

Ema Shin

Hearts of Absent Women (Tree of Family), 2026

wool, cotton, bamboo yarn, acrylic yarn, cotton pearls, glass beads, polyester ribbon, aluminium

Courtesy the artist and Gallerysmith, Melbourne

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Education Resource (K-6)



Hearts of Absent Women #12, 2023

Photography Photography Narelle Wilson.

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Overview

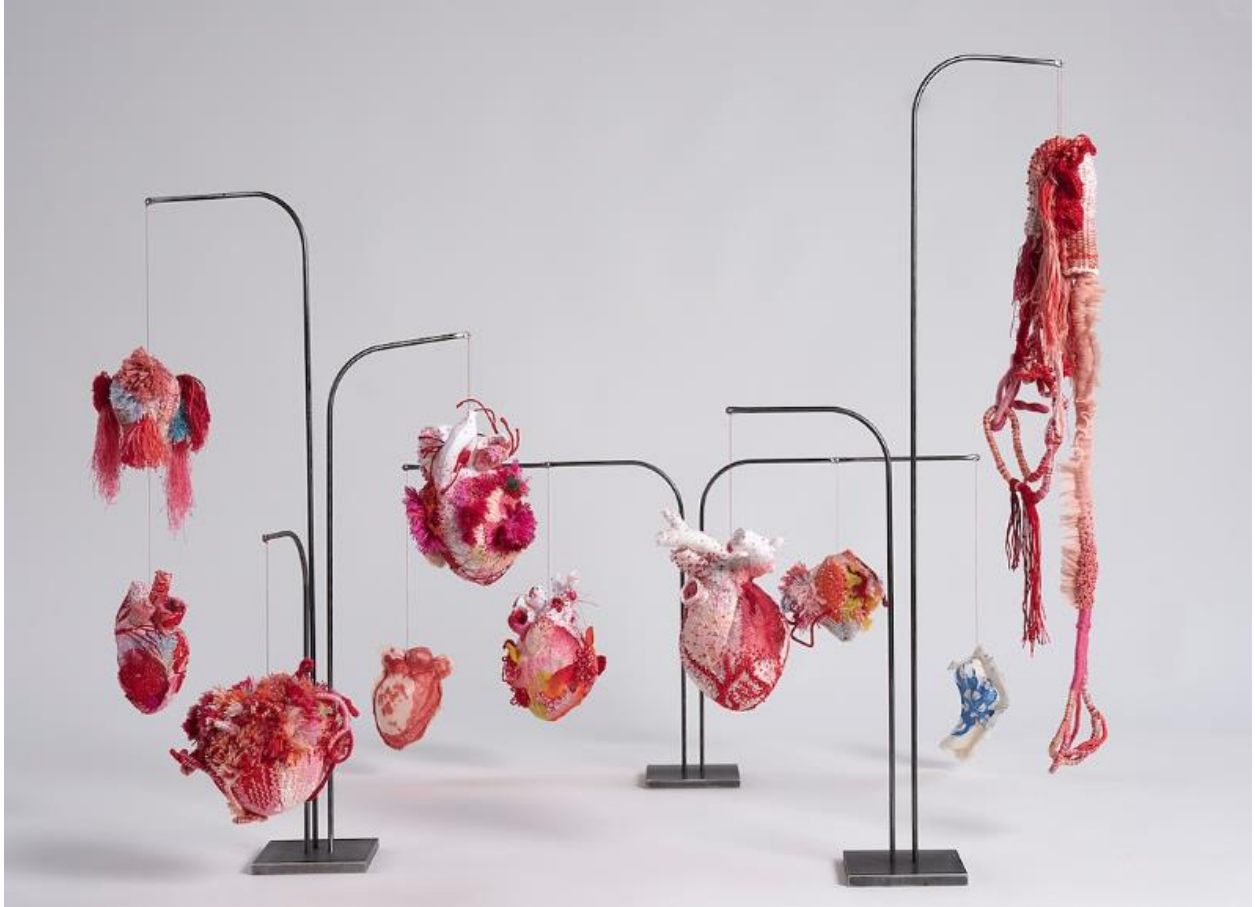
This big heart is made to thank women. Each stitch, bead, and ribbon appreciates not only their beauty, but their strength and creativity. It's made by artist Ema Shin, who was born in Japan and has Korean heritage. She now lives and makes textile art in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia.

Ema was inspired by a family tree her grandfather gave her. It showed 32 generations! But it shocked Ema to see many women's names were missing unless they had sons. In Japanese and Korean culture, only women who had sons were counted to carry the family line. Even though the law changed, old ideas can stick around for a long time. This became the reason for her big heart artwork.

Ema chose a heart to stand for women. A heart is soft like feelings and strong like a lifeline, just as many women are kind and caring while also keeping families going. She shows this through her materials: soft fibres woven tight to be strong, and red and pink to show lifeblood and care that women give every day. She adds shiny metallic threads and pearls to celebrate women and show their value.

Ema's artwork celebrates women who have not always been valued equally in her culture. Her artwork says that women's stories matter and deserve to be seen. Art can push back against unfair treatment and help people share important ideas when words aren't enough.





Hearts of Absent Women, 2021,
embroidery, glass, polyester, linen, cotton, wool, hanji paper, lokta paper
Image courtesy of the artist

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Discussion Questions

Ema added beautiful decorations like pearls, beads, and ribbons to her heart. When do you **see** beautiful decorations or wear special ornaments? (Birthdays? Celebrations? Special clothes?)
What do decorations **show** about something being **important**?
This heart is **soft** but also very **strong**. Can you **think** of something else that seems soft but is actually strong?
The heart is also a **symbol** for many **different** things. What does a heart **mean** to you? (Love? Feelings? Family? Being alive? Courage?)

Ema made this heart to honour the women in her family, like her grandmother, mother, aunts, because their names weren't always remembered.
Who are the **women** in your life who take **care** of you or **teach** you things?
And every single stitch and bead was placed by hand. It took a very long time and a lot of care.
When you **make** something with **care** and take your time, how is it **different** from rushing? What's something you've **learned** to do because it **mattered** to you?

Practical Activities

Activity 1

Think of one woman or girl in your life who is important to you. This could be your parent, grandparent, sibling, teacher, friend.
Think about their face in your mind. Can you imagine it?
Zoom in on their face like a camera. Get really close in your mind and imagine their features.
Is their hair straight like spaghetti or curly like springs?
What colour are their eyes? Are they big and round, or do they squinch up when they smile?
Are they smiling with their teeth showing, or is their mouth closed?
Do they wear glasses? Do they have earrings or a favourite hat?
Spend 5 minutes making a sketch of this person, including all the features you thought of.

Activity 2

On a new page, draw a large heart shape taking up most of your page.



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Using the same person in activity 1, write at the top of the page "This heart is for..." with their name in capital letters.

Inside the heart, divide it into 4 sections by drawing a cross.

In each corner of the cross, draw or write something about that person:

Something they make or do (cook, garden, work, teach, fix things).

Something they teach you.

How they make you feel (safe, happy, loved, brave).

A pattern that reminds you of them (flowers? stripes? stars? dots?).

Around the outside edge of your heart, draw small decorations. These are like Ema's beads and pearls celebrating someone special.

Find a friend and show your heart and say the person's name and one thing from inside the heart.



Hearts of Absent Women (detail), 2021

embroidery, glass, polyester, linen, cotton, wool, hanji paper, lokta paper

Image courtesy of the artist

