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20
30

HAEGUE YANG

Sadong 30

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Writing about a project such as Haegue Yang's *Sadong 30*—which combined a specific, personal context with a particular spatial situation—requires discretion. One must decide from where, how and what to speak about, as well as when to remain silent. The moment, or process, of creating the project was indeed a task of discretion as well. An artist and a curator must consider what to expose and what to keep veiled between themselves. For me, *Sadong 30* itself was a project all about these considerations.

Even though information about *Sadong 30* has previously been published in a variety of books and journals, I always think that this kind of exposure only presents the vulnerability, as well as the impossibility, of its reproduction. It doesn't mean that the artist and curator (in this case, myself) are confident that we know the exhibition better than anyone else—because it is impossible for one to say that they know their own exhibition in its entirety. But let me once again try to recollect it.

Yang and I collaborated very closely with one another for a number of years in the mid-2000s when we were both working in Europe and Seoul and often traveling between the two. You could say that *Sadong 30*, which opened on August 19, 2006, was an exhibition that arose naturally from our friendship and from a particular time—one intensified by our strenuous lives and our respective passions as an artist and as a curator. Even though we had nothing except the artist's grandmother's old house near Yeonan Pier in Incheon—found by Yang herself after it had been abandoned for more than ten years—we decided to do a project there. Using our own money and beginning nearly broke, we were fortunate to receive some support from a newly established cultural foundation in Incheon, and our task became a bit easier.

Because the house no longer had an address, the place seemed to be in a comatose state. The house appeared rougher and more grotesque than, say, a very eccentric, elderly homeless person who had spent decades in the streets; its presence was absolute. Incheon's Yeonan Pier, a port connected to China and once active with minor tradesmen's commerce, is now a remote, declining redevelopment area; the house's abandonment conveyed a most shocking image of these circumstances. For me, however, its appearance, rather than pitiful, felt similar to the momentary impression of nobility one encounters when coming across a homeless person in the heart of a city—the integrity of one who has transcended social time after having been cast off by society. I believed the artist would confront the house's presence as a way to respect the dignity of such an “undoer,” that is, someone who goes against the conventional desires of society, by not doing anything, by staying the way he is.

In order to get electricity and water restored, first we had to have an address reassigned to the house, and though there were cumbersome bureaucratic formalities, thanks to the efficient Korean public services, we received it within two days and got electricity

and running water shortly thereafter. This small, L-shaped Japanese-style wooden house consisted of four main spaces: a vestibule, side room, living room and bedroom, as well as a kitchen and a small garden with a spigot. Using these rooms as her setting, Yang inserted objects including small origami pieces she had made, light fixtures and a drying rack covered in a pale-blue fabric. She also installed mirrors, either totally broken or intact, which revealed the spaces and the lights she had arranged. In the kitchen, a rotating fan set the air in the house in motion; a flowerbed was set up around the spigot that no longer produced water, and the porch was converted into an observation area where visitors could rest.

Though I understand that the artist became intensely introspective during the process of making the work, I didn't fully understand at the time the ways in which the lights and mirrors appeared in the final installation, for it was rather ritualized, symbolically filling the house with metaphors about light and dark and self-reflection. Only later did I come to understand that the melancholy that permeates Yang's later work had already started then, with *Sadong 30*.

Visitors followed the map we had distributed with the invitation card, and could open the lock on the house themselves using an entry code. We chose to do it like this not just because we were unable to reside in and guard the exhibition space but also because it offered the visitors a private viewing-experience. In subsequent interviews, Yang has often emphasized that the reason she chose this house was because of its independence from the institutional system. For me, however, rather than signifying a critique of or a distancing from institutions, the project instead came from a journey that coincided with life's contingencies: a chance conversation one night about our very similar personal stories regarding our grandmothers' inexplicable deaths, and the inevitable awareness of parts of our lives that we had overlooked but rediscovered in that conversation. This was the moment in which the artist and I were led to the house, in its uncompromising, absolute temporality, which in that moment became a strong allegory for a pair of young mourners struggling and drifting in a given reality and system. Let me stop here.

Speaking about an exhibition is always limited. The exhibition reveals itself, but is unable to speak for itself. There is no immediate form of the present in writing about exhibitions, as well as no way to reproduce the spatial experience despite the enormous efforts spent archiving a project. This is why it is never wrong to view past exhibitions as a kind of Other. The artist or curator may know the inside story of an exhibition, but that knowledge renders them unable to become a proper reader; instead, they can disrupt the exhibition's own life. *Sadong 30* is, in a good way, just as secretive for me as ever. Perhaps because of that, illuminating its secret presents itself as yet another long journey.



HAEGUE YANG, *Sadong 30*, 2006, various light sources (hanging light bulbs, strobes, chains of lights), mirror, origami objects, drying rack wrapped in fabric, fan, viewing terrace, cooler filled with bottles of mineral water, chrysanthemums and garden balsams (planted), wood bench, wall clock, glow-in-the-dark paint, wood piles, spray paint, installation in an abandoned house in Incheon, Korea.
Photo by Daenam Kim, Courtesy the artist.