

Haegue Yang

Haegue Yang's restless video-essays *Restrained Courage* and *Unfolding Places* (both from 2004) each are made up of almost twenty minutes of apparently insignificant moments from days and nights spent in Amsterdam, London, Berlin, and the artist's city of birth, Seoul, South Korea. Cars thunder underneath a bridge, the sun emerges from behind a wharf building, passengers drift across a station concourse, a tree is reflected in a window. The voice-overs that accompany the handheld footage were scripted by Yang yet are read by actors, and as they repeatedly express sentiments of awkward dislocation and a frustration in relating with others, they bring a vulnerable and confessional inflection to the stream of images. Brightly colored, geometric origami constructions appear strewn across puddles in *Unfolding Places*. They also featured as elements of *Sadong 30* (2006), a project in Inch'on, South Korea, in which Yang transformed the interior and courtyard of a decrepit house with fragile interventions of sculpture and light. Origami constructions carry a metaphorical burden in her work, and the artist has spoken of the contrast between the learned behavior of paper folding and the "nonfolding" method that she aspires to, which for her is a constant attempt to "unlearn" standardized habits. Consequently, beginning in the late 1990s, as her work became known to a wider public, Yang has continued to resist a defining medium, engaging instead with a range of means, including wall drawing, books, sculpture, installation, moving image, and photography.

The oblique self-analysis that Yang uses as both strategy and substance in her "placeless" art is symptomatic of someone who has lived for many years outside of her country of origin and whose life and work entail the high-mobility and in-transit condition common to many contemporary artists operating internationally. This acute sense of provisional belonging—being at home in what is foreign and feeling foreign in what is home—lends Yang's work a hair-trigger sensitivity for the inflections of quotidian experience. The photographic series *Social Conditions of the Sitting Table* (2001), for example, inventories the practice in Korea of putting low tables outside the front door of some homes—something that

doubtless seemed unremarkable to her within the culture. Yet her eulogy to these ostensibly banal tables—vestiges from traditional house design wherein a raised threshold would have allowed visitors to be received without being formally welcomed into the home—highlights the tenacity of socially meaningful objects that have persisted despite modernization and the loss of original context.

Storage Piece (2004) is a succinct and humorous anomaly among Yang's narratives of belonging, cultural baggage, and emancipation. Finding herself without a place to store several of her works, which were due to be returned from various exhibitions around the world, and simultaneously preparing for a new exhibition in London, she neutralized the two predicaments by creating a third. What emerged was a new sculpture made of the diverted "homeless" artworks, which sat unseen and mothballed in their protective bubble wrap or packed in crates strapped to wooden pallets. (MA)

Born 1971, Seoul, South Korea
Lives and works in Frankfurt am Main and Berlin, Germany, and Seoul

Haegue Yang graduated from the Fine Arts College at Seoul National University in 1994 with a BFA and the Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main, in 1999 with an MA. Her work has been featured in solo exhibitions at venues such as Cubitt, London (2008); Dépendance, Brussels (2007, 2004); Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin (2007, 2004, 2000); Basis voor Actuele Kunst, Utrecht (2006, cat.); and Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt (2004). Additionally, she completed a site-specific installation, *Sadong 30*, in Inch'on, South Korea (2006, cat.). Yang's recent group exhibitions include *Brave New Worlds*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Tomorrow, Artsonje Center and Kumho Museum, Seoul, Prague Biennale, and *Made in Germany*, Kestnagesellschaft, Hannover (all in 2007, cats.); *If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution*; *Edition 2—Feminist Legacies and Potentials in Contemporary Art Practice*, De Appel, Amsterdam (2006–2007, cat., traveled to Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp); *Bienal de São Paulo* (2006, cat.); *Busan Biennale*, South Korea (2004, cat.); and

Manifesta: European Biennial of Contemporary Art, Frankfurt am Main, and *Gwangju Biennale*, South Korea (both in 2002, cats.).

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