

## Haegue Yang's Uncanny Sculptures Lure You In

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Haegue Yang, 'Sonic Domesticus', 2020, installation view, MMCA Seoul. Photo: Cheolki Hong; courtesy MMCA

**In her largest solo presentation to date in Korea, the artist conjures up a hybrid sensibility – familiar yet foreign, inscrutable yet obvious**

The art practice of Haegue Yang has the tendency to confound viewers with a surfeit of latent references, fuelling a lofty discursive purview for framing her work in the context of continually shifting conceptual parameters. At its core, however, Yang's oeuvre conveys nuanced sensibilities and provokes visceral encounters with viewers across cultures, repurposing everyday materials such as clothes drying racks, venetian blinds, bells and artificial straw to invoke imaginative excursions into the realms of science, craft, folklore and philosophy.



Haegue Yang, 'DMZ Un-Do', 2020, installation view, MMCA Seoul. Photo: Cheolki Hong; courtesy MMCA

Yang's largest solo presentation to date in Korea, *O<sub>2</sub> & H<sub>2</sub>O* explores the conceptual space between the ontology of natural phenomena and human efforts to navigate competing beliefs, desires and conditions in an indeterminate world. The exhibition title makes reference to the molecular structures of oxygen and water; despite the specificity of these chemical symbols, however, they remain highly abstract as signifiers, giving little clue as to the actual physical properties of either substance. It's precisely this sort of hybrid sensibility – familiar yet foreign, inscrutable yet obvious – that Yang is so deft at conjuring in her works, luring viewers deeper into her visual milieu.



Haegue Yang, *Five Doing Un-Doing*, 2020, installation view, MMCA Seoul. Photo: Cheolki Hong; courtesy MMCA

Substantiating this sensibility are two groups of sculptures that exude a commanding and uncanny presence, activating divergent cognitive pathways by conflating the bizarre and banal.

Yang's *Sonic Domesticus* series (2020) enlarges scissors, tongs and hairdryers into imposing forms, while new works from *Sonic Clotheshorses* series (2018–) are modelled after configurations of drying racks; aside from their unusual silhouettes, what makes these works so strangely evocative are the thousands of small bells that cover their surfaces. Throughout human history, bells have been used in religious rites as a means of connecting human beings to the cosmos, and in the case of Yang's sculptures, they invest domestic forms with a sacred resonance.



Haegue Yang, *The Intermediate*, 2017-2020, installation view, MMCA Seoul. Photo: Cheolki Hong; courtesy MMCA

Other groups of works unfold similar dualities through the interplay of materiality and form. In works from *The Intermediates* series (2015–), Yang uses artificial straw to create shaggy surfaces that enshroud ambiguous sculptural forms drawn from folk imagery – namely, serpents and shields – and forge links between artisanship and representation. Elsewhere, venetian blinds function both as a rigid structural element and permeable internal substance in two new works from Yang's *So/LeWitt Upside Down* series (2015–) and in the monumental *Silo of Silence – Clicked Core* (2017), this last rising 16m into the air and slowly rotating to assert an entropic presence that simultaneously arouses curiosity and apprehension.



Haegue Yang, Silo of Silence – Clicked Core, 2017, installation view, MMCA Seoul. Photo: Cheolki Hong; courtesy MMCA

The exhibition is rounded out with several site-specific installations laden with multiple dimensions of meaning, some more obscure than others. And yet, the myriad references that have come to characterise Yang's distinctive oeuvre are subdued in *O<sub>2</sub> & H<sub>2</sub>O*, and the need to parse the meaning of every single work subsides in the broader context of the exhibition. As such, one's appreciation for Yang's diverse presentation is not predicated on any external framework that might otherwise overshadow the viewing experience; instead, her works are permitted to speak for themselves, facilitating a mode of interpretation that is more intuitive than cerebral.

MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2020: Haegue Yang – *O<sub>2</sub> & H<sub>2</sub>O*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, Seoul, 29 September – 28 February