

## Why do we demonise work? Korean artist Haegue Yang defies convention

August 13, 2016 | Vivienne Chow

page 1 of 4

Passion for work has become taboo, says award-winner known for her pieces featuring Venetian blinds. It's time to defy convention and blur the lines between our jobs and private lives



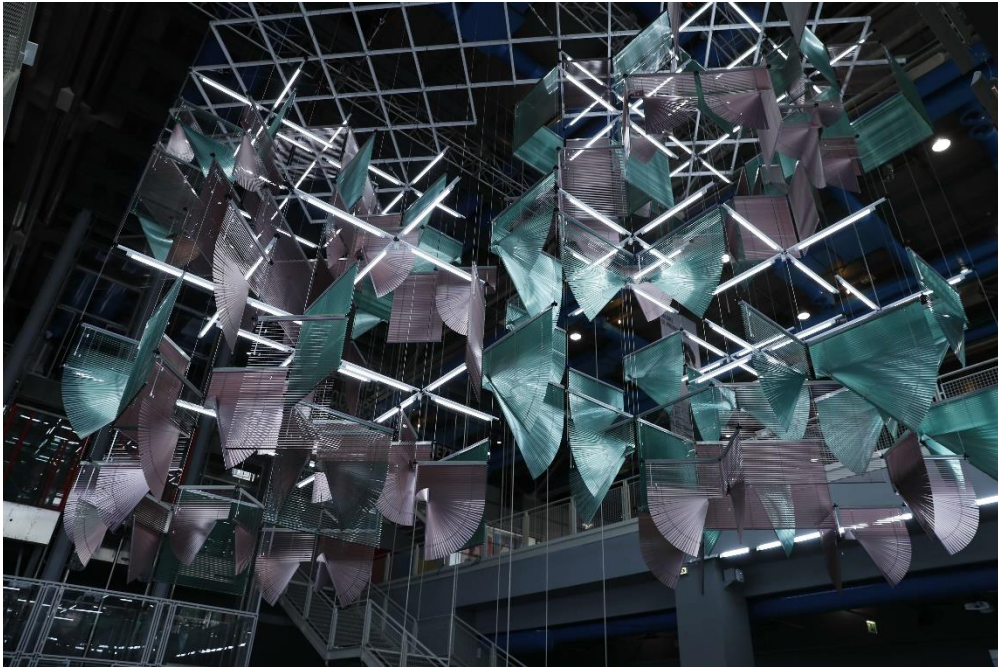
▲ South Korean artist Haegue Yang poses under her installation *Lingering Nous* at the Centre Pompidou. The monumental artwork is an assembly of colourful Venetian blinds. Photo: AFP

Haegue Yang has a rather unconventional idea of how to spend her private time. She wants to lock herself and a couple of friends in a room and fast for a day or two, surviving only on water.

"We would be just lying around and slowly feeling weaker," says the award-winning Korean artist. "We would be sharing an experience, focusing on being together and not getting distracted from it, without an expensive hotel, wine or food. What would happen between us? It is an intimate experiment.

"For example when I'm in New York, people always think about which restaurants to go to, ordering food and drinks, or where to go. These are overwhelming topics, and people do not realise they are more overwhelming than going to work. They are interference. All these rituals are disturbances and do not take 'getting together' seriously."

Yang hasn't put her idea to the test yet. Finding the time and friends daring enough to take part have both proved difficult.



▲ Lingering Nous - an installation featuring Venetian blinds - by South Korean artist Haegue Yang will be on show at the Centre Pompidou's The Forum until September 5. Photo:AFP

The internationally renowned artist, noted for her work with Venetian blinds, has a jam-packed schedule. In April, Yang opened her solo exhibition Quasi-Pagan Serial at the Kunsthalle Hamburg in Germany. It runs until April 30, 2017.

In June, at Art Basel in Switzerland, she showed Sol LeWitt Upside Down – Structure with Three Towers, Expanded 23 Times, Split in Three, an installation of more than 500 Venetian blinds that recreates one of LeWitt's signature works.

Then Yang travelled to Paris to complete Lingering Nous (main picture) at the Centre Pompidou. The monumental artwork – another assembly of Venetian blinds – is on show at the museum's The Forum until September 5.

Most of Yang's time is occupied by work, but this does not mean she does not have a personal life.

"I don't like the notion of a personal life that exists outside of a work life," Yang says.

"Unless, that is, you have a family and need to negotiate more private time to spend with them.

"Being a single person, I can be more inventive."



▲ South Korean artist Haegue Yang says she likes blurring the work/life balance. Photo:AFP

Born in Seoul in South Korea in 1971, Yang was educated in Seoul and Frankfurt and has been dividing her time between her home country and Germany since the late 1990s.

She is a regular at major international art events, and was a notable presence at the 2012 edition of DOCUMENTA, an exhibition that takes place every five years in Kassel, Germany. In 2009, she represented South Korea at the Venice Biennale.

Last year she featured in Mobile M+: Live Art, a performance art special presented by West Kowloon museum M+ in Hong Kong.

"I don't want to follow convention," Yang says, a principle she applies to both her art and her personal life.

Following convention, she says, can stifle inventiveness in one's personal life. She does not believe in such conventional images of private time as relaxing holidays on the beach, shopping or dining at fancy restaurants.

"I live in Berlin and I live in Seoul, but I don't have a personal list of great tourist info. I don't pay attention to those things. I just can't remember," she says. "My knowledge about my cities might be quite useless to some but I can guide people differently. I can point out the great shows at museums. I know about the history and the major topics in society for discussion."



▲ South Korean artist Haegue Yang under her installation at the Centre Pompidou. Photo:AFP

We may be living in an era where work takes up a majority of our time – a UBS study in May found Parisians enjoyed the world's shortest working week with 30 hours and Hongkongers the longest with 50 hours – but Yang says we have been conditioned to hate going to work.

"People make too easy a distinction between work and life. Why do we demonise work so much?" she asks.

To Yang, work contributes far more than just money to life. Appreciating the value of work is something society has forgotten in recent years, she believes. "People can argue that if you work as a supermarket cashier, it's a boring job. But being a cashier involves a great deal of human interaction. You can like your work," she says.

People have come to look down on and hate their jobs. Yang says her work is interesting, and through work she meets a lot of "interesting, crazy people" who inspire her private life.

The boundary between her work and private life is blurred, but she doesn't mind that. She embraces it, and hopes people can grow to like their work. "There's a huge underestimation of the value of work. If you are passionate about your work, you are deemed a workaholic. Passion for work has become a taboo. And how did we lose this passion?" Yang asks. "We should question instead of just following the convention."

**Private Time is a fortnightly column on how professionals in the region spend – and define – their private time**