

**Transcription for Grandma Movements, Moments and Mementos
with Yoshie Sakai
Saturday, July 30, 2022**

Hi everyone, my name is Jamie my pronouns are she/her/hers and on behalf of the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery and Department of Cultural Affairs we are so excited and thrilled to present today's program as part of COLA 2022. As a public and civic institution, we acknowledge that our gallery resides on what was historically the heartland of Kizh, Tongva, and Chumash peoples who were dispossessed of their land. We encourage you to share what land you are on in the chat today if you feel comfortable, as well as your pronouns if they are not already on your screen name. Before I introduce and hand it off to Yoshie I have a few programmatic logistics to go over with you all. First, just if you could please make sure your microphone is muted during the artist talk portion of the program just so we can prevent any feedback or disruption. And as a reminder this particular portion of the program will be recorded for archival purposes. For the guided workshop component, we will stop recording the program and we encourage you just however you feel most comfortable to turn on your microphones at that point or use the chat box to participate if you choose to and just again just to reiterate it's whatever you feel most comfortable with. We will also save the last few minutes of the program for a general Q and A with Yoshie. And we're also really grateful to have sign language interpreters here and live captioning available for the program today. And if you requested either service, we just recommend pinning their windows and if you have any issues accessing, just feel free to chat myself or Stephanie Sherwood, who is also here on behalf of the gallery and DCA. And with that I'm honored to introduce Yoshie. Yoshie Sakai is a multimedia visual artist working in Gardena California. She holds a BA from the University of California Los Angeles, a BFA from California State University Long Beach and an MFA from Claremont Graduate University. Sakai's work has been featured in exhibitions across the United States, including *KOKO's Love: A Soap Opera Tale of One Family*, Antenna, New Orleans, Louisiana (solo exhibition); *KOKO's Love: The Technicolor Unfairytale* Ball Verge Center for the Arts, Sacramento, California (solo exhibition), *The Autotopographers*, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and *KOKO's Neighborhood*, University Art Gallery, California State University Dominguez Hills, Carson, California (solo exhibition). So, with that super just cannot reiterate enough, really happy to be here with Yoshie and just to pass it over to Yoshie at this point.

Hi everyone thank you so much for taking this time this afternoon to share with me an opportunity to think about our grandparents and grandmothers and I'm really grateful to be here. I wanted to thank the Los Angeles Municipal Arts Gallery Department of Cultural Affairs and this COLA fellowship for very much a privilege and an honor for me to be a part of this and to be able to sort of tap into sort of new avenues for my work, so thank you so much. And with that I'm going to start with my presentation. So, what inspires my work now, and I think what has always inspired my work is my fascination or just the fascination with the everyday that quotidian life. So, whatever my family, my friends, my co-workers, when I was teaching, my students were inspired by or their preoccupations

sort of become my obsessions or sort of material for the work that I do. Really, it's about the anxieties fears and joys that they sort of feel. I'd like to tap into that and explore. But the crux of my work has always been the subversion of expectations, whether it be that the mass media, those related to culture, identity gender roles in personal and familiar relationships.

And so, I want to go back a little bit in time to 2011 to the first excerpt of a video that I'll show is, which is called *Que Sera Sera* and I wanted to use this video as an example because it informs much of the work or much of how I do my research. When I try to make these videos and it's essentially like interviewing, talking to people in the community. Gathering people's feelings thoughts stories, I find it to be very enjoyable and informative it gives me great satisfaction and I just really enjoyed connecting with people and it's a very important part of my practice. And this video was also influenced by Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu and he is a Japanese filmmaker that really focuses on the daily working class Japanese family lives. So, they're not big and epic films, but they are about aging, sort of the strengths and weaknesses of family bonds and the communication between different generations, and so I kind of took this as inspiration. And for this piece I started examining going out into the community, the diverse community, and asking them about their expectations and things. And I would ask them very, very kind of cliché quite questions that maybe people think about like oh, what are you most afraid of what do you regret. And so, I asked this of all ages from infants to people age 93 I asked the same questions. And I gather their answers, and then I lip synced to them by aging myself by decades so like the teens the 20 so I kind of tried to dress age appropriate and then lip sync my answers, lip sync their answers to my questions. So I am going to show a little bit of that. Oh I didn't share my screen. I was that was that was bad. Okay sorry about that everybody.

