

ArtReview

October 2022

Ghislaine Leung: *The Porous Boundaries of Parenthood*
by Maddie Hampton



Ghislaine Leung, *Monitors*, 2022. Score: A baby monitor installed in one room and broadcast to another.

Balances at Maxwell Graham / Essex Street, New York positions the work of the artist with the constant compromise of maternal responsibilities.

Parenthood has shaken up Ghislaine Leung's practice. Where before her work strove to illuminate and critique the constructed neutrality of art institutions, *Balances* would suggest Leung has shifted to examine the implications of agency in the personal sphere. Presented as a series of objects and interventions set in scores – a conceptual framework borrowed from Fluxus and Sol LeWitt where the work exists primarily as instructions for its own realisation – the exhibition is intimate, a visual negotiation of Leung's new competing roles as mother and artist.

Leung conjures the unruly by presenting work that adheres to a strict, antithetical neatness. The pieces exist beyond the objects themselves, meaning that the high-precision scale that sits on the floor and comprises *Balances* (all works 2022) could be any such model of laboratory weighing instrument, so long as its lid is left open, allowing the movement of passersby to alter its exact weight reading. In fact, depending on when you visit, the gallery may be empty. Her most sweeping score, *Times*, calls for the exhibition to be on view only during the hours Leung has allocated herself studio time (Thursdays and Fridays from 9am to 4pm), necessitating a regular deinstallation and subsequent restaging of the scores. While cleverly visualising the obvious but easily overlooked fact that her artwork is entirely reliant on her art work, *Times* moves further to recontextualise Leung's practice itself, positioning it, via the show's fluctuating presence and absence, in constant compromise with her parental responsibilities.

But both the starkness of deinstallation and the tidy grids of *Hours* – a wall painting of 168 rectangles demarcating each hour of the week with her 14 studio hours blacked solid – seem to mock their own implication: that her parenthood could ever be turned off, fully separated from her art practice. This inescapable overlap is perhaps best articulated by a baby monitor installed to broadcast an image of the gallery's back room and offices. *Monitors* proves dependence transcends material presence; a tool to enable a parent's momentary separation from their child, the monitor is, in reality, a tether, testament to the absolute reliance of a child on their parent – a reliance ignorant of gallery shows and studio hours.

In looking for the edges defining her role as parent and as artist, Leung comes up empty – the boundary is porous, the contexts themselves intertwined. Ultimately, the exhibition's greatest strength is Leung's play on simplicity and her masterful use of the sparse to communicate the vast and the contradictory.