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FEATURE

53<sup>rd</sup> la Biennale di

Venezia

KOREA  
JAPAN  
CHINA



*La Biennale di Venezia's 53rd International Art Exhibition will run from 7th June to 22nd November 2009 in the traditional venues of the Giardini and the Arsenale, as well as in various other locations around the city. The Director of the Visual Arts Sector of the Biennale is Daniel Birnbaum, with specific responsibility for curating the 53rd International Art Exhibition. The 53rd International Art Exhibition, entitled *Fare Mondi // Making Worlds* / *Banin Duniyan // 世界の創造 // Welchenmachen // Construire des Mondes // Fazer Mundos...*. The title of the exhibition is an expression of wish to emphasize the process of creation.*

*The National Participations of the 53rd International Art Exhibition, presented in the historical Pavilions in the Giardini, in selected areas of the Arsenale and in numerous venues throughout the city, are this year amounting to the record number of 77 Nations participating, including first-time participations of Montenegro, Principality of Monaco, Republic of Gabon, Union of Comoros, and United Arab Emirates. Here, art in ASFA will feature national pavilions of Korea, Japan and China of its histories and 53rd exhibition plans.*

*"Condensation," a solo presentation of new works by Haegue Yang will feature three newly commissioned works: In sculpture Sallim (2009), Yang's reproduction of a full-scale model of her Berlin kitchen, a video essay Doubles and Halves—Events with Nameless Neighbors (2009), and an installation Series of Vulnerable Arrangements—Voice and Wind (2009), a labyrinthine system of stacked venetian blinds. These reflect the breadth of Yang's work and her concern with the potential of marginalized spaces and the possibilities for alternate forms of public engagement. "Condensation" is the first solo exhibition by a woman artist in the Korean Pavilion at Venice. Yang's work will also be installed in the Arsenale as part of Daniel Birnbaum's main exhibition, "Making Worlds."*



## HAEGUE YANG

Haegue Yang (b. Seoul, 1971) received her B.F.A. from Seoul National University, Fine Arts College in 1994, and her Meisterschüler from Städelschule Frankfurt am Main, in 1999. Her works have been exhibited internationally including Anyang Public Art Project 2007; BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht; the 56th Carnegie International, Pittsburgh; Cubitt Gallery, London; Kunsthalle Hamburg; Portikus; REDCAT, Los Angeles; 2006 Sao Paulo Biennial; the 2006 Turin Triennale; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and most recently, Sala Rekalde, Bilbao, and The Power Plant, Toronto. Yang lives and works in Berlin and Seoul.





Left: *Holiday For Tomorrow*, consist with Blind Department/Ten aluminum venetian blinds, fans, Yes-I-Know-Screens/Seven painted wooden screens, metal, Shell Sculpture/PVC, shells and Holiday Story/Water, color, sound, 2007. Installation view of "Tomorrow" at Artsonje Center, Seoul, Korea, 2007. Courtesy: Galerie Barbara Wilen, Berlin, Germany, Photo: Choi Jinsuk and Gamsuo. Below: *Yearning Mischievous Red*, 2008, site-specific installation, Aluminum venetian blinds (shiny white, faux wood), mirror, moving lights, infrared heater, fan, drum kit, cable, trigger, MIDI converter. Exhibition view of *Asymmetrically Equally*, REDCAT, Los Angeles, USA, 2008. Courtesy: Galerie Barbara Wilen, Berlin, Germany, Photo: Scott Gruber.

Opposite: *Three Winds*, 2008, site-specific installation, aluminum venetian blinds (various colors and shapes), three Avri flood lights, three Martin Mac 250-plus moving lights. Exhibition view of *Life on Mars* at the 55th Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, USA, 2008. Courtesy: Galerie Barbara Wilen, Berlin, Germany, Photo: Tom Little.





Above: *Sedong 30*, 2006, various light sources (hanging light bulbs, strobes, light chain) and drying rack wrapped in fabric, fan and mixed media. Site-specific installation in an abandoned house in Incheon, Korea. Courtesy: Artist and Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin, Germany. Photo: Daenam Kim.

Left: *Dehors*, 2006, slide projection, two slide projectors (Kodak, Dissolver), 192 color slides. Courtesy: Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin, Germany

Opposite: *Series of Vulnerable Arrangements-Seven Basel Lights*, 2007, site-specific installation, seven light sculptures with TV stands, extension cables, light bulb, mirror. Courtesy Gallery Barbara Wien, Berlin. Collection Kunsthalle Hamburg.





