



Yang Hae-gue's sculpture series "Boxing Ballet" is inspired by German artist Oskar Schlemmer's "Triadic Ballet."

Courtesy of Yang Hae-gue

# Yang Hae-gue on nature, human, community

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Artist Yang Hae-gue has returned to Korea for her third solo exhibition at Leeum in Hannam-dong, Seoul. Known for her nomadic and conceptual works, Yang's new exhibit features 35 works ranging from her early ones to the latest, exploring human and community in historical and social context.

Title of the exhibition, "Haegue Yang: Shooting the Elephant Thinking the Elephant," took inspiration from George Orwell's essay "Shooting an Elephant" and Romain Gary's novel "The Root of Heaven." In both literary references, an elephant represents nature destroyed by human as well as the dignity of man.

Based in Berlin and Seoul, the 44-year-old artist — who took the Korean Pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennial and participated in DOCUMENTA Kassel in 2012 — referred her works as a result of "ongoing agonizing." "I am an artist who creates new works and grows up during the process. It could be temerarious or courageous for a mid-career artist to tackle such a large, profound theme, but I always knew I would work on this someday. This is the beginning of a new phase," Yang said at a press conference of the exhibit last week.

Upon entering the gallery, visitors will face a facade of boxes made of white aluminum Venetian blinds hanging from the ceiling over a hallway. Tae Hyun-sun, Leeum's chief curator, said this new blind piece "Sol LeWitt Upside Down — Structure with Three Towers, Expanded 23 Times" blazes a trail.



Artist Yang Hae-gue

"Yang's previous blind works had historical, narrative attributes, but her newest piece became rather minimal, reinterpreting American Minimalist sculptor Sol LeWitt," Tae said.

Yang's new series "The Intermediates," revealed at the Leeum for the first time, greet the visitors as they take an escalator down to the Ground Gallery. The synthetic straw sculptures turn the contem-

porary art museum into a folk museum, but Yang's craft is not as simple as that.

At first, larger sculptures look like bungalows from a beach, but in fact they are straw-crafted, scaled-down reproductions of specific religious architectures such as Russia's mosque Lala Tulpan and Indonesia's Buddhist temple Borobudur. Smaller human-sized figures come from various traits of Asian countries, mingled in Yang's imagination. These new works represent the artist's interest in the balance between folksy particularity and civilizational universality of cultures, combining primitive material and handcraft.

One of her earliest works, "Storage Piece" from 2004, interconnects the artist's past, present and future. The artwork was created from a young artist's desperation.

"It is like an avatar of Yang," curator Tae said. "She was doing a residency program in the United Kingdom and lit-

erally had no place to store her works. When she had to exhibit new works, Yang packed her previous works, sent them to the gallery and displayed them as boxed. The pile of boxes became a totem."

"VIP Union" presents a slice of Seoul through a collection of chairs and tables borrowed from various people from different classes, including K-pop group Big Bang's T.O.P to U.S. ambassador to Korea Mark W. Lippert. This is Yang's take on the definition of community as the artist, lenders and visitors all together complete this work, which can be interpreted as a miniature of a society.

In the Black Box upstairs, visitors can walk through Yang's 2011 blind piece "Cittadella." Unlike the sturdy title, this citadel is fragile and light, sound and smell go through the Venetian blinds.

"Boxing Ballet" is a cheerful and clinkety-clank interpretation of German Bauhaus artist Oskar Schlemmer's "Triadic Ballet." Yang transformed Schlemmer's dance costumes into her signature sonic sculptures made of small bells.

Do not miss the final piece of the exhibit installed at a darkish corner of the museum's parking lot. Yang is a scholarly artist and many of her works come from literary background. To complement the artistic experience, Leeum prepared "Unlearning Workshop" where visitors can read books inspired Yang's works and create their own version of "Seoul Guts."

The exhibit runs through May 10. English docent program is available at 2 p.m. on weekends. Admission is 7,000 won for adults. For more information, visit [www.leeum.org](http://www.leeum.org) or call 02-2014-6901.



Yang Hae-gue, "The Intermediate — Basket Totem on Triple Leg" (2015)

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