You're good Yoshie.

Okay okay, here we go. Oh, I didn't find the video. Yeah. Okay, so that was my intro slide. So, you will see these videos a little later on. But this is the first video that I was talking about called *Que Sera Sera*. and so, this is like a one minute 30 second excerpt. Here we go.

You know I'm 93. I'm a big boy. I would come back as Jennifer Lopez. Come back as like Bill Clinton, be a damn playboy. Naturally you want to come back as damn... born rich.

(speaking in Japanese)

(speaking in Japanese)

(speaking in Japanese)

afraid of? what the hell am I going to be afraid of. What. Not having made a difference. Afraid of other people that I don't know my name might be truck guilt I don't want to die.

I'm not going to die for a very long time. I'm not sure I'm not sure I want to come back. Come back as myself. Why, why would I want to come back as anyone else. I would come back as myself.

And so that was *Que Sera Sera*. And so, the next piece I'm going to talk about, and it's a work that I've been working on since 2014, it still is going on, until the present, I don't know I'm not sure if I'm supposed to exit. But so okay, so now I'm going more inwards and looking at my family dysfunctionalities and so this is *Koko's Love* it is the East Asian, Asian American hybrid soap opera series. I'm very much again influenced by the people around me this happens to be because I moved back home with my now 88-year-old mother. And she claims that soap operas, these East Asian soap operas she watches, day and night that's what she lives for, and so, even when the pandemic happened, she was just like great, this is what I do anyway. But I can see where she is very much drawn to these soaps, the addictive sort of narrative storytelling, the outrageous characters. There are very many of them, but at the same time, it really does touch upon like fundamental emotions that are very accessible, and so I decided to use this soap opera genre and sort of reimagine these melodramatic tropes to challenge the sort of model minority aspect, the idea of the guise of superficial perfection. With regards to me being Asian American and a woman, and so this story revolves around the Sakimoto family, it's a fictitious family loosely autobiographically based. But there is a patriarch Hiroshi who insists that a male take over his Koko's liquor store business rather than a female, but the only thing is that Hiroshi only has a daughter, and only daughter, and her name is Yuki. So, the story sort of revolves around that premise and it keeps going on, I have three episodes. There are some related variety and videos related to that. I do start with a script and a storyboard, I do green screen like you see the green screen behind me, I have people voice act to my script and then I lip sync to them. I'm only the voice of the daughter and the mother. But, since it is loosely autobiographically based, and I am the daughter of that previous actual owner of Koko's liquor, that's my father, I thought it was very important for me to direct produce write and play every character as a performative process for my video and the absurdity and humor does come from the fact that I play both male and female characters and they're very exaggerated contemporary family situations. I will show now *Koko's Love*, this is just episode one and it's a one and a half minute excerpt but the rest, you can see, like on my website.

(speaking in Japanese)

(speaking in Japanese) liquor store (speaking in Japanese)

(speaking in Japanese)

(speaking in Japanese)

(speaking in Japanese)

Wait here I'm going to turn off the alarm so wait here.

So thank you for watching that was *Koko's Love*, a little excerpt of it. And when I have the opportunity to give whenever I have the opportunity to take over space or I'm offered a space to occupy I do like to create installations and environments for my videos. I believe, for me it creates accessibility, very easily for those of all ages and of educational backgrounds and to emphasize the subject matter and so. it's very important for me to,

if I can have these spaces to create these installations, as you can see from this first slide, I am a maximalist I don't like to have white space showing. So this sort of fullness of my space, my installations, I believe, are grounded in the tangible and what I call fantastical domesticity which means I have gathered from my hoarder home greasy caked on lazy Susan's, holey tablecloths, couches and then I mix it up with thrift store finds to create sort of imaginative characters and the sort of flamboyant interior sceneries. This first one is from New Orleans and the characters I created here, since this is based on the second episode. Anytime, and this happens a lot in my soap operas, anytime anyone passes out they flip into a dream sequence, and in this case, they do, and then we have these guides. They sort of represent New Orleans sort of take the characters throughout their journey we have mixed friendly beignet and alligator the great and also tombstone tammy. This was great, it was on the second floor of a house. which was a perfect location for my soap opera series. This is, I created a space, it became sort of a high school college gym with championship banners going across the top, and this is the thematic dance that was called *The Technicolor Unfairytale Ball* since there's really nothing fairy tale about Koko's. And then so you walk into a monochromatic gray, black and white room and then you open the curtains and end up in this sort of colorful space where pretty much all my videos related to Koko's were playing.

