

REVIEWS

Nazan Hanjoo, *Tera, Kasa City* was called by the nickname "Black People's Town" (Kokugaiji), 1971, image print, 15 1/2 x 22 1/2". From "Wanted Images: When Microhistories Take Form."



entering the exhibition space, visitors acknowledge and come under the jurisdiction of this constitution.

Titled "Wishful Images: When Microhistories Take Form" and curated by Hsu Fang-Tse, the exhibition channels the utopian possibilities of Kawamitsu's poem-as-constitution. Divided into six chapters and undergirded by denunciations of military violence and of the selfish accumulation of power, resources, and capital, the poem, printed on the walls, quite literally encircles the exhibition space, lassoing works by five artists from seemingly disparate sociopolitical contexts into intimate conversation.

To be clear, Okinawa serves not merely as subject matter for the exhibition, but rather as a dynamic point of entry to discussions of broader geopolitical and historical affinities. Case in point: Hsu juxtaposed works addressing two little-known microhistories, the Kōza riot of 1970, in which Okinawans protested against American military occupation, and Singapore's participation that same year in the Lusaka Conference, a summit of nonaligned nations, where demilitarization was a key topic of discussion. Although such entanglements are likely to remain etched in oblivion, this exhibition manifests them in the form of "wishful images" that recall forgotten or forcibly elided pasts, tracing their pulses into the present.

Aya Rodríguez-Izumi's *Okinawa's Tragedy: Echoes from the Last Battle of WWII*, 2020, reproduces four prints from a 1987 English textbook devised by her Cuban-American father featuring translated survivor testimonies from the Battle of Okinawa, a 1945 clash between American and Japanese armies that ravaged the Okinawan civilian population. Each print is accompanied by a corresponding audio excerpt, narrated by Rodríguez and her parents, and a title, austere printed on top of an empty glass cabinet. The accented voices and intangible shadows cast by the lettering revivify forgotten accounts of suicide and sacrifice, haunting the amnesiac contemporary viewer.

Kuniyoshi Kazuo's twenty-four black-and-white images document the Kōza riot. A photojournalist by trade, Kuniyoshi did not sensationalize the event. Instead, his photographs capture unexpected alliances, such as those encompassed by the stationed soldiers' antiwar and African American civil rights protests that took place around the time of the riot. Photographs such as *Ten nabeho ladies*, 1978, featuring a pair of braided women, and *Tera, Kasa City* was called by the nickname "Black People's Town" (Kokugaiji), 1971, further allude to anti-imperialist intimacies.

Nguyen Trinh Thi's video *Eleven Men*, 2016, implicitly questions film's ability to document and legitimize textbook renditions of history. Nguyen appropriated scenes from state-backed films from the 1960s through the present that feature famed Vietnamese actress Nhr Quynh and superimposed new plotlines onto the footage; the narrator pettily critiques the appearance and disposition of the actress's eleven on-

screen male partners. She is no longer the hapless, timeless object of desire she normally portrayed. We witness the actress aging while Vietnamese history and the film medium's material quality progress seamlessly and episodically in parallel.

Hsu's curation is a radical contextualization of time and space. A mélange of disavowed continental connections bled into and scar the present. Lucy Davis's film *Jalan Jati* (Teak Road), 2012, is the artist's attempt at tracking the origins of her scavenged teak bed through Southeast Asia's history and topography. The piece testifies to art's cosmopolitan potential, even amid ongoing lockdowns and travel limitations. Instead of simply reaffirming the importance of supposedly global perspectives, the exhibition speaks to the discomfiting complexities of regional specificity.

—Wong Ting Hao

MANILA

Haegue Yang

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND DESIGN

Concern is an auspicious word in this climate of global pandemic. "The Cone of Concern," the title of Haegue Yang's recent exhibition, refers to the path a storm might take as it gathers moisture and wind speed. The idea became even more apropos when in the first weeks of the exhibition a storm was predicted to make landfall in Manila. The artist's first solo presentation in the Philippines, the show runs parallel with shows by Yang elsewhere: in Leipzig; New York; Seoul; Singapore; St. Ives, UK; and Toronto. The exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design presents newly commissioned site-specific works alongside existing pieces, including collages and prints made of food and household items such as pepper, coffee, tea, and cacao.

A leitmotif print looms large in the exhibition space. Titled *The Fantastic Warp and Weft of a Tropical Depression* and covering an expanse of the space's nearly ninety-foot-long wall, the 2020 work remixes digital renderings of meteorological instruments, windmills, turbines, cyclones, and debris. Perpendicular to the print are floor-standing wooden panels with carous that form the pattern of *hinakol* coxles, indigenous Filipino fabrics worn to drive away malevolent spirits. Interspersed throughout the space is *The Ranting Intermediates—Inception Quarter*, 2020, a quarter of rattan totems with wings, limbs, and wheels,

View of "Haegue Yang," 2020-21.



some with capiz-shell ornaments. Yang created these sculptures in collaboration with local artisans, who used the technique of randing, in which a single reed is woven onto a sculptural frame. Two additional wheeled rattan sculptures, titled *The Ranting Intermediates—Underbelly Alliance Duo*, 2020, are more colorful and more squat, with polyps and tendrils growing out of them, and also sport handlebars.

