the notes are two-sided, and the artist has mounted them within the screen so that they swivel. This gesture, paired with the screen's zigzag shape, suggests the same oscillation seen in Min's colorful table, shuttling back and forth between control and something less predictable, but full of possibility.

Commonwealth & Council, 3006 W. 7th St. #220, L.A. Through Jan. 7; closed Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays. (213) 703-9077, www.commonwealthandcouncil.com