## VULNERABILITY FOR AN EXPLORATION

Clara Kim

*The text provides insightful context about the artist's thinking, giving us a rare glimpse into the motivations of her practice through her own words. Though the interview cites the REDCAT project specifically, Yang's responses speak more broadly to a body of related work during an active two-year period (2008-9).*

*Yang's upcoming exhibition Condensation for the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale and her solo exhibition at the Walker Art Center in September 2009 proceed from the conceptual framework and vocabulary discussed in this text.*

Since 2006, Haegue Yang's installations have taken the form of temporary and ephemeral fields of sensory experiences in which individual associations and connotations unfold limitlessly. In Series of *Vulnerable Arrangements* (a series of different but related installations created for specific sites and contexts between 2006 and 2007—Version Utrecht, Blind Room, Blind Table, Version Cologne, Seven Basel Lights), Yang employs various sensory devices including Venetian blinds, lights, industrial fans, infrared heaters, humidifiers and scent emitters to create an atmosphere in which qualities of luminosity, heat, wind and smell shift as the human body comes into contact. These sentient landscapes describe a kind of alternate consciousness in which memory, sentiment, intellect, and political ideology are inextricably linked to the social body, however collective or personal. Vulnerability allows for an exploration of unheroic acts, irrational behavior, emotional release—the states of mind between contemplation and action.

In more recent installations beginning with *Mountains of Encounter* at Kunstverein Hamburg (2008), *Letthal Love for Cubitt* in London (2008), *Siblings and Twins for Portikus* in Frankfurt, *Asymmetric Equality for REDCAT* in Los Angeles and *Symmetric Inequality* for Sala Rekalde in Bilbao (2008-9), Yang's abstract, sensorial vocabulary becomes more pronounced as Venetian blinds take a more structural, though asymmetrical, presence and forces of energy play off in unproductive, inefficient pairings. These related installations operate as abstract portraits, narratives so to speak, about the relationships between certain literary and political characters: the French novelist and filmmaker Marguerite Duras, whose work explored the ambiguous conditions of colonialism in French Indochina, her husband and fellow Résistance fighter Robert Antelme and her lover Dionys Mascolo; the encounter between the underground communist revolutionary Kim San who fought against the Japanese occupation of Korea and the American journalist Nym Wales who met Kim secretly under life-threatening circumstances that led to her writing of his biography *Song of Artran* (1941); and the life and death of German activist and founder of the German Green Party (Die Grünen) Petra Kelly and Gert Bastien, the former NATO general who became Kelly's lover and is believed to have shot and killed Kelly in a murder-suicide. Whether within the backdrop of a tropical landscape of colonial Indochina or the clandestine meetings in the mountainous terrain of Yan'an during its height as the center of Chinese communist revolution, these relationships to Yang represent the precarious conditions in which communities are formed, conditions in which political freedom comes with great personal risk and where passion drives subjectivity, fate and history. Yang's work is an exploration of community (that of lovers, political dissidents, revolutionaries, individuals) that contemplates the possibility of arriving at subjectivity through absence, exile or destruction rather than through traditional notions of cultural identity or geographic boundaries. Her work unfolds slowly attempting to describe a notion of equality or justice through physical and sensorial displacement. Space is not fixed, rather it morphs, changes and shifts. It is porous and contaminated. Light, which figures prominently in her installations, becomes a beckoning call that illuminates, dims, detracts and destabilizes until its

Below: *Saffin*, 2009, steel frame, perforated steel plate, castle, light bulbs, electric fan, scent emitters, mixed media, 250 x 420 x 310cm. Courtesy Galerie Barbara Wehr, Berlin, and Kukja Gallery, Seoul. Photo: Petrus Chernuschnacki.



## DIALOGUE FOR NUTURE

### Commissioner Eungie Joo



Commissioner Eungie Joo said about her selection, "Many commissioners and artists with different ideas have participated in previous exhibitions; I believe that this upcoming exhibition is an independent project with a completely different set of contexts and I will focus on exhibiting the most powerful artists at this point." Because she did not have enough time to build an exhibition, she decided to concentrate on introducing artists with whom

she had a profound understanding and communication.

She believed that her conversations with Artist Hyeogye Yang and all of the many derivative concepts would take her exhibition at this Venice Biennale a step further.

"Haeogye Yang is a compelling artist whose work speaks to a complex struggle for context through the stimulation of the human senses and the experience of the viewer. The project for the Biennale is a great opportunity for us to continue our ongoing conversation in the form of an international exhibition that echoes the artist's preoccupations with Europe and Asia," says Eungie Joo.

