

Yang Hae-gue brings world of transformations, juxtapositions to Seoul

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Yang Hae-gue has turned a gallery space into a place full of ill-matched images. Colors on the walls both dazzle and confuse visitors. Sitting in the middle are sonic and mobile sculptures. Scented gym balls roll between movable versions of her signature venetian-blind sculptures. And shallow layers of artificial fog from the corners fill the floor.

Berlin-based Korean artist Yang is holding a solo exhibition titled "When the Year 2000 Comes" at Kukje Gallery, Samcheong-dong, Seoul. It marks Yang's first solo exhibition here in four years since her last show at Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art in 2015.



Yang Hae-gue poses for pictures on a gym ball shown at her solo exhibition at Kukje Gallery.
(Kukje Gallery)

"What I have been thinking the most of is honesty. Instead of trying to meet others' expectations, I try to be honest. It is important to convey my reality in an honest, precise and sincere manner," Yang said during a press conference held at Kukje Gallery on Monday.

Yang's exhibition comprising vastly different types of works resists a one-sentence summary. When looked at together, the works in the room appear utterly chaotic.

Yang's works demand laborious reading of her works, as well as their historical context. The works seem to require conceptual understanding rather than emotional appreciation.

"I think an artist's role ends when the installation is completed," said the artist wearing red makeup on her chin.

The rest is up to the viewers who see the juxtapositions of images, understand how and why they are put together in a particular manner and learn the works' sociopolitical, cultural and historical background.

As in her previous exhibitions, Yang has made case studies of various historical materials she found worth looking into.

An example is a text work titled "A Chronology of Conflated Dispersion - Duras and Yun" (2018), where Yang juxtaposes the lives of French author Marguerite Duras (1914-1996) and Korean composer Yun I-sang (1917-1995).

"Marguerite Duras was born in in French Indochina and later came back to her motherland. Yun was born in Korea and later move to Germany. The details may be dramatically different, but the lives of the two artists share systematic or structural similarities as they both experienced social and political upheavals of their time," Yang said.

Yun's 1968 composition "Images," inspired by the mural of the Great Tomb of Gangseo, which he visited during a trip to North Korea in 1963., will be performed by a quartet from the Tongyeong International Music Foundation on Sept. 21, Oct. 19 and Nov. 16 at the gallery.

Yang has used classical music pieces at several exhibitions. But this is the first time that she is using a popular song.

The exhibition title "When the Year 2000 Comes," for instance, was taken from Korean singer Min Hae-kyung's "AD 2000," a song released in 1982.



Yang Hae-gue's "Sol LeWitt Vehicles" (Kukje Gallery)

"The song's lyrics written in the daily vocabulary of the time reflect space and time. When the song was released, the lyrics describe the year 2000, a distant future from 1982. But when looked at from now, different periods of time are mixed. We all consider time as a sort of objective measure, but it's often not so," Yang said.

The song plays outside of the exhibition space while inside a 30-minute audio clip that Yang made with sounds from the broadcast of the inter-Korean summit held in April 2018 plays.

The tracing back in time is largely based on her personal intellectual and aesthetic interests, Yang said.

Yet, her experiments based on laborious studies of historical events and figures, cultural elements offer an alternative way to look at the past and an opportunity to reflect on our own past.

"When the Year 2000 Come" runs until Nov. 17 at Kukje Gallery in Seoul.