

ARTFORUM

Haegue Yang

06.28.08-08.25.08 Gallery at REDCAT

By Sharon Mizota
7.31.08



Haegue Yang's first US solo exhibition, "Asymmetric Equality," is an elegant argument for the affective, emancipatory possibilities of abstract sculpture. The roomsize installation—an austere landscape of venetian blinds, space heaters, fans, and theatrical lights—combines the phenomenological bent of James Turrell and Olafur Eliasson with the machine aesthetic of Dennis Oppenheim. Suspended from the ceiling in a darkened, cavernous gallery, the blinds form a mazelike structure lit by slowly roving beams from high-tech theatrical spotlights

and the warm glow of nearby heating elements. Moody shadows encircle the room, and slippery moiré patterns appear and dissolve across the blinds. The overall effect is an eternal twilight, that melancholy juncture between day and night, between one moment and the next. But this pensive mood is recast as deadlock by the arrangement of heaters and fans, whose extravagant expenditures of energy cancel each other out.

Yang's ability to evoke wistfulness and inertia with little more than domestic, mechanical objects is remarkable, given the exposed machinery of the spotlights and the black cords that snake overhead. Yet the piece becomes even more powerful when it abandons abstract feeling for concrete metaphor. After wandering through the twilight, the viewer rounds a corner to find a rock 'n' roll drum kit tethered to the rest of the installation via more cords. Playing the drums alters the movement and intensity of the lights in the other room, the full effect of which can't be seen by the drummer. On the one hand, this asymmetry is an empowering metaphor for the artistic act: a personal effort whose influence may extend well beyond the artist's knowledge. On the other, it's a philosophical intervention, disrupting the meditative stasis of ambivalence with an assertive—if fleeting—beat.