Her relationship and artistic interaction with Yang have persisted since they first met at the 2004 Busan Biennale. Yang's solo show "Asymmetrical Equality," which was held last year at the REDCAT Gallery, was initially curated by Joo as she was a curator at the REDCAT Gallery before she transferred to the New Museum in 2007. "Conversation" is the new strategy or methodology that is emerging in the field of exhibition. It is not an intentional attempt to 'do something together,' but it is the process of developing concepts together." According to Joo, continuing discussions and conversations to share plans and concepts, and even this preparation of the Korean Hall exhibition for Venice Biennale are a part of "a process that has persisted for more than four years."

Commissioner Joo has been developing her concept by understanding the characteristics of space and environment while avoiding any modification of space in the Korean Hall. Joo and Yang are also working around the strong sunlight that comes from the front windows of the Korean Hall and trying to incorporate it with their basic elements and tools. Therefore, it may still be a solo show, but it would be rather different from the previous Korean Hall exhibition that completely blocked light to encourage deeper immersion into the artworks.

Curated by Joo, the exhibition "Condensation," a solo presentation of new work by Haeogye Yang at the Korean Pavilion of the 53rd Venice Biennale, will present hidden spaces that might be considered marginal while vulnerable sites transpire informal developments. Using condensation as a metaphor, Yang seeks direct communication with unknown people through a seemingly intangible path of exchange—one that imparts non-functional yet ontologically significant information.

Eungie Joo, the Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Programs at the New Museum, New York, is the first non-national commissioner appointed by the Arts Council Korea for the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Joo joined the New Museum in 2007, after a four-year tenure as director and curator of the Gallery at REDCAT in Los Angeles. Her essay, "An Encounter" was recently published in Haeogye Yang: *Asymmetrical Equality* (Los Angeles: CalArts/REDCAT 2008).

effect settles deeply and unforgettably under your skin like cigar smoke lingering in the middle of a darkened room.

The interview that follows took place during the preparations for Yang's solo exhibition "Asymmetric Equality" at REDCAT in the summer of 2008.

**Clara Kim** Can you talk about the development of the work you have created for REDCAT and your interest in abstraction?

**Haeogye Yang** I had works in mind, which came to the world one by one, during a period of time I gave to myself to experiment and experience.

While I was in the midst of it, the artistic desire to be more frank with myself in my own work brought me to a certain consciousness about abstraction. I still do not have enough distance to really speak about this desire, and maybe I will never be able to, or I will not even think about it again. Abstraction is the language I choose to give true value to the presence of the narrative inside of me as well as the narratives I have encountered and realized as 'relatives,' which exist outside of me. For me, they appear pre-conditionary, as if they've always existed around us. These narratives are not unfamiliar to me or to others. I think what fundamentally lies beneath these narratives can be shared without being told as a story. For me, abstraction is not anti-narrative, it is not a language that attempts to negate narration, but rather allows a narrative to be achieved without constituting its own limits. The form of language I choose to experiment with is abstract even if the motivation is always concrete.

**CK** To this end, you often employ sensory devices in your work. In *Asymmetric Equality*, you use light, infrared heaters, fans and sound in order to create an environment that demands sensorial engagement. Can you talk about your interest in the sensorial as an almost proto- or post-linguistic form as it relates to narrative and subjectivity?

**HY** Light, movement and sound are the dynamics of space, which illuminate abstraction and silences a conventional narrative that is capable of illustrating only one image. Recently, I have been using moving lights as they take over diverse functions. Like touching hands, light moves slowly across the space, gently touching different surfaces. I see it as relative to air, transparent but present. Light also serves as a functioning device that creates shadow. The shower of moving lights in constant motion gives different length and focus to the shadows and demonstrates the idea of an engagement of the observer through their own individual perspective. Light is an autonomous form because it has no physical boundaries.

In the installation, there is a mixture of various types of lights—the moving shower of lights from high-tech theatrical instruments and the red glow from stationary infrared heaters. Both are light sources, yet create different effects and feelings. In the installation, each of the infrared heaters is accompanied by a fan—pairing two opposing forces across from each other. There is a dialogue between the paired devices—a kind of yearning for each other, an intensive negation of heat and wind facing paradoxical disaster. They act as if they would at best destroy one another, which to me, demonstrates a principle of love and revolution. Their existence is derived from this possible destruction, squandering enormous energy of emotion. I see this as a subversive act, because it's separate and fundamentally inefficient.



**JK** Another recurring element in your recent work is the use of customized Venetian blinds. In your installation, the blinds do not necessarily demarcate an outside and inside or an exterior and interior as much as they create a shifting landscape where transparency, opacity and positionality are in constant flux. Can you talk about your use of these domestically specific objects and the geometric configurations which you submit them to in your installations?