And then also I, it's for me to explain, like the sort of flamboyant interior scenes kind of reflect how we sort of portray ourselves to the outside world. We may wear these masks you know, even though we might be crying inside we put on this picture that we're happy we're doing well. That sort of these kind of loud and colorful scenes that I'm portraying on the inside, but I am bringing it to the inside as a distraction for a lot of the pain and shame that we may have within ourselves, and the *Koko's Love* soap opera is does talk about that. And I feel like the installations do add to that scenario and theme, and so this, this is another installation, where I focus on the daughter Yuki character and she's like wanting a pet dog. There's a super pug character who's trying to help her get this dog her parents don't want her to have this dog. It's in a corner and it's split in half diagonally, half where it's like half dreamscape and then half reality of the Sakimoto family living room. We have, you know, shelves for the different animal that she can hopefully obtain or purchase at the pet store. And so, these are people in my installations.

Another installation where it's *You're Married Now What*, which is a newlywed game show talk show that kind of goes back in time to tell us the story about the main characters, the wife and husband Hiroshi and Keiko of the Sakimoto family. So, I created this not exactly the set but it kind of changes form, depending on the space, but in this case, you know we have like the prize wheel and the seats, and we do have a host and you can see her on the screen. And so, now we come to the start of my grandma entertainment franchise, and I'll talk a little bit more about that, right after this video when we do a virtual walkthrough of the space. But for this, I wanted to again kind of go through like my research process and I have been interviewing a lot of people since last year. Talking to them about their grandmothers, I asked like questions such as do you remember what they wore you know, are there any songs that your grandparents like

your grandma liked, what songs would you associate with them if you don't know what song they like. If you can, if they had any regrets or even if they didn't like how would you reimagine their life to have played out or their stories. And so, I just like to hear what people have to say. I'm not really sure where it's going right now, I'm thinking I'll probably put together a larger story like a Koko's that could be fictitious. Where the events and scenarios that happen may, you know, are based on true story, but definitely the emotions are real, even if the story is maybe made up, but this is just a little snippet of some notes about different grandmothers.

Elegant postures and maybe like. For example, I had with my hand. It's you know, and this is from my grandmother there's a lot of pictures of her. So, she was always like all to. My grandmother was always at the sink like always in the kitchen and always her doing something, and like occasionally, just like washing dishes like, even if they were clean, she was just grab a dish just would be singing. So those are some notes with interviews that I've done that were quite enjoyable to do. Right now I'm at a residency I have access to a piano and I haven't touched a piano for 30 years but I'm trying to do it again. So that is the easy version of amazing grace and that's also what Larissa associates her grandmother with as she was a prominent member of the choir and the music part of the church. And so, that was reminisce notes on the reminiscing of grandma and this grandma nightclub virtual walkthrough will be, you'll be able to see on the COLA website. I'm just going to talk you through my idea of how I envision the nightclub to look like if it were in person and you were able to actually be in the space.

And so, this was created by Carlos Avila and Alfredo Gonzales for this COLA. And so here we are at the grandma nightclub which is going to be part of my grandma entertainment franchise comprised of the day spa the amusement park and again here the nightclub. And so, we'll walk into the nightclub and this idea came to me, I mean as a way to celebrate and honor our senior Community they are disenfranchised population.

And I feel like it has been neglected by our capitalistic society, or they have been, and so I started to think a lot about this at the height of Covid or at the beginning of Covid actually when all of a sudden, there was this like mad rush to try and protect our seniors from Covid. I really never felt that care or concern from the government ever about the seniors you know nursing home care, all that is just really just horrible in our country, and so anyway, I wanted to take this time to celebrate our seniors. There will be a music video, *Grandma Nightclub* playing on the dance floor. If you make your way through in the back I'll have a sign that says meeting rooms, then, to the left. And a lot of times I think in the nightclubs the meeting rooms are sort of the bathroom the restroom area. Yes, I my sinks, some like future night grandma nightclub posters. And then, I have two other videos one will be playing in each bathroom stall. I would like them to be eventually on the door but for this virtual walk through, they are in the stalls though it is to create a more private and personal space where you can experience the videos. It's a little bit different departure from what I usually do, which has a lot more humor in it, these stories are greatly they're very personal. You know autobiographically based on my maternal figures in my life, and so you know there's one about little sacrifices my grandma made and another one where I'm an unborn fetus kind of warning my mother about the sort of

