

Coleen Baik

엄마 나라 | MOTHER LAND 2023

Watercolor on paper, digital, phonotrope

Animated and shot footage, 6 min

The “phonotrope” is a simple looping animation that comes to life on a turntable. It invites a meditative regard, while simultaneously establishing remove—the animations cannot be seen with the naked eye.

In 2022, the mother I knew disappeared, suffering from depression and the strain of caregiving for almost a decade. A slow burn over summer and fall months exploded over three days in which my mother was involuntarily committed, and my father died. This six minute film, consisting primarily of hand-painted and filmed animations, is a way for me to be present with the raw, intense, and inexpressible in a way that feels both honoring and tender. The months-long process of making it has helped me see what I can’t yet look at directly.

The film is also an exploration of what I believe are parallels of longing: traumatic reverberations in an historical, cultural, and national—as well as the personal and familial—context. As I deliver this film, I find myself confronted with difficult emotions around hidden labor and the price it exacts from Korean women across generations. Legacies of absence and division further complicate how I feel.

Much of the footage is shot with an iPhone and macro lens attachment, held 1 inch away from images spinning 45 revolutions per minute. Inherent repetition in the medium leads to stillness in attention, while the way it forces fragmentation of narrative, underscores realities of fracture.

The film’s loose structure is inspired by *salpuri*, a traditional Korean shamanic dance of “exorcism.” It’s often referred to as an expression of *han*, which can be thought of as deep sadness in the context of Korean culture and history. It begins slowly, speeds up, then slows down again, returning physically to where it began—but transitioning spiritually beyond.