Flimsy flags hover above, and a slight breeze from electric wall fans causes them to flutter, simulating a windy day. The works elicit movement, or at least cause the viewer to move. One hears a barely discernible voice, catching it only intermittently as one comes within the vicinity of two overhead speakers. Walking along the length of the leitmotif print, one experiences an illusion that things are moving and that the pattern in the panels extend the wall-bound print. The turbines in the print start rotating; the debris begins to unsettle. The *hinakol* panels come to life as a dizzying optical illusion. Although one cannot touch the sculptures, their wheels and handles evoke mobility. Finally, the installations 18.87m, 2002/2020, and 21.33m, 2000/2020, marking a corner of the space with colored string and chalk, also benefit from movement, since they can easily be missed if seen straight on.

Risk and precarity have lately become idioms of abstraction or aesthetic experimentation in contemporary art. In Yang's exhibition in the Philippines, a place frequently ravaged by storms and super typhoons, the image of the cyclone becomes a conceptual anchor. On the day of my visit to the exhibition, I was almost turned away because of an unexpected maintenance issue. A leak had formed in the museum's wall, threatening to damage the leitmotif print—and by a remarkable coincidence that leak had appeared near an abstracted image of a cyclone. This disruption was a good reminder of the vitality and ferocity of the world that the exhibition attempts to discipline into interesting form.

Ultimately, Yang's use of abstractions to create material or topical resonances does not succeed. She fails to place her art in a compelling conversation with the contemporary climate crisis, with all its urgency. In light of the exhibition's emergency maintenance, I couldn't help but wonder how a global exhibition might be more sensitive to the contexts to which it supposedly responds.

—Carlos Quijón Jr.

SYDNEY

Natalya Hughes
SULLIVAN + STRUMPF

The title of Natalya Hughes's latest exhibition, "The Landscape Is in the Woman," borrowed Willem de Kooning's words from 1953, the year when his first "Woman" paintings were exhibited. The recall of de Kooning's fearlessly sexualized female bodies hacked out in Abstract Expressionist style might suggest yet another feminist critique of his portrayal of women as objectifying and aggressively misogynistic—a reproach that since the 1970s has become orthodox. While Hughes's show was patently informed by such views, she describes her artistic conversation with this canonical modern painter in more give-and-take terms, as wanting to "figure out whether I might have something to contribute to the dialogue that was started by them."

Among the works in the show were seven large acrylic-on-polyester paintings that replicate the sizes, imagery, and compositional structures of selected "Woman" paintings and drawings of the early 1950s. But the coarse physicality of the originals' gestural marks is replaced by a mosaic of meticulously painted patterns forming the women's bodies and surroundings. The initial layering of pattern over de Kooning's women occurs in *Fluorodrop*, with the resulting hybrids projected onto the supports and then laboriously painted in Hughes's crisp, detailed style.

The decorative patterns of bold color and geometric repeats are drawn from the artist's library of 1950s fabric and interior design—contemporary with the de Koonings. Hughes's *Woman 1* (Me from here), 2018–19, for instance, reprises the older artist's *Woman 1*, 1950–52, emulating the monumental scale of the original and the looming presence of its seated figure with her beefy shoulders and handlelike thighs, huge breasts, protruding eyes, and bared teeth. But here the original's snarls of fleshy pink, red, blue, green, and yellow have been translated into

higher-key colors, with fragments of delicately painted patterns covering all surfaces of the figure. The work's subtlety suggests a self-portrait rather than any archetype of ferocious femininity; other titles referred to particular women significant in Hughes's life. *Woman with Electric Bicycle* (After Julie), 2020, which cools down the garish colors of de Kooning's *Woman and Bicycle*, 1952–53, with a palette of gray, white, and black, invokes a friend of the artist. Propped against the gallery wall, this large painting balanced on a pair of bronze-colored, double-ended dildos—a nod to Lynda Bengali's notorious fuck-you to a male-dominated art world in a 1974 *Artforum* ad. Although the portrait of Julie reprises the voluptuous standing figure with the grotesque doubled grin of de Kooning's figure, she wears extravagant cat's-eye spectacles that craftily contradict the cliché of woman as prurient natter. Decorative detail is sparing here. Scattered diamond-lattice designs, stripes, and oblong spirals interact with coy blooms of water-glyp paint that supplant de Kooning's vigorous brushstrokes and charcoal strikes at the canvas.

The gestural mark's sometime associations with spontaneous expression and many creative energy were likewise deflated in two large- and three small-scale pattern paintings, four of which were ironically titled *Gesture* and numbered (all 2020). These pictures artfully integrated obviously computer-generated squiggles into fields of vibrantly polychromatic, variegated pattern. In *Gesture 8*, green, white, and pink-hued and ornamented doodles, like knots with loose ends, are painted as though woven through a geometric grid of mustard, orange, and maroon triangles. Painterly gesture is domesticated as just another motif within a virtuoso display of patterning.

The question remains as to what Hughes gains from de Kooning's painting. One answer might relate to the latter's affirmation of the grotesque as a "woman's" affront to tamer, less challenging models of female beauty. The grotesque is traditionally associated with the excessive, the distorted, and the hybridized. Hughes's pictures of women follow this logic. As mash-ups of the physically imposing, generously endowed bodies of de Kooning's women with fastidious decorative abstraction, or nakedly exposed body parts with lavish domestic decor, Hughes's women may not feature in your typical beauty ad, but they are all the more arresting for that.

—Tom Ross

CORRECTIONS: In the December issue, in a review of the work of *Bliss Guillaume* at Backlash in Paris (p. 188), the gallery's name was misspelled. Also in the December issue, in a Top Ten article (p. 125), Joyce Kozloff's first name appeared mistakenly as Jason. *Artforum* regrets the errors.



Natalya Hughes, *Woman 1 (Me from here)*, 2018–19, acrylic on polyester, 78 x 97 1/2".