**IY** I normally use blinds to create boundaries, which give me the comfort of breathing inside, but looking half-hidden outside. When I look out into space from the inside, I feel a deep sense of nostalgia and a desire to get to the other side, while cowardly breathing the air within. The half transparency is visual. With *Asymmetric Equality*, I didn't draw boundaries; instead I created an open structure with branch-like arms. I wanted them to be, as in Heidegger's notion of existence or *dasein*, timid but inally with facial expression. The blinds grow out of a series of mirrors anchored to the column, creating branch like forms from its 'trunk.'

The varying elevations and angles of the blinds create a kind of landscape. On the one hand, the configuration of the blinds is geometrical, yet it contains organic growth. Each unit has a crystalline-like flowery structure made up of three, four, five or six arms, implying infinite development. To me, they are like characters that address micro-communities, connected to each other, yet containing their own complexity and completeness. I am very excited about combining two different colors in the blinds—shiny white and faux wood. I sometimes feel awkward describing structures like this, even if this is actually how I engage with abstraction as bearing certain imagery of thoughts—in this case, around a micro-community. The projects I have worked on this year dealt with narratives driven by certain historical, political and literary figures from various times and places, including the underground Korean revolutionary Kim Jisan, the German politician and activist Petra Kelly, and the French novelist and filmmaker Marguerite Duras. With this work for REDCAT, I am, in a way, returning to my own narrative.

**JK** *Asymmetric Equality* continues your thinking about Marguerite Duras and your interest in ideas about community and home. You mentioned that with this installation you want to create an atmosphere of 'tropical melancholy,' which to me conveys a kind of displacement that is palpable sensorially while demanding a cognitive suspension—a temporary submission to external forces that disengage thought for feeling, mind for body, place for non-place. Can you talk about this 'atmosphere' as it relates to Duras and your own personal experience of growing up and living in two different countries, cultures, contexts?

**IY** The atmosphere I would like to describe is one of my childhood growing up in Seoul in the 70s and 80s when Korea was still regarded as socially, politically and economically underdeveloped, and therefore was full of construction. I only vaguely remember how often huge trucks ran through unpaved roads without a division between cars and pedestrians and all of us were in dust and dirt, yet this didn't stop eager children from running after them in the streets and releasing their energy. I remember loud sounds and large dust showers surrounding me all the time and the dull yet massive sounds of heavy industrialization all over. There was not

a single moment without the smell of fear—the fear of a severely repressive military regime mixed with a sweetly traditional environment, an old-fashioned life style, which remains highly nostalgic and innocent in my mind. I was born into this kind of 'colonial' environment, which I think characterizes my pathetic stubbornness and a struggle not to be modern, flexible or convenient in the world. I acknowledge the comfort of these memories as something primitive, a feeling we create unconsciously for sustenance in circumstances of difficulty or suppression that is therefore, different from convenience, which is a product of an efficient, industrialized society. When I'm absorbed in a 'colonial' structure, I see many empowering moments, because it is weak, meek and deceiving by nature. The structure provides the belief of growth and change, but what we get from living in the face of it is a fundamental subversiveness. This fascination with the experience of living with comfort and discomfort, living in an environment with dust, pollution, political suppression, violence and exhaustion, left me with no words. For me, the noise from the past is wrapped with the silence of the present.

**CK** I find very interesting aspect in your work, that in your referencing of 'historical' characters such as Duras, you are collapsing the time-space continuum, making Duras present now and allowing our senses to dictate experience which seems radically democratic to me.

**IY** I have recently begun to explore parallels between my life and those of other social and political figures. For example, I've been thinking about similar experiences with Marguerite Duras—especially her eventual move from Indochina to Paris—in search of a home that made her homeless as a result of a metaphorical experience of learning and unlearning in a colonial structure. In 1932, she moved to Paris from Indochina (then under French rule), where she was born and raised, but would never return. At that time, she didn't know her 'home country' (France), and the place where she actually grew up was never objectively regarded as her 'home' because she was of French descent. In her old home, politics was only a governing language, but in her new home, language was political. Early on, I believe she felt the need to completely erase her knowledge and memory of Indochina in order to make France her new home. During this period, she engaged in dubious political affiliations with the ministry that oversaw affairs in the French colonies as well as with the Nazi puppet government in Vichy. Despite her initial participation in these controversial histories, she later found her own artistic and political language, which I understand to be a process of unlearning the rules of outside power structures. I would describe this process as a kind of homecoming and would dare to insist that, in time, she somehow kept her old 'home' in a way that sympathetically recognized Indochina as something more than a geographic location but certainly had much to do with the time and events connected with it. In novels such as *The Sea Wall* (1950) as well as *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), I feel like her writing attempts to revisit her home only to discover her homelessness—a truth that eventually led to her silence in literature and in death. The place I am addressing in *Asymmetric Equality* is not an imaginary place. It's a place where things exist and do not need to be proved as real in order to gain its dignity.