

Haegue Yang Kunsthau Bregenz

'Arrivals' was Haegue Yang's most ambitious exhibition to date. The show, which was installed over the three upper levels of the well-appointed Kunsthau Bregenz (KUB) – a concrete and glass construction designed in the mid-1990s by the Swiss architect Peter Zumthor – presented the working worlds of the Korean artist, who has been living in Berlin for the last 15 years. In the tradition of KUB's monographic projects, Yang's specially designed architecture for the space impressively managed to confront its imposing austerity without succumbing to forced monumentalism.

On the first floor, 'Intro Wheel' comprised nimble, precise arrangements of Yang's works from the last 17 years, unfolding across a painted wooden structure that divided the museum. This complex construction of triangles and trapezoids – somewhere between a tangram and Robert Smithson's 'crystallography', and cleverly suggestive of Zumthor's gridded ceiling – was painted white on one side and left bare on the other, showing its grid-like construction of wooden supports. Within the varyingly sized spaces it created were some of Yang's older pieces of sparse and sensual materiality, such as *Fishing* (1995), a small, yellowed picture covered with a transparent lacquer that encases fishhooks beneath its surface, evoking the notions of flux and migration upon which her work is still based. The slide projection *Illiterate Leftovers* (2004) comprises a series of blank sheets of paper sent by fax, bearing only the name and number of their recipient and the date. The work echoes the intimate conceptualism of *Storage Piece*, created the same year, which brings together Yang's works that are currently 'homeless' and in transit – its packaging inspired by the improvised way that merchandise is transported in Korea. A trilogy of videos – *Unfolding Places* (2004), *Restrained Courage* (2004) and *Squandering Negative Spaces* (2006) – presents the melancholy of cities through impressionistic filmic essays, somewhere between intimate reflections and a study of the contemporary urban condition. Throughout the exhibition, the motif of folding and unfolding – as in *Gymnastics of the Foldables* (2006) or *Three Kinds in Transition* (2008) – became an allegory for work that



hides and reveals meaning in an enigmatic game of sophisticated and seductive hollows and enclosures.

Cittadella (2011) occupied the entire second floor, which was plunged in darkness. This new work comprises almost 200 aluminium Venetian blinds suspended from the ceiling at various heights and angles, bathed in iridescent colours radiating from directional lights. Punctuated by the intermittent diffusion of odours, the piece, immersive and kinetic, is reminiscent of Hélio Oiticica's early installations. But the scents ('earth', 'cedar wood', 'volcanic sulfur', 'ocean', 'freshly cut grass') evoke the faraway, synthesized nature of an imaginary landscape. The formal coldness of the installation, its mechanical, conventional dimension, inscribed it fully in the present, making it more abstract, technological and nearly threatening.

The exhibition's orchestration was almost musical: each floor, like a movement in a symphony, suggested a different ambience, offering a progression up to the spectacular finale on the third floor. *Warrior Believer Lover* (2011) was a grouping of 33 anthropomorphic and luminous sculptures, built on wheeled stands upon which the artist had

Above: Haegue Yang
Cittadella
2011
Installation view

Right: Haegue Yang
Female Natives
2010
Mixed media
210x95 cm



meticulously arranged various coloured elements, both natural and artificial, which vaguely echo human body parts: light bulbs, cables, fake plants, chains, feathers and clothes. Classed by the artist into different groups ('Female Natives', 'Medicine Men', 'Circular Flats', 'Totem Robots', 'Couples'), Yang's contemporary totems unexpectedly evoked the French Pop artist Martial Raysse's totemic accumulations of everyday objects from the early 1960s; they function through the collection and association of connoted elements, between phantoms of contemporary trends (one, a new-hippie, another neo-New Age) and impossible collages of more intuitive, formal referents, creating other worlds or even monsters. Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913) was piped into the room at regular intervals. The different assemblages populating the space thus took on the dimension of futurist pagan figures with the attributes of otherworldly heroes, symbolizing, in Giorgio Agamben's words, a sort of 'community to come'.

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Translated by Rebecca Cavanaugh



Haegue Yang
'Intro Wheel'
2011
Installation view
as part of 'Arrivals'