like warnings about yeah, I don't know how your life would be or not be like, if you didn't have or had children. So those are private personal and those will be in the bathroom stalls you'll come back out maybe if you're sad in my bathroom stall tears videos you feel better once you're on the dance floor. And so, this is my grandma nightclub and hopefully you got a taste of how it would look in real life, so thank you for going through that with me, this will also be on the COLA website, so you'd be able to watch it again, and there is a narration. So, this next video is the actual video that will be playing. On the dance floor this is again an excerpt. I just have to give you a little warning and there's some profanity in here, so you know if that is something that you don't want to hear that I just want to warn you about that. In the *Grandma Nightclub* video, it is actually choreography to *Singin' in the Rain* by Gene Kelly, but yes, I sort of made this into a karaoke medley version. So yes, celebrating our seniors and their sexual.

Up all night, all night. You drink it just like water. You see you. keep you. But show me, can you keep. Because then I'll have to keep you should maybe I'm a. boy at the drinking coffee. Healthy. Can you stay up all night. Sixty-nine with you.

Okay, so that was, so that was *Grandma Nightclub*. And yes, it's to celebrate the vitality and sexuality of seniors that we may not normally associate with them, you know. I have a friend whose parents are at like Leisure World and they're like there's like these 90-year-old, you know, women who are like still going on dates and having a great time and so that's definitely a side of the senior community that I would love to celebrate. And so that's my little you know, yeah, a way of honoring them and celebrating them and this next one is *Bathroom Stall Tears Part 1*, it is one of the videos that would be playing in one of the bathroom stalls. And again it's just the little sacrifices older generations make for their for the younger counterparts and something I'm super grateful for, I had a really personal relationship with my grandmother and so um yeah so...

And so it goes night after night.

(speaking in Japanese)

(speaking in Japanese)

(speaking in Japanese) Obaa-chan, I wish you were my sister (speaking in Japanese)

I hate being an only child (speaking in Japanese)

(speaking in Japanese) That's okay obaa-chan, I don't need any money. For some reason she believed obaa-chan should be giving some allowance to their grandkids that that was part of spoiling them.

So that's *Bathroom Stall Tears Part 2*, and then part one, and now we're on *Bathroom Stall Tears Part 2*, where I am this unborn fetus inside my mother and kind of telling her or warning her about what it what her life might become if she were to become a mother.

And the reason why I started thinking about this is because I realized that, you know talking to family, to my parents friends from long before they had all these hobbies and things that they did in their life seem really, really, I mean maybe they I'm sure they're not regretting their lives now but, they had all these hobbies that which sort of like disappeared once they had me. You know and all their focus became on trying to provide for me which I'm very grateful for, at the same time, I wonder, like if I weren't born, and it's not that I'm not happy being born, but yeah it's just these things that I these issues that I think about and I deal with and so here's this video.

Can you hear me? Chill out with that megaphone you don't need that to talk with me, I know what you're thinking or feeling without a single utterance, duh, I've been a character in your life stories I need to warn her the dangers of motherhood and me being born. it's too late you've been conceived and own a megaphone you've already gone shopping at the local womalmart all sales final. (Speaking Japanese)

(Speaking Japanese)

(Speaking Japanese)

(Speaking Japanese)

If I'm not here, life would be more fulfilling. Or maybe not.

And so. So yes, thank you for watching and I really appreciate you going through this process with me. But so, thank you so much, and now I guess I'll start the prompt section. So, there are some I guess prompts that it'd be nice for us to share again this is like the process that I go through whenever I make my work, so I would like to take this time together to remember and honor our grandparents' figures. And that we can share with each other, some grandma movements, mementos and moments that that remind us of our grandparents and to celebrate the vibrant senior community and how they enrich our personal lives so. Yes, so we'll start some, ok Jamie, and so my first prompt is: so close your eyes, I mean you don't have to close your eyes close your eyes and visualize your grandma or your grandparents figure, they can be anybody, I mean you know, and if you don't have a grandparent figure, maybe you can imagine how you would have liked to have a grandparent, like what they would be like